

**For Immediate Release**

March 6, 2025

**Nebraska Educators Rising Recognizes State Leaders and Award Winners**

*Kearney, NE* – The 2025 Nebraska Educators Rising State Leadership Conference brought together aspiring educators for a dynamic lineup of events, providing them with opportunities to network, compete, and learn about careers in Education. Nearly 400 youth members, teacher leaders, and guests from 30 chapters gathered for the annual conference hosted at Younes South Conference Center.

Students kicked off the event with Youth Networking, where they connected with peers and learned about engaging contests throughout the conference. The Opportunity Fair allowed participants to explore colleges and organizations supporting their future careers, while Competitive Events showcased their skills in various education-related challenges. Attendees also had the chance to develop leadership skills through Youth Breakout Sessions and Youth Workshops, which provided hands-on experiences on educational topics.

Breakout sessions covered a range of important topics, offering students insights into leadership, classroom management, and inclusion. Jeff Lange, MS, LIMHP, led *Understanding Anxiety's Hidden Benefits*, reframing anxiety as a tool for growth and resilience. Sessions like *Disrupt and Inspire* with Lindsey Wilson and *Positive Language and Behaviors in the Classroom* with Sheelagh Lucas provided practical strategies for creating dynamic and supportive learning environments. Future educators also explored leadership in *Unlocking Your Leadership Potential* and *Building Ed Rising Foundations*, hosted by the 2024-25 Nebraska Educators Rising State Officers, where students learned about goal setting, program development, and effective chapter leadership.

Career pathways in special education were highlighted in *You Are Going to Love These Students*, where Leslie Wagner introduced students to transition services and supporting learners with multiple disabilities. Inclusion remained a key theme, with *Kids & Dreams: Providing Hope & Inclusion* showcasing programs that build confidence and independence in students with autism. Dr. Jeanne Stolzer challenged traditional educational models in *Celebrating Strengths and Uniqueness*, encouraging students to focus on strengths rather than deficits in learning. The *Assistive Technology (AT) Playground* offered students an opportunity to explore innovative tools designed to support individuals with diverse needs, making technology more accessible for all learners.

Sessions like *Hope and Housing* and *Revolution* empowered students to advocate for social change, addressing issues such as housing insecurity and violence prevention. Additionally, students gained insight into career growth through *You Have Your Dream Teaching Job—Now What?*, which explored graduate education and advanced certifications for educators. Scholarship opportunities were also highlighted in *UNK Thompson Scholars Learning Community & the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation Scholarship*.

Beyond breakout sessions, the conference featured key moments celebrating student achievements and leadership. The Recognition General Session was led by 2024-25 State Officers: Lea Hanson, President from Omaha Burke High School and Owen Elsasser, Vice President of Public Relations from Ralston High School. Outstanding chapters, members, and future educators were recognized during this session, which also included a special address from the 2025 Nebraska Teacher of the Year, Lindsey Wilson. Wilson shared her journey as an educator, emphasizing the invaluable rewards of teaching that go beyond monetary value. The first annual Senior Signing Event was held during this session, where over 50 graduating seniors signed letters

of intent to pursue careers in education, ranging from Early Childhood Education to School Counseling to secondary education across all subject areas.

Hands-on and interactive workshops enriched the learning experience. Attendees participated in *Teaching Spanish 101: A Hands-On Microteaching Experience*, led by Sergio Perez, where they discovered strategies for language instruction and culture immersion. *Enhancing Education In & Out of the Classroom* explored the value of integrating real-world experiences into education, with Nebraska Extension experts demonstrating ways to make learning engaging and relevant. Christine Fisher's session, *Social Emotional Learning (SEL): Building Skills for Life and Success*, introduced students to strategies for fostering emotional intelligence and resilience in the classroom.

Other highlights included the KCLC Service Project, where chapters engaged with students in local after-school programs, and the Career Collective Social, where future educators connected with school leaders from across Nebraska. Attendees also enjoyed the LifeSmarts Knowledge Bowl, a head-to-head competition testing students' knowledge in various education-related topics.

The event concluded with the Grand Awards Luncheon, recognizing top competitors, national qualifiers, and exceptional leaders within the organization. Through these experiences, students left inspired and better prepared to shape the future of education. A full list of award winners and competitors qualifying for nationals is provided in this release.

