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## PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM RATIONALE

**DATE:** May 1, 2023

**TO:** Deborah A. Frison, Ed.D.  
Deputy Commissioner of Education

**FROM:** Lane Carr  
Administrator, Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives

Deborah Dogba  
Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives

**PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM:** Approve the proposed Innovation Grant networks for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years and authorize the deputy commissioner to enter into contracts with vendors to carry out the grants.

**AGENDA ITEM TYPE:** Grant

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

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Innovative Grant Fund and the Innovation Grant Program were created with the passage of Legislative Bill (LB) 519 and codified in Nebraska Revised Statute (NRS) [79-1054](#). This grant program provides resources and opportunities to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to support the development, expansion, and investment in innovative best practices that improve (1) education outcomes for early childhood, elementary, middle school, or high school students, (2) transitions between any successive stages of education, or (3) transitions between education and the workforce.

In 2017, the State Board of Education approved funding for five projects through the Innovative Grant Program. The five recipients, with awards totaling \$4.4 million, represented innovative and promising practices in education. In 2019, to expand access to the resources and opportunities available through the Innovation Grant Program, the State Board of Education approved five Education Innovation Networks. Through the networks, LEAs gained access to innovative best practices, as determined by the NDE, that were replicable, scalable, and have the potential to improve education outcomes.

The NDE intends to establish a third cohort of proposed grant networks, aligned to state board priorities. However, LB705 has the potential to adjust funding amounts and priorities. These networks are included below.

**PROPOSED BOARD MEETING (MONTH/YEAR):** May 2023

**ESTIMATED COST:** \$2,961,000 per year



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**FOR CONTRACTS AND GRANTS:**

- Indicate the Funding Source: Nebraska Education Improvement Fund (Lottery)
- New or Renewal: New
- If renewal, date of first approval:

**FOR NEW CONTRACTS OR OTHER CONTRACTS REQUIRING PROCUREMENT:**

- Indicate the method of procurement: When approved, each network will subsequently bring any additional contracts for Board approval, and describe procurement method.
- Rationale for method of procurement:
- Rationale for contractor selection:

**FOR GRANT SUBAWARDS:**

- Describe the grantee selection process: Selection criteria will be established by network leads, but will focus on schools needing support to improve and those most impacted by the pandemic.

*\*Updated 02.07.2023*



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## Appendix A: Proposed Network

Nebraska Career Connections

Proposed Network Lead: **Katie Graham**

Nebraska Career Connections (NCC) was developed through a research project seeking to determine how to best address the career planning needs of Nebraska students and adult job seekers. NDE currently holds a contract with Kuder to provide this service to all Nebraska schools. NCC provides career interest inventories, work value assessments, and information on careers and postsecondary education in Nebraska. NCC is used by over 220 school districts. It is available to middle and high school students with over 100,000 users (about the seating capacity of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum) during the last school year. Most Nebraska school districts count on Career Connections as the career development site used in the school counseling programs and career education classrooms. A unique aspect of NCC not available from other career information services is the 24 hours a day / 7 days a week access for students and parents. Students can access the site away from the school building, unlike other career information systems that require the student to be at the school site. Nebraska Career Connections has gone through a major revision that allows the site to be used from any mobile device, in addition to other significant upgrades. In addition to Nebraska schools, NCC is used by Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, the Nebraska Department of Labor, and Corrections.

**Total Cost:** \$312,500 per year

**Timeline:** September contract with Kuder is ready for renewal, renegotiation, or new bid.

Innovative Tutoring Network

Proposed Network Lead: **Lane Carr**

The tutoring program will use student teachers from the state colleges, and connect them with students needing homework help, or additional time to master content. Costs include funding for the tutors, support for a digital platform to connect the tutors with students, marketing, and evaluation. The unfinished teaching and learning because of COVID-19 have created an increased need to focus on instructional time. In collaboration with the Nebraska State College System, the NDE will establish an innovative network focused on tutoring to increase exposure to rich, on-grade level content, and provide more time for students to re-learn, to learn for the first time, or to master content. While eventually having a statewide reach, this program will leverage regional support from the Educational Service Units (ESUs) and state colleges to target school districts with significant numbers of schools classified as Needs Support to Improve.

**Total Cost:** \$1,000,000

**Timeline:** August 2023 - May 2025

2023-2025: Budget \$500,000/year x 2 years = \$1,000,000 over two years.



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#### Future Ready Digital Learning Collaborative (FRDLC)

Proposed Network Lead: Dorann Avey, Scott Isaacson, Kristin Yates

This multi-year project will build upon learnings from the Asynchronous Professional Learning and the Software Innovation projects done from 2019 – 2022. This innovation network will utilize the existing FRDLC leadership team along with the network director.

