



NEWS RELEASE

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NEBRASKA'S ESSA PLAN APPROVED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Nebraska has received approval of the state's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan. The U.S. Department of Education (U.S.D.E) accepted the plan originally submitted by the state on September 22, 2017. In December, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) received initial feedback requesting clarification on certain aspects of the plan. Since then, NDE staff have worked with members of the U.S.D.E. leading to the state's approval.

Nebraska's ESSA plan is bolstered by the unique efforts of the Nebraska State Board of Education, seamlessly blending their ambitious goals outlined in the Strategic Vision and Direction and NDE's comprehensive accountability system, AQuESTT. Nebraska approached the ESSA plan by considering where to focus federal resources to better support struggling schools, historically underserved students, and the recruitment and development of highly-effective educators.

"Nebraska's ESSA plan provides the flexibility to continue our work with AQuESTT and the Strategic Vision and Direction while fulfilling all of federal requirements under the law. We are confident we can use the plan to work toward equity for all students and close the achievement gaps we have seen for years in Nebraska," said Nebraska Commissioner of Education Matthew Blomstedt.

Key components of the plan include:

- Nebraska's overall 10-year goal of a 50 percent reduction in the number of students in every subgroup not proficient on the statewide assessment
- Proposing a set of Challenge Goals to accelerate closing achievement gaps

ESSA requires states to create an accountability system that identifies schools most in need of support and intervention. Nebraska's plan uses AQuESTT to track indicators including academic achievement, academic progress, graduation rate, progress for English Learners, and chronic absenteeism to help determine school quality and student success. Nebraska's ESSA plan supports the state's current work to improve its schools designated in AQuESTT as "Most In Need of Support to Improve," or Priority Schools. In the future, Priority Schools will continue to receive support through state-funded improvement activities as will roughly 24 schools identified through ESSA as "In Need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement," qualifying them for federally-funded improvement activities.

For the first time, federal law under ESSA requires states to include measures of English Learner (EL) progress in state accountability systems, helping to address the EL achievement gap. Nebraska will fulfill this requirement by

continuing its work with the ELPA21 consortium, a group of states that designs and develops an assessment system for English Learners that addresses language demands needed to be college and career ready. NDE will also direct federal funds for professional development, activities for new teachers, rigorous evaluation of educators, and strategies for recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers.

Nebraska's ESSA plan was created through extensive outreach including a statewide listening tour held in seven locations from Scottsbluff to Omaha, online partner facilitation resources, and an online feedback survey with more than 1,700 responses. NDE staff also engaged in productive dialogue with Governor Pete Ricketts and received a letter of support from the Governor and U.S. Senator Deb Fischer.

The attached document provides more information on Nebraska's plan. The final approved state plan can be found on NDE's ESSA website: <https://www.education.ne.gov/essa/>.

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