

# The AFCON Sentinel

*Newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska*

Volume 28, Number 6

December 2024

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## Academic Freedom Nebraska Case Repository

David Moshman

In October 2024, AFCON launched the Academic Freedom Nebraska Case Repository, a searchable collection of Nebraska cases involving intellectual freedom in academic contexts. The repository can be found on the AFCON website:

<https://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org/case-repository.html>

The repository can be searched by *issue* (e.g., curriculum, research, book censorship, student press; politics; harassment/hostile environment); *course/topic* (e.g., history, religion, sexuality, violence, race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+); *type of institution* (K-12 education, higher education, library); *target* (e.g., teacher, student, researcher); *time period* (cases range from 1870 to 2024); or *place* (with cases from more than dozen Nebraska cities). It can also be searched for any combination of these categories.

For example, of the 87 cases currently in the repository, 23 involve matters of race or ethnicity. Subdividing by institution type we find 12 of these cases in higher education (including 1 in a college library), 11 in K-12 education (including 3 in school libraries), and 4 in libraries (all four also categorized in either K-12 or higher education). In Nebraska, as elsewhere, controversy and censorship related to race or ethnicity are common at all levels of education.

In contrast, if we look at book censorship broken down by type of institution, we find that none of the 16 cases involve higher education, 13 involve K-12 education (including 8 in school libraries), and 11 involve libraries (counting again the same 8 in school libraries). In Nebraska, as elsewhere, book banning is mostly associated with K-12 education and libraries, and especially school libraries. But as the repository makes clear, attacks and restrictions on intellectual freedom in higher education are also common; they simply take different forms.

We hope this resource will be useful to anyone interested in learning, teaching, or writing about intellectual freedom in academic contexts of education and research. We are happy to hear from anyone with knowledge about these cases or about others that should be added. We are also happy to cooperate with anyone interested in expanding this project to other states or to national databases. If you have questions, comments, suggestions, additions, or corrections, email David Moshman at [dmoshman1@unl.edu](mailto:dmoshman1@unl.edu).

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David Moshman is policy coordinator of AFCON and author of *Reasoning, Argumentation, and Deliberative Democracy*. <https://www.routledge.com/authors/i20496-david-moshman>

# The Nebraska State Board of Education...We're Watching

Nancy Comer



This article begins with an update on Nebraska's State Board of Education. At the October 4 meeting held in Grand Island, Commissioner Maher shared the "Literacy Project" with the SBOE's support and approval. For your information, the Vision, Goals and Tenets are below.

## **Our Vision**

To foster a culture of proficient and lifelong readers in Nebraska and unlock student potential for learning, earning, and living through a focus on evidence-based reading instruction.

## **Our Goals**

1. Increase third grade proficiency on NSCAS ELA to 75% by 2030.
2. Increase the % of Nebraska K-3 students who meet the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act approved assessment thresholds.
3. Ensure 100% of Nebraska educator preparation programs are implementing evidence-based instruction for teachers grounded in the science of reading.

## **Our Tenets**

**Tenet 1. Professional Learning System**  
High quality professional development for all educators who teach literacy for students age 4 through 3rd grade grounded in the science of reading to ensure that educators have skills in evidence-based instructional practices

**Tenet 2. Curriculum and Teacher Preparation Aligned to Evidence-based Reading Instruction**

Sustained teacher preparation programs and PreK – 3 curriculum, instruction, and assessment grounded in the science of reading using high quality materials

**Tenet 3. Regional Literacy Coaches**

Establishment of a network of coaches across the state who are trained in the science of reading and evidence-based practices. This network of coaches will provide sustained support services to Nebraska schools.

**Tenet 4. Data Collections to Evaluate Effectiveness**

Data collections measuring the effectiveness of literacy initiatives and implementation of professional development in evidence-based reading

**Tenet 5. Family Literacy and PreK Programs**

Development of resources to assist families in accessing local family literacy centers, existing community literacy initiatives, and prekindergarten programs in order to strengthen literacy and

language development for young children so that they start kindergarten ready to thrive.

If you are wondering why this is important, following the pandemic, the SBOE came under attack after a draft of a new health curriculum was released. Parents and members of the community criticized curriculum, which is their right, but moved from curriculum to books that they argued weren't appropriate for school libraries and charged that teachers were grooming their children for inappropriate sexual behavior. The state legislature passed bills that would permit using public money for private schools and school choice.

Then we learned that President-elect Donald Trump is appointing Linda McMahon to be Secretary of Education; she is tasked with overseeing an agency Trump promised to dismantle.

McMahon has expressed support for charter schools and school choice.

Yesterday, I received notice of bills that are set to come before Congress. The goal is to gut

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion from college and university programs. See attachment below. The first HR8706 is called the Dismantle DEI Act of 2024. It is lengthy but needs to be read. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/8706>

To end on a more positive note, here is a “shout out” to some current SBOE members. Lisa Fricke received the Distinguished Service Award from National Association of the State Boards of Education (NASBE) and was presented the award at the Annual Conference held in Louisville KY October 22-25, 2024. Nebraska Department of Education Staff Member Ryan Foor will present a session on Parliamentary Procedure. NDE Staff member Allyson DenBeste and SBOE member Patti Gubbels will present a session on high quality instructional materials. Patti Gubbels was invited to serve as part of a general session at the 2024 National Forum to Advance Rural

Education (NFARE) titled, From Polarization to Progress: Leading and Modeling in a Time of High Conflict.

Take away: What happens on the Nebraska State Board of Education as well as local school boards is important to Nebraskans. There will be four new members on the SBOE in the new year. We’ll be watching and listening to what goes on.

