NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEWS RELEASE

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NEBRASKA SPECIAL ED ELIGIBILITY APPROVED, SCHOOLS TO RECEIVE $158 MILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDS

The federal government recently approved Nebraska's special education policies and procedures for serving children with disabilities, paving the way for the state to receive more than $158 million in federal funds.

Approval of the Nebraska Eligibility Document by the U.S. Department of Education will result in local and state programs receiving $153 million to assist in providing special education services to children and youth, 3- 21 years of age. Nebraska will receive an additional $5 million in federal dollars for special education services for children birth to 3 years of age. These estimated totals include Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as well as American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) federal funds.

As part of the federal review of special education services for all states, Nebraska programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities received the nation's top rating of "meets requirements" for the third consecutive year. These programs serve children birth to 3 years of age. The review looked at programs that existed two years ago, in 2007.

The federal government's four levels of approval are: 1) meets requirements 2) needs assistance 3) needs intervention and 4) needs substantial intervention. Nebraska programs serving children and youth with disabilities ages 3-21 years received the second highest level of approval, needing assistance, based on issues related to the submission of data and meeting federal timelines — not the quality of special education services provided children with disabilities.

"We are pleased that the federal government recognizes the high level of special education services provided to children by our schools and service providers. We are especially pleased that Nebraska services for infants and toddlers received the highest national rating, and we are working to resolve data and timeline issues that led to the needs assistance approval rating for services provided children 3-21 years of age," said Beth Wierda, a state special education official. "Specifically, we are using resources from the federal Office of Special Education Programs and a regional center to improve how we submit data and to better meet our timelines."

A copy of Nebraska's policies and procedures for special education services to children and youth with disabilities is available at the Office of Special Education, Nebraska Department of Education, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln. Information about Nebraska special education services is available at: www.nde.state.ne.us.