



## NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### ESEA Reauthorization 2015

#### NEBRASKA POSITION STATEMENT UPDATED

Nebraska Department of Education and Nebraska Education Policy Partners

The people of Nebraska — through their Constitution, the Nebraska Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Commissioner of Education, and state policymakers — are responsible for designing Nebraska’s education system, including providing opportunities for all students to graduate ready for college and career. Local boards of education, administrators, teachers, parents, communities, and students proudly lead the education system’s implementation. The Nebraska Department of Education and local school districts also work hard to cultivate a balanced working relationship among federal, state, and local education entities — a relationship built on a support system that benefits all students across Nebraska.

The Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Legislature, and education policy partners worked hand-in-hand over the last several years to build essential systems for supporting school district improvement. Policymakers and practitioners collaborated to develop college and career ready standards, valid and reliable assessments to measure student progress against the standards, and, more recently, developed a balanced state accountability system relying on test scores and graduation rates as well as other valid indicators to monitor school and district performance and to prescribe interventions for persistently low-performing schools.

The State Board of Education believes that further integrating components of accountability, assessment, accreditation, career education, and data use into an aligned system of continuous school improvement and support is imperative for Nebraska’s students and to close persistent achievement gaps. The educational success of every Nebraska student is critical to the state’s plans for building a vibrant and economically successful future. Given this work, we appreciate Congress’ work to date on ESEA Reauthorization in view of our unique circumstances and the context in other states. We appreciate Congress promoting educational equity by moving beyond No Child Left Behind’s one-size-fits-all model and instead helping states and districts establish more meaningful and nuanced supports for students served by the nation’s lowest performing schools.

In going forward, the House and Senate conferees, along with the Administration, should set high expectations for state and local education systems, but allow Nebraska and other states to define strategies for meeting those goals, such as using more sophisticated accountability systems and tailoring interventions to address unique local needs. Currently, states, intermediate agencies, and schools spend an immense amount of time, effort, and money addressing federal regulatory measures that do not fit local circumstances and discourage educational innovation. This problem can be addressed by continuing to hold states and districts accountable for effectively serving all students while also empowering state and local leaders to design and implement innovative strategies for closing or eliminating achievement gaps. Punitive federal accountability measures should be replaced by state and local systems for examining persistent school and district underperformance. The conferees should promote problem solving and the targeting of resources and interventions based on locally identified needs, rather than relying on rigid federal intervention strategies. This state and its locally-led approach will promote genuine

and significant school and district improvement and would be better understood and embraced by local communities.

To be effective, a reauthorized ESEA must help states, regional agencies, and local districts by supporting school improvement systems, investing in best practices, and removing fear and blame. In Nebraska, where resources are scarce, we believe in leveraging our assets by inspiring intrinsic motivation to improve and by “showing up to help before we show up to criticize.”

### **Major Position Topics**

1. Standards: Content and performance standards are best designed -- as Nebraska has done for 17 years --at the state level with local stakeholder input. The new ESEA should call on states to develop and adopt college and career ready standards, but must not require the adoption of specific standards or related curriculum. Nebraska recently adopted revised English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards that all state postsecondary education systems declared college and career ready. All state standards should address the career-ready expectations of Nebraska employers.

Nebraska supports S. 1177's and H.R. 5's explicit deference to state leadership and authority over standards setting and urge the conferees to maintain this approach in the conference report. We also urge the conferees to adopt S. 1177's high-level requirement that states provide an assurance that standards are aligned with entrance requirements, without the need for remediation, for entrance into a state institution of higher education; the state's career and technical education standards; and the state's early learning guidelines. Finally, we encourage the conferees to ensure the final bill explicitly recognizes the importance of ensuring students graduate with both knowledge and skills by strengthening and maintaining references to these closely related graduation goals. This approach will help ensure that federal law and related resources are aligned with Nebraska's efforts to prepare all students for postsecondary success and careers.

2. Accountability and Assessment: State accountability systems, as well as educators, should use the assessment results — national, state, and classroom-based — and other appropriate indicators to monitor school performance and to measure student achievement on college and career ready standards. Assessment and accountability systems must be balanced and appropriate for students. Therefore, the new ESEA must enable states to use multiple measures as well as statewide summative assessments as part of their accountability systems.