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*Educators Rising is a student organization that helps ensure students interested in a career in education have the experience and skills they need to be ready for the classroom. Cultivating a new generation of highly skilled educators by guiding young people from high school through college and into their teaching careers. These aspiring educators reflect the demographics of their communities and are passionate about serving those communities through public education. Nebraska Educators Rising has over 500 members in 40 chapters across the state. For more information about Educators Rising, please visit [www.edrisingneb.org](http://www.edrisingneb.org).*

*Nebraska Educators Rising is supported through the Nebraska Center for Student Leadership and Expanded Learning at the Nebraska Department of Education.*

**2025-2026 Nebraska Educators Rising State Officers**

Grace Johnson, Ralston

Khadijah Brooks, Papillion La Vista South

Karli Knaub, Scottsbluff

Camila Martinez, Omaha South

**2024-2025 Nebraska Educators Rising Executive Committee Members**

Lilly Elsasser, Ralston

Bailey Kai, Wakefield

Kiya Rodriguez, South Sioux City

**Nebraska Educators Rising Administrator of the Year**

Josh Jones, The Career Academy - Lincoln

**Nebraska Educators Teacher Leader of the Year**

Samantha Koehler-Overton, Omaha South

**Nebraska Educators Outstanding Alumni of the Year**

Milan Aranda

**Nebraska Educators Rising Member of the Year**

Mikaylah Garcia, Scottsbluff

**Feed Nebraska Award Winner**

Plainview

**2025 Statewide Community Service Project: Community Youth Development**

Scottsbluff

**Community Literacy Impact Award**

Scottsbluff

**LifeSmarts Knowledge Bowl Teams** took an online qualifying quiz, were seeded and then played head-to-head (quiz bowl style) in a double-elimination bracket.

Scottsbluff, First Place

Ralston, Second Place

Wakefield, Third Place

Bayard, Fourth Place

**Chapter Awards** gives Educators Rising chapters the opportunity to showcase and receive recognition for their exceptional work throughout the year. There are three levels of recognition: Bronze, Silver, Gold.

***Silver Chapter Award***

- Plainview

***Gold Chapter Award***

- Millard Education Academy
- Scottsbluff

**Red and White Affiliation Awards** recognize chapters who recruit Educators Rising members from their Education & Training classes. There are three levels of recognition for this award:

**White Chapters** which have 50-75% of their chapter membership currently enrolled in an Education & Training course.

- Omaha Burke
- Omaha South

**Blue Chapters** which have 76-95% of their chapter membership currently enrolled in an Education & Training course.

- Lincoln – The Career Academy
- Scottsbluff

**Blue & White Chapters** which have more than 96% of their chapter membership currently enrolled in an Education & Training course.

- Millard Education Academy
- Plainview
- Waverly

**Education & Training Achievement Awards** recognize students in Education & Training courses who have been active members of Educators Rising for at least two (2) years. There are two levels of recognition for this award:

**Rising Concentrators** have successfully completed or are currently enrolled in the introductory courses in the Education & Training Program of Study. Students must have also been affiliated Educators Rising members for at least two (2) years.

- Audrey Brown, Omaha Burke
- Keziah Etse, Omaha Burke
- Jasmine Tran, Omaha Burke

**Concentrators** have successfully completed or are currently enrolled in both the intermediate and capstone courses in the Education & Training Program of Study. Students must have also been affiliated Educators Rising members for at least two (2) years.

- Ava Martinez, Lincoln – The Career Academy
- Emily Bender, Lincoln – The Career Academy
- Jacey Ryan, Lincoln – The Career Academy
- Lyric Gans, Lincoln – The Career Academy
- Jordan Blake-Oxley, Lincoln – The Career Academy

- Madison Sparks, Millard Education Academy-West
- Reese Bouges, Millard Education Academy-West
- Addison Kloock, Millard Education Academy-West
- McKinley Avery, Millard Education Academy-West
- Allie Abboud, Millard Education Academy-West
- Allison Riesselman, Millard Education Academy-West
- Sonia Alonzo, Omaha Burke
- Sophia Bouman, Omaha Burke
- Lea Hanson, Omaha Burke
- Tye Hatfield, Omaha Burke
- Isiah Jacobson, Omaha Burke
- Harper Johnson, Omaha Burke
- Nastasia Orr, Omaha Burke
- Chloe Price, Omaha Burke
- Lily Reid, Omaha Burke
- Hailey Scholten, Omaha Burke
- Grace Voorhees, Omaha Burke

**Class of 2025 Senior Signing Event Participants*****Career & Technical Education (CTE)***

- Meke Herman, Scottsbluff
- Alex Cancino, South Sioux City
- Allison Brandl, Waverly