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Nancy Comer, AFCON Board member representing the Nebraska State Literacy Association

## AFCON

[www.academicfreedomnebraska.org](http://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org)

The Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska was founded in 1988 to promote intellectual freedom in Nebraska education and research, including freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas.

AFCON Board of Directors

*Wyatt Packard, President*

*Peggy Adair, Secretary and Legislative Liaison*

*Rod Wagner, Treasurer*

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From the AFCON Constitution, Article I:

The purpose of AFCON shall be to promote academic freedom in Nebraska, defined as intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts. This includes freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas. In pursuit of this general goal, AFCON shall:

1. Support application of the First Amendment in academic contexts, including schools, colleges, universities, and libraries.
2. Educate Nebraskans in and out of Academic settings, citizens and professionals, parents and students about the meaning and value of intellectual freedom, intellectual diversity, mutual respect, open communication, and uninhibited pursuit of knowledge, including the role of these ideals in academic contexts and in democratic self government.
3. Assist students, teachers, librarians, researchers, and others confronted with censorship, indoctrination, or suppression of information or ideas in academic settings.
4. Act as liaison among groups in the State of Nebraska that support academic freedom.

### ***JOIN OR RENEW***

Rod Wagner, Treasurer

If you are interested in defending and expanding academic freedom in Nebraska, we welcome you or your organization as a member of AFCON. Annual dues are \$120 for institutions, \$15 for individuals, and \$5 for students. Individual life memberships are available for \$150. You can pay by visiting our website at <https://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org/>

Memberships and donations can also be made by check (payable to AFCON). Send check to AFCON Treasurer, 3901 S. 27th St.,#47, Lincoln NE 68502.

Organizational members are entitled to a representative on the AFCON board. We also have at-large board members. You may express your interest to the president to be considered for appointment to the board.

### **Local Links**

**EXCLUSIVE: NU system defunds student agencies after controversial purchases**

[https://www.unothegateway.com/news/university/exclusive-nu-system-defunds-student-agencies-after-controversial-purchases/article\\_02ab32c0-980d-11ef-82e6-f3ef6b7f6f09.html](https://www.unothegateway.com/news/university/exclusive-nu-system-defunds-student-agencies-after-controversial-purchases/article_02ab32c0-980d-11ef-82e6-f3ef6b7f6f09.html)

**Concerns raised after Dean Cathy Pettid personally reimbursed student in cash for controversial dildo purchase**

[https://www.unothegateway.com/news/university/concerns-raised-after-dean-cathy-pettid-personally-reimbursed-student-in-cash-for-controversial-dildo-purchase/article\\_b40336d4-a2c7-11ef-b569-1f54f1b93c3e.html](https://www.unothegateway.com/news/university/concerns-raised-after-dean-cathy-pettid-personally-reimbursed-student-in-cash-for-controversial-dildo-purchase/article_b40336d4-a2c7-11ef-b569-1f54f1b93c3e.html)

#### **National Links**

**Project 2025 Offers Cuts to Education, Classroom Censorship and Expanded Book Bans**

<https://www.mississippifreepress.org/project-2025-offers-cuts-to-education-classroom-censorship-and-expanded-book-bans/>

**State Senate passes bill intended to halt book bans, protect librarians**

<https://newjerseymonitor.com/2024/10/29/state-senate-passes-bill-intended-to-halt-book-bans-protect-librarians/>

### **Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska**

#### **Annual Membership Business Meeting**

UNL Student Union, Lincoln, Nebraska and Via Videoconference

November 9, 2024

Present:

Peggy Adair, secretary, legislative liaison

John Bender, representing UNL Faculty Senate

Nancy Comer, representing Nebraska State Literacy Association

Laurie Thomas Lee, representing ACLU Nebraska

Dave Moshman, policy coordinator

Wyatt Packard, president, representing Nebraska Library Association

Todd Schlechte, webmaster, director at large

Rod Wagner, treasurer, representing Nebraska Center for the Book

Regina Wegrum, representing American Association of University Professors, UNL

Vicki Wood, immediate past president, director at large, newsletter editor

## MINUTES

President Packard convened the meeting at 1:02 p.m.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Comer, to approve minutes of the annual membership meeting held on November 4, 2023. Motion carried on a voice vote and show of hands.

ANNUAL TREASURER'S REPORT: Rod Wagner reported balance on hand as of November 9, 2024, is \$3,065.97.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: President Packard reported on some of the statewide outcomes in the recent election. Packard reported voters repealed the portion of a statute that would have moved \$10 million per year of taxpayer dollars from public education to private education. Packard reported the state board of education is now evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. Packard thanked the AFCON members for their advocacy and noted AFCON needs to remain a strong voice in support of academic freedom.

AFCON BOARD MEETINGS: Members agreed by consensus to hold the next AFCON meeting on Saturday, December 14, 2024. No AFCON meeting will be held in January, 2025.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT: On behalf of the nominating committee, Wood presented the following slate of officers for 2024: President-elect, John Bender; Treasurer, Rod Wagner; and Secretary, Peggy Adair. A motion was made by Moshman, second by Wood, to close nominations from the floor. The nominating committee report was approved by the board on a voice vote and show of hands.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Peggy Adair, Secretary

The AFCON Sentinel is the newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska, published bimonthly in February, April, June, August, October, and December. Unless otherwise indicated, articles represent the views of the authors. All issues of the AFCON Sentinel are available here:

<https://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org/the-sentinel.html>

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