

Committee of Practitioners Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 1, 2023
In Person and via Zoom

The November 1, 2023 meeting of the Nebraska Committee of Practitioners was held in person at the Nebraska Department of Education, 500 S. 84th St Ste 200, Lincoln, Nebraska 68510 and via Zoom.

Tina Forté, Committee Chair, called the Committee of Practitioners meeting to order at 9:00 AM on Wednesday, November 1, 2023.

Members in Attendance

Ann Caruso
Brent Cudly
Scott English
Tina Forté
Bill Heimann
Michele Hensley (Zoom)
Tara James
Kim Jonas
Anita Harkins-Mehsling (Zoom)
Ita Mendoza
Marco Pedroza
Phillip Picquet (Zoom)
Hillary Rasmussen (Zoom)
Deb Ross
Kris Schneider
Heather Stukey

NDE Staff in Attendance

Ann Carmoney
Lane Carr
Jan Handa
Dottie Heusman
Melody Hobson
Anne Hubbell
Derek Ippensen
Jim Kent
Stephanie Knust
Amanda Noonan
Julie Otero
Shirley Vargas
Brian Welch
Beth Wooster
Rhonda Wredt
Benjamin Zink

Not in Attendance

Andy DeFreece
Daniel Jaimes Diaz
Dave Erb
Kim Larson
Kamau Turner
Robert Ziegler

Guests in Attendance

Taylor Esparza (Guest)
Lindsey Luly (Guest)

Welcome & Introductions:

This COP meeting was held In Person and Zoom on November 1, 2023. Tina Forté, Committee Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and a roll call was taken. Dottie Heusman replaced Kirk Russell as Assistant Administrator/Title I Director, and welcomed new members, Anita Harkins-Mehsling, Omaha Arch Diocese, Marco Pedroza, Lincoln PS, Heather Stukey, ESU #10, Kamau Turner, Winnebago PS, NDE staff Julie Otero and Amanda Noonan. Dottie mentioned that Kristin Schultz resigned from the committee and Deb Ross, Hastings HeadStart announced she would be retiring in January.

Nebraska Open Meeting Acts (NOMA) Reminder:

Tina issued a general reminder about the NOMA. A copy of the Open Meetings Act was available.

Open for public comments:

Tina asked if there was any public comment. None was requested.

Approval of Minutes for March 31st and September 20th, 2023 meetings:

Tara James made a motion to approve the March 31st, 2023 and September 20th, 2023 minutes. Bill Heimann seconded the motion. Motion unanimously approved.

NDE COP Process Rules – Management - Election of Committee of Practitioners Chairperson for 2023-24: Dottie shared there were three nominations, Tina Forté, Bill Heimann and Andy DeFreece. Andy regretfully declined. An electronic vote was taken and Bill Heimann was elected. Dottie and Beth thanked Tina for her leadership the past few years.

Tour of Nebraska Department of ED Building: Joel Scherling, Facility Administrator took the committee on a tour of the NDE building.

Emergency Relief Grants:

Bipartisan Safer Communities Grant (Stronger Connections Grant): Dottie reported 19 districts applied for the Stronger Connections Grant with 17 districts awarded allocations totaling \$4,591,374. NDE employees familiar with Title IV Safe and Healthy requirements as well as quality and appropriate safety practices reviewed the grant applications. All allocations were approved at the October State Board meeting. Districts received allocations for school based mental health services, social/emotional learning, prevention of bullying and harassment, violence prevention, crisis management and conflict resolution, community/district collaboration and other allowable uses. Two districts did not receive funding due to their activities listed were not allowable in the grant directives. Allocations must be spent by September 30, 2026.

ARP-HCY I & II Grants: Ann Carmoney reported Nebraska has approximately \$2,885,752 available as of October 3, 2023 for the ARP-HCY I and HCY II grants which is 81% of our state's combined allocations. HCY I was the competitive grant and districts had to apply for. All these funds have been budgeted and more than half of the districts have claimed their funds. ARP HCY II was the formula grant and districts are in the planning stages on how to best use those funds. A letter to Chief State School Officers in the final year of ARP-HCY will help LEA subgrantees obligate all their funds in the next year by September 30, 2024, and need to be spent by January 15, 2025.