***Early Childhood Education***

- Madilyn Kitzing, Centennial
- Skyler Scheidemann, Hampton
- Tye Hatfield, Omaha Burke
- Harper Johnson, Omaha Burke
- Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview

***Elementary Education***

- Lauryn Breitreutz, Centennial
- Lillian Jones, Millard North Education Academy
- Brooklyn Morten, Millard North Education Academy
- Briley Saunders-Loewenstein, Millard North Education Academy
- Kaydence Foor, Millard North Education Academy
- Daisy Altamirano, Omaha Bryan
- Ashley Sanchez Andrade, Omaha Bryan
- Nastasia Orr, Omaha Burke

- Hailey Scholten, Omaha Burke
- Lilly Elsasser, Ralston
- Melusi Ngeleka, South Sioux City
- Parker Christiansen, Waverly
- Addison Rathjen, Waverly
- Alyson Recker, Waverly

***English/Language Arts***

- Emily Bennett, Bayard
- Garrett Johnson, Millard North Education Academy
- Isaiah Jacobson, Omaha Burke
- Grace Voorhees, Omaha Burke
- Alexandria Ihnen, Omaha Northwest
- Owen Elsasser, Ralston

***Mathematics***

- Capria Rogers, Scottsbluff

***Music***

- Natalie Anderson, Omaha Northwest
- Brandon Baker, Scottsbluff
- Madison Johnson, Waverly

***PE & Health***

- Carlie McKibbin, Bayard

***School Counseling***

- Angella Nguyen, South Sioux City

***Social Studies***

- Danika Smith, Centennial
- Liberty Tomjack, Centennial
- Sonia Alonzo, Omaha Burke
- Sophia Bouman, Omaha Burke
- Lea Hanson, Omaha Burke
- Lily Reid, Omaha Burke
- Jakobe Smith, Omaha Northwest
- Zachary Havlovic, Omaha Westview
- Oscar Vazquez, Scottsbluff
- Aidan Jespersen, Waverly
- Benjamin Michael, Waverly
- Avery Scott, Waverly

***Speech Language Pathology***

- Avery Behrend, Waverly

***Special Education***

- Rowyn Wiltgen, Millard North Education Academy
- Brooke Applequist, Omaha Burke
- Chloe Price, Omaha Burke

**Education & Training Challenge Tests** were offered at the Junior (grades 9-10) and Senior (grades 11-12) levels. Students completed the tests virtually prior to the State Leadership Conference.

***Education & Training I Junior***

- First Place: Gavin Guthrie, Ralston

***Education & Training I Senior***

- First Place: Oscar Vazquez, Scottsbluff
- Second Place: Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview

***Education & Training II Senior***

- First Place: Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview
- Second Place: Oscar Vazquez, Scottsbluff

***Education & Training III Senior***

- First Place: Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview
- Second Place: Oscar Vazquez, Scottsbluff

***Education & Training Terminology Senior***

- First Place: Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview
- Second Place: Oscar Vazquez, Scottsbluff
- Third Place: Lilly Elsasser, Ralston

***Child Development Junior***

- First Place: Shara Schluterbusch, Scottsbluff
- Second Place: Emily Nelson, Scottsbluff

***Child Development Senior***

- First Place: Oscar Vazquez, Scottsbluff
- Second Place: Ella Powell, Scottsbluff
- Third Place: Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview

***Lifespan Development Senior***

- First Place: Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview
- Second Place: Oscar Vazquez, Scottsbluff
- Third Place: Capria Rogers, Scottsbluff

**Competitive Event National Qualifiers** are listed on the following pages. Over 300 students participated in Competitive Events at the State Leadership Conference. Students who placed in the Top Ten or received a Blue ribbon at the state level qualified to compete at the national competition in Orlando, Florida this June.

