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I wrestle every January, as does much of America, with the dilemma of New Year's resolutions. It is an old custom about what changes should be made in our personal lives, work or relationships. Some take resolutions very seriously and carefully ponder and write down their intentions as a kind of contract with themselves. Others think about making resolutions for change, but never quite get around to specifically articulating a plan. The result is that New Year's resolutions are often the object of humor or derision and, sometimes, regret in the realization that another year will pass without any real attempt at improvement.

The problem with New Year's resolutions is that they are almost never big enough. They fail, not because they are too difficult or long-term, but because they are too immediate, too private, and too focused on the individual. Most resolutions do not involve the community, family, friends, club or other social institutions. These groups could provide support and encouragement to reach goals that are far beyond our personal vanities. Instead, resolutions usually focus on such individualist concerns as how many times to go to the gym, how many calories to cut, how to quit smoking, or how often to review our high school French. Important, strategic decisions that promise significant change in our lives involve much more than focusing on just ourselves.

Strategic, Long Term

So, what are the social institutions that make the most long-term difference to the quality of life? Whatever else our lists contain, they undoubtedly include public schools. How can we talk

about improving the quality of life without talking about a renewed commitment to our local schools?

Resolutions that count are strategic. They span time, sometimes generations. No one makes New Year's resolutions that are intended for just one day. Some even argue that there is a direct correlation between the proposed time duration of the resolution and its significance, but most resolutions are lucky to last a year.

The effects of any support we can give to our local schools may last for generations. The offer to mentor an individual student or share special expertise with a teacher or her class (or with the entire school), giving a financial contribution for special equipment or materials, or simply being a volunteer at our local school are all great examples of a New Year's resolution that makes a difference for others.

What issues should get our renewed commitment at the beginning of the New Year? What really makes a difference in the quality of life in our communities? Good parenting and special attention to the youngest members of our communities, including health, constructive play, and safe homes, streets and playgrounds are not just the responsibility of parents. These are critical components — with the local school — in the education and development of our children. And they are the perfect objects of resolutions that matter.

For Us...or Others?

So, are we serious enough about our resolutions to make such a contract? The point is that, if we are committed to the support of public education, safe communities, and a head start for our children, why do we keep making resolutions such as eating good carbs or spending more time with the dog?

Resolutions that matter can make a difference for our communities and the futures of our children. Consider being a mentor or volunteering in your local school. Become active in your

community or neighborhood association to make our public spaces safe and clean. Volunteer to be a Big Brother or Big Sister. Actively support political candidates or elected officials that support education and child welfare.

So, what will our resolutions be this year? Are they just for us...or do they involve others? This year — make resolutions count.

Founded in 1867, the Nebraska State Education Association has 28,000 members across the state.