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Nebraska Submits Race to the Top Application

(Lincoln, Neb.) Gov. Dave Heineman and Dr. Roger Breed, Commissioner of Education, announced today that Nebraska has submitted an application for federal Race to the Top funding to the U.S. Department of Education. Applications for Phase I projects are expected to be announced by the department in April.

"This proposal represents hours and hours of work over the past several months and I want to thank those involved in developing this grant application for our state," Gov. Heineman said. "These ideas are part of our long range vision for strengthening education in Nebraska.

"Within education, we have a more coordinated group working together to strengthen our schools than ever before. We want to use the high level of collaboration and partnership to help Nebraska students reach higher levels of academic achievement, make progress in dramatically reducing learning gaps, and ensure more of our students graduate and attend college in Nebraska."

Nebraska's Race to the Top proposal strengthens ongoing educational reforms identified as priorities for the state by the Nebraska P-16 Initiative (P-16), a group that includes policymakers, business and education leaders and is chaired by Gov. Heineman.

Funding awarded to Nebraska would be used for education proposals in five areas, including: implementing statewide standards and assessments, efforts to support the professional development of great teachers and school leaders, expanding Nebraska's educational data systems, developing coordinated efforts to turn around struggling schools, and allow Nebraska's key education and business groups to work together in more coordinated ways.

Dr. Breed said, "Our Race to the Top proposal seeks to transform the Nebraska Department of Education and Nebraska's 253 school districts to better meet the needs of students today. This proposal fits within the existing goals for P-16 reform and incorporates research and evidence-based practices. Our goal was to outline a plan and detail activities that are focused on improving student learning in ways that are sustainable so as to support school districts in continuous improvement beyond the grant period."

In the area of standards and assessments, is a proposal to create a new virtual high school available to help students be ready for college by expanding current independent study programs. Developed by the University of Nebraska, the virtual high school would provide Nebraska students access to a wider range of academic classes and more rigorous courses.

Other proposals involve supporting current efforts to develop statewide assessments, and unify curriculum and standards in core subjects. Nebraska is part of a national effort to adopt common standards for education, with the state on track to adopt math and English standards by August.

Proposals to support the development of great teachers and school leaders include: establishing statewide teacher and principal standards of performance and developing certification requirements to better prepare educators, particularly in STEM (Science, technology, engineering and math) subjects.

Data system proposals include expanding current systems and linking them to allow data sharing among Nebraska's pre-K, K-12 and postsecondary schools and career-oriented programs.

Efforts to help school leaders turn around struggling schools include identifying and supporting persistently low-achieving schools by providing the technical assistance and professional development, and modeling the successful methods used by other schools. Family and community engagement efforts would also be an essential part of successful transformations.

Finally, these proposals and initiatives would be developed and with the support and expertise of P-16 and other statewide partners, including: the Governor, the Legislature's Education Chair, the Commissioner of Education, the State Board of Education, along with business and industry groups and private foundations, higher education officials, Educational Service Units, the Nebraska State Education Association, the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Nebraska Association of School Boards and school districts leaders.