Competitive Events have two levels of participation:

- JV – grades 9-10
- Varsity – grades 11-12

### ***Interactive Bulletin Board Contest – Elementary (Varsity)***

- Blue Ribbon: Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview
- Blue Ribbon: Trinity Elliott-Piersee & Rosemary Reyes, Sutton
- Blue Ribbon: Kobie Kosek, Centennial
- Blue Ribbon: Erin Cassoutt & Alyssa Fisher, Papillion La Vista South

### ***Interactive Bulletin Board Contest – Middle/High (Varsity)***

- Blue Ribbon: Lauryn Breitreutz & Sarah Payne, Centennial

### ***Project Visualize Contest (Varsity)***

- Blue Ribbon: Sophia Bouman & Lea Hanson, Omaha Burke
- Blue Ribbon: Avery Albers, York

### ***Teacher Created Materials Contest (Varsity)***

- Blue Ribbon: Sarah Payne, Centennial
- Blue Ribbon: Kobie Kosek, Centennial

### ***Children's Literature K-3 (Varsity)***

1. Emily Schmidt, Millard North Education Academy
2. Olivia Simms, Omaha Westview
3. Jordan Blake-Oxley & Payton Jurgensen, Lincoln TCA
4. Eva Philippi, Ralston
5. Meke Herman & Aubrey Blair, Scottsbluff
6. Shelbie McKibbin, Bayard
7. Karli Knaub, Scottsbluff
8. Alena Lococo, Lincoln TCA
9. Brenda Dominguez Gomez, Omaha Bryan
10. Taylor Peters & Lainey Portwine, York

### ***Children's Literature K-3 – Spanish (Varsity)***

1. Estefani Aguilar Rodriguez, Omaha South
2. Sonia Alonzo, Omaha Burke
3. Marco Guerrero Miranda, Omaha Buena Vista

### ***Children's Literature Pre-K (JV)***

1. Braylea Halverson & Jayde McAllister, Bayard
2. Kennedy Geiger, Westside
3. Emily Nelson, Scottsbluff
4. Kennedy Erving & Lilianna Urwin, Omaha North



***Children's Literature Pre-K (Varsity)***

1. Alex Cancino & Angella Nguyen, South Sioux City
2. Brooklyn Morten, Millard North Education Academy
3. Alexi Nesbitt, Bayard
4. Endy Barrera & Arthur Southward, Omaha South
5. Carlie McKibbin, Bayard
6. Lea Jensen, Waverly
7. Tesa Dykstra & Ella White, Millard Education Academy
8. Eva Urman & Grace Urman, Lincoln TCA
9. Nastasia Orr, Omaha Burke
10. Olivia Pearson, Omaha Westview

***Children's Literature Pre-K – Spanish (Varsity)***

1. Mayte Flores Garcia, Wakefield
2. Itzel Montoya Hernandez, Omaha Bryan
3. Denise Acevedo Jara & Camila Martinez Gutierrez, Omaha South

***Creative Lecture (Varsity)***

1. Brandon Baker, Scottsbluff
2. Madelynn Miller, York
3. Aubree Lawrey, Lincoln TCA
4. Danika Smith, Centennial
5. Hunter Fhuere, Sandy Creek
6. Aidyn Jones, Papillion La Vista South
7. Garrett Johnson, Millard North Education Academy
8. Keziah Etse, Omaha Burke

***Educators Rising Moment (JV)***

1. Maya Jangulo, Omaha North
2. Mario Torres, South Sioux City
3. Olivia Aarhus, Omaha Westview
4. Jenna Smith, Omaha Westview

***Educators Rising Moment (Varsity)***

1. Cambria Cruickshank, Millard Education Academy
2. Stephanie Santiago, Omaha South
3. Izabella Mesner-Olson, Millard North Education Academy
4. Lilly Elsasser, Ralston
5. Ashley Sanchez Andrade, Omaha Bryan
6. Kimberly Alba, South Sioux City
7. Andrea Chacon Herrera, Omaha South
8. Kaydence Foor, Millard North Education Academy

***Educators Rising Moment – Spanish (Varsity)***

1. Daisy Altamirano, Omaha Bryan
2. Griselda Zacarias, Wakefield
3. Atziry Martinez Cisneros, Scottsbluff
4. Mileny Romero Hernandez, Wakefield

***Ethical Dilemma (Varsity)***

1. Molly Hansen, Teyla Herrold, Gabrielle Major & Isabelle Petty, Lincoln TCA
2. Nicholas Hart & Emma Hike, Millard North Education Academy
3. Reese Bouges & Alexandria Johnson, Millard Education Academy
4. Kylie Champlin & Madison Howe, Papillion-La Vista
5. Khadijah Brooks, Taylor Parrack & Hailey Pold, Papillion La Vista South
6. Joaquin Chavez-German, Mayte Flores Garcia, Lilyana King-Lobo & Dorothy Sullivan, Wakefield
7. Maite Villarreal, Desirae Bacon, Hodhan Mohammed & Muna Mohammed, South Sioux City

