



## PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM RATIONALE

**TO:** Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D.  
Commissioner of Education

**FROM:** Dr. Dean R. Folkers  
Information Systems Officer

**PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM:** Grant the Commissioner the authority obligate up to \$1,500,000 from the Education Improvement Lottery Fund to create the Equitable Access and Digital Resources Innovation Network.

### **RATIONALE/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

An Innovation Grant Program was initially created with the passage of Legislative Bill (LB) 519 (2015) and codified in Nebraska Revised Statute (NRS) §79-1054. The competitive grant program provided resources and opportunities to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and consortiums to support the development, expansion and investment in innovative best practices. The projects and efforts ranged from personalized learning, career academies, afterschool design network, and digital ecosystem development.

Through the work of the DE<sup>2</sup>TAILS innovation grant project, it remained clear that solid infrastructure, strong security and privacy protections, and data integrations are an important foundation for services that improve learning, teaching and administrative processes. User feedback and usage patterns show that to be effective, software solutions must meet a strong need, be easy to use, and available at an efficient and sustainable cost.

Building from the work of data ecosystem development, the Network will focus on cooperative software development, evaluation and licensing. A software innovation network will provide high-quality software and features to students, educators and administrators:

- Attention to meeting Nebraska-specific needs and use cases
- Focus on a lower, sustainable cost
- Ensure equitable statewide access
- Raise the level of data privacy and security protections

This Education Innovation Network will include school districts and educational service units working together and with the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council (ESUCC) as the primary contractor to develop and maintain a portfolio of innovative digital tools and resources. Identifying a core set of prioritized applications will be selected for focus. For each selected need, a steering committee of actively interested members will be assembled. These steering members will represent diverse perspectives on the project, such as large vs. small districts or an instruction vs. technical vs. administrative role. The

steering committee will research the area of need and explore, evaluate possible solutions, and may engage others to provide additional insight and information.

Solutions may include enhancement of an existing asset, or development or licensing of new digital tools and resources. Rather than only selecting from what is available, the intent of the innovation network is to imagine what could and should be and to take sustainable steps toward that innovation. The emphasis will be on producing and enhancing open, shareable resources and tools with the goal of broad adoption, use and building a community of continuous improvement. Support for communication, professional development and coaching will be integrated within each project plan to assure that the innovative resource is shared as widely as possible and used as effectively as possible.

**ESTIMATED COST:** To accomplish this Education Innovation Network, \$1,500,000 would be obligated for contracts and competitive grant supports for the Network.