Nebraska encourages the conferees to adopt S. 1177's Innovative Assessment and Accountability Authority and H.R. 5's Local Assessment Authority. The next ESEA must support state and local efforts to develop and use new approaches to assessment, including new competency based, performance based, and other models that will support student success. Furthermore, S. 1177's and H.R. 5's provisions permitting a much greater range of state accountability indicators, offer much needed freedom and incentives to create better accountability and school improvement systems focused more squarely on supporting effective instruction. The conference report should continue this more sophisticated systems building approach and move beyond the more rigid approaches to accountability embedded in NCLB and the NCLB Waiver framework. We also

strongly support conferees promoting full transparency regarding schools' performance, including continuing the law's focus on subgroup level accountability and reporting.

3. **Effective Educators and Leaders:** All students must be supported by effective teachers, and educator leaders. Educational Service Units, schools, and districts should develop effective teachers and education leaders who establish a culture of success. With broad input from stakeholders, the Nebraska State Board of Education established a Teacher/Principal Evaluation framework. The State Board is committed to partnering with postsecondary institutions, intermediate agencies, school districts, local teachers and leaders to increase capacity for educator professional development and effective support systems that institute effective instructional practices in all buildings and classrooms. The new ESEA should provide adequate resources and flexibility to enable states and school districts to invest in their educators and school leaders. Furthermore, the new law must not mandate a one-size-fits-all educator evaluation system.

Nebraska encourages the conferees to maintain S. 1177's and H.R. 5's language permitting – but not mandating – the use of Title II professional development resources for educator evaluation systems. We also urge the conferees to encourage the final bill provides significant flexibility for states and school districts to use Title II resources to support teachers, principals, and other educators, and we urge you to adopt S. 1177's language permitting such funds to be used for high quality induction programs for new teacher and recruiting new educators to the profession. Finally, we encourage you to adopt S. 1177's Innovative Technology Expands Children's Horizon's program to provide additional professional development focused on effectively using technology, protecting student privacy, and better using data to support instruction and decision making. This program is an important complement to the Federal Communications Commission's recent update to the E-rate program.

4. **School Improvement:** Rather than requiring compliance with rigid school turnaround models that mandate staffing and other changes without reflecting on local circumstances and needs, the new ESEA should include support designed to ensure that our most vulnerable students have stable education environments as well as effective and supportive teachers and school building leaders. The new ESEA should call on states to have effective intervention strategies for persistently low-performing schools, but not mandate specific interventions.

Nebraska encourages the conferees to maintain S.1177's and H.R. 5's prohibitions on federal prescriptions about the specific steps or models school districts and states must take to improve their lowest performing schools. We also urge the conferees to adopt S. 1177's initiative to provide federal grants to states and school districts to help improve low-performing schools that are identified by the state accountability systems, while allowing districts to design evidence-based interventions for these schools. This approach reflects the ESEAs historic commitment to promoting educational equity by targeted additional federal resources to the schools and communities in greatest need of assistance.

5. **General Funding and Flexibility:** To truly build a strong education system nationwide, the new ESEA must allow states — based on their own state plans — to consolidate and transfer select federal funds to support state, regional, and local practices that enhance capacity for

improvement rather than depleting capacity to meet regulatory demands. The new ESEA must be aligned to support high quality early learning systems that Nebraska is expanding.

Nebraska supports S. 1177's language permitting transfer of 100% of state level funding between Title II and Title V and urges the conferees to maintain this approach in the final conference report. This model will enable Nebraska to better address unique state needs in these areas. We strongly support S. 1177's language making early learning a clear allowable use across ESEA programs, and urge the conferees to include the bipartisan Early Learning Alignment and Improvement Grant program in the conference report. Promoting greater alignment between high quality early learning programs and elementary schools – including S. 1177's provisions focused on building elementary principals' capacity to support children along the Pre-K to Third Grade continuum - must be a top priority and S. 1177's early learning provisions take a strong step in the right direction.

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