***Exploring Education Administration Careers (Varsity)***

1. Zachary Havlovic, Omaha Westview

***Exploring Non-Core Subject Teaching Careers (Varsity)***

1. Riley Hopkins, Bayard
2. Alex Cancino, South Sioux City
3. Claire Neth, Lincoln TCA
4. Olivia Rexius, Millard North Education Academy
5. Maite Villarreal, South Sioux City

***Exploring Support Services Careers (JV)***

1. Jacie Thompson, Omaha Westview
2. Monserrat Arellano-Pena, Westside

***Exploring Support Services Careers (Varsity)***

1. Rocio Arellano, Westside
2. Hailey Scholten, Omaha Burke
3. Eva Philippi, Ralston
4. Amy Albro, Bayard
5. Olivia Weaver, Millard North Education Academy
6. Lilly Nelson, Ralston

***Inside Our Schools (JV)***

1. Ariel Horn, Alexis Kennedy, Eliza Raven & Jacie Thompson, Omaha Westview
2. Olivia Aarhus, Paisley Beck, Jasmine McCarty & Zyran Parrck, Omaha Westview
3. Rosy Corado, Karina Herrera & Brennan Ironshell, South Sioux City

***Inside Our Schools (Varsity)***

1. Samantha Draper, Maggie Novak & Samantha Ritterbush, Papillion-La Vista
2. Janika Dwight & Lauren Priest, Millard North Education Academy
3. Hser Ku & Joelle Thompson, Omaha Westview
4. Lilia Burr & McKinnley Kroos, Kenesaw
5. Amayah Coleman, Sahree Worthy & Claire Miller, Omaha Westview

***Inside Our Schools – Spanish (Varsity)***

1. Kenya Calderon & Marco Guerrero Miranda, Omaha Buena Vista
2. Daisy Altamirano & Itzel Montoya Hernandez, Omaha Bryan

***Job Interview (JV)***

1. Jenna Smith, Omaha Westview

***Job Interview (Varsity)***

1. Skyler Scheidemann, Hampton
2. Melusi Ngeleka, South Sioux City
3. Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview
4. Aidyn Jones, Papillion La Vista South
5. Brandon Baker, Scottsbluff
6. Mikaylah Garcia, Scottsbluff
7. Nicole Rodriguez, Lincoln TCA
8. Ashley Sanchez Andrade, Omaha Bryan
9. Hayley Sliva, Shickley
10. Chloe Wilkins, Omaha Westview

***Lesson Planning & Delivery – Arts (Varsity)***

1. Alexandria Shannon, Lincoln TCA
2. Ashlee Cavender, Ralston
3. Micah Aranda, Westside
4. Laily Eldridge, Millard North Education Academy

***Lesson Planning & Delivery – CTE (Varsity)***

1. Kathryn Naber, Seward
2. Morgan Swaney, Millard Education Academy

***Lesson Planning & Delivery – Humanities (Varsity)***

1. Julyssa Ruiz, Westside
2. Addison Klock, Millard Education Academy

***Lesson Planning & Delivery – STEM (Varsity)***

1. Capria Rogers, Scottsbluff
2. Balele Kanunde, Omaha Burke
3. Rebecca Brooks, Papillion La Vista South
4. Jasmine Tran, Omaha Burke

***Outstanding Chapter Award (Varsity)***

1. Violet Casady, Esthefany Contreras-Suarez, Genevieve Hodoly & Vivian Hodoly, Omaha South

***Public Service Announcement: Teacher Recruitment (Varsity)***

1. Nathan Robles & Melusi Ngeleka, South Sioux City
1. Dominic Diaz, Jan Fernandez, Diego Rosales Valdez & Sergio Veles, Omaha Bryan

***Public Speaking (Varsity)***

1. Kaden Curtis, Millard Education Academy
2. Eli Ockander, Lincoln TCA
3. Albert Rodriguez Nunez, Omaha Bryan
4. Bailey Kai, Wakefield
5. Christopher Estrada, Omaha Bryan
6. Chantal Sierra, Omaha South
7. Olivia Stoll, Ralston

***Researching Learning Challenges (JV)***

1. Thuy Nguyen, Aaliyah Torres & Mario Torres, South Sioux City

***Researching Learning Challenges (Varsity)***

1. Brooke Applequist & Audrey Brown, Omaha Burke
2. Allie Abboud & Elizabeth Wartenbee, Millard Education Academy
3. Jordan Blake-Oxley, Lyric Gans & Jacey Ryan, Lincoln TCA
4. Alexis Dix & Claire Neth, Lincoln TCA