The networks main goals are to expand Canvas' reach and use it both in the classroom and for professional development. Increased focus on creating high-quality learning materials for professional and classroom benefits will be applied using skills learned in the first project. A second goal will be to expand into the creation of synchronous learning along with growing our efforts in the asynchronous space started in the previous network. Initiatives started in the software innovation network will continue to be supported and further developed in greater coordination with the networks main goals. The hope is to complete the work in 36 months (about 3 years). Opportunities for public districts, non-public schools, ESU's and NDE staff will include:

- Opportunities for institutions that are adopting Canvas to grow staff expertise in creating high-quality learning experiences for staff and students.
- For participants to earn Canvas Certified Educator certifications through completion of Canvas certification courses.
- For participants to have access to Canvas provided coaches, trainers, technical support, and resources with opportunities for learning in multiple modalities.
- Participants will continue to receive access and training to Articulate 360, Canvas, other digital design tools and applications introduced in the first project and to be further developed in this innovation network.
- For participant institution leadership to receive training on how to support staff in adopting Canvas across the district, ESU and NDE for the purposes of developing experts who can provide high quality instructional materials tied to standards across the state in multiple content areas.
- For participants to gain expertise in teaching in both high quality synchronous and asynchronous environments.
- For participants to build out stronger infrastructure and technology supports needed to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous learning environments and enhance student learning.
- The network will organize cooperative purchases and assist in the development of sustainable solutions to meet participants needs for long-term support of the project goals.
- Organic development of districts content leads to provide district support to future teachers and teachers without Canvas experience

Total Cost: \$2,695,500

Timeline: March 2023 - Summer 2026

FRDLC Innovation Network - Year 1: \$898,500 / Year 2: \$898,500 / Year 3: \$898,500



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Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Innovation Network (\$750,000)

Network Lead: **Jeff Cole** (Beyond School Bells)

The goal of this network is to provide additional opportunities for state-level partners to work closely with new and established ELO programs to expand access to high quality, locally sustainable ELO programs designed to serve Nebraska youth, including youth from urban and rural educational environments. The network will also identify and cultivate characteristics of high-quality programming that can be shared with other communities across the state through a variety of in-person and online platforms.

**Project Cost:** \$750,000

**Timeline:** March 2021 - Summer 2024

2021-2024: Budget \$250,000/year x 3 years = \$750,000 over three years.

Zearn Network

Network Lead: **Marissa Payzant**

In the Summer of 2021 and into SY 2021-22, the NDE used ESSER II funds to provide all Nebraska districts access to Zearn Math. The original purchase gave full K-7 digital access for either core or supplementary instructional materials use. Earlier this school year (22-23), in partnership with Zearn, the NDE released an [impact analysis](#) that shows Nebraska elementary- and middle-school students who consistently utilized the resource had 2.5 times growth in their NSCAS Math scores than students who did not. Moreover, the study shows that students at the lowest level of math achievement who consistently used Zearn Math were two times more likely to improve their NSCAS achievement level when compared with students who did not.

Current Zearn licenses are scheduled to expire in June 2023. Because of Zearn's positive impact on statewide math acceleration efforts, the NDE would like to provide a means by which those schools using Zearn Math could continue to do so beginning in July 2023 and into SY 2023-24. The NDE will create an application process by which districts and/or schools can receive funds to renew Zearn licenses. Schools would be required to demonstrate their commitment to continued usage and curriculum-based professional learning.

**Project Estimated Cost:** \$500,000 per year

**Timeline:** July 2023 - SY 2023-24

School Transformation Network

Proposed Network Lead: **Shirley Vargas**

The School Transformation Network will leverage state and federal accountability results to create network improvement communities (NIC) of like-schools. In this network, participating school, district, and ESU staff will investigate multiple data sources and identify potential root causes for shared problems of practices. With support of expert facilitators, the network will focus on identifying and implementing evidence-based practices and follow an improvement science process to study results and make adjustments based on data. NICs focus on studying



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and impacting a clearly defined, measurable outcome – in this case, it would be determined based on participating schools and districts. Costs include contracting with potential vendors to support facilitation, codify learning in shareable resources, and cover limited expenses of participating schools/districts.

**Total Cost:** \$500,000

**Timeline:** August 2023 - May 2025

2023-2025: Budget \$250,000/year x 2 years = \$500,000 over two years.

Every Day Counts: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism Across NE Schools

Proposed Network Lead: **Shirley Vargas**

During the 2021-2022 school year, nearly 77,000 students or 23% of Nebraska students were chronically absent. Chronic absence is defined as a student missing 10% or more of their time in membership. As students and communities emerge from the pandemic, it is important to understand the multiple root causes for why students miss school. This network will focus on reviewing local attendance policies, current family and community engagement practices, and identify and implement evidence-based practices or interventions to increase student attendance and minimize the negative impact chronic absenteeism has on student learning. Costs include contracting with potential vendors to support facilitation, codify learning in shareable resources, and cover limited expenses of participating schools/districts.

**Total Cost:** \$500,000

**Timeline:** August 2023 - May 2025

2023-2025: Budget \$250,000/year x 2 years = \$500,000 over two years.