ESSER II & III Fiscal Monitoring/Programmatic Monitoring: Beth Wooster reported we have 43 districts that have not spent all their ESSER II funds. The Federal Programs and Fiscal teams have been working with districts to get their funds spent. Last minute issues arose with subscriptions that went beyond the ESSER II time frame and both teams have been working with those districts to find other uses if an on-line subscription wasn't allowable.

Beth reviewed the process for the ESSER program monitoring which is a requirement, and all monitoring can be completed the year when the funding ends. One third of the districts have completed their ESSER monitoring. The Federal Programs team would complete the monitoring with the other third of the districts for 2023-24 school year and the remaining third of districts in 2024-25 school year. The committee discussed adding ARP HCY I and II to the program monitoring as well. Bill Heimann asked for a motion to change the ESSER I, II, & III Program Monitoring and ARP HCY I & II Program Monitoring schedule to a three-year schedule that will be completed by the 2024-25 school year. Ann Caruso made a motion to approve, Brent Cudly seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously.

2023-24 Schoolwide PEER Review Process: Beth shared Nebraska has been going above and beyond the requirements for schoolwide peer reviews in the past with taking a lot of school personnel's and the federal program team's time. Beth has worked with Victoria, USED representative and discovered it is not a requirement to do a schoolwide peer review. Beth and team are proposing to move to a yearly self-review and if a district has changes to their Schoolwide plans, they will send them to NDE. The districts would continue to share their Schoolwide plans on their website and link it in their GMS grant application. Schools new to schoolwide would submit their plans by April 1st and the federal programs team would review it and respond to the district. This process covers all the requirements. The committee discussed that the evidence they collect would be kept in house for seven years and during the programmatic monitoring the most current documentation would be reviewed. Bill requested a motion to approve the changes as proposed to the Title I Schoolwide Peer Review process to start during the 2023-2024 school year and moving forward. Tina Forte made motion to approve, and Kris Schneider seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously.

USED Monitoring of NDE Federal Programs: Beth reported Dr. Maher received the approval letter for the USED Monitoring of the NDE Federal Programs. Kirk Russell took the lead on this 18-month process which was a good learning process, and the needed changes were made. USED said they were impressed by the work that Nebraska was doing.

USED/Nebraska 2022-2023 Fiscal Waiver: Beth reported the Title I, II, III and IV waiver was received by USED. States were instructed to ask for only what was needed therefore, we asked for Title I due to the 1003a funds for school improvement to support the districts. The state didn't ask for the 15% carryover waiver in Title I due to communications that it would be a slim chance of getting it approved. Reallocations of state set aside funds will be done to help support schools. This came from money we have as well as money that was given back to USED from other states.

ESSA State Plan Update (working lunch): Lane Carr, Administrator, Office of Policy & Strategic Initiatives gave a brief [overview](#) on the ESSA Plan and revisions. He outlined the key policy decisions and provided resources for these decisions in his [handouts](#). The committee had small group discussions on topics for Long-Term Goals, Accountability Indicators, and Supporting Effective Educators. The upcoming timeline will be aggressive. In order to implement any changes for the 2024-25 school year, the ESSA Plan draft must be submitted to USDE by February 1, 2024, knowing there will still be conversations and follow-up.

Commissioner of Education Update: Dr. Brian Maher, Commissioner, shared he has been in his role now for four months. He summarized on the five priorities given to him by the State Board of Education: Evaluate Status of Statewide Assessment, Develop and Understanding of Internal Operations, Strategic Plan, Develop Relationships, and Communication Strategies. He stated he has enjoyed the interactions that he has had with educators across the state and continued to remind all of us to continue to work for the students of Nebraska.

Family and Community Engagement: Brian Welch, Family and Engagement Specialist shared the Statewide Family Engagement Center wrapped up their first five-year grant at the end of September. The new grant was approved and now in the process of opening it up in January 2024. The new grant's focus will be on expanding to family engagement and leadership as well as family literacy. Nebraska School, Family, and Communities Engagement Framework has been well perceived and a version of this will be provided for families by next summer. Finally, the Nebraska Café, a discussion-based webinar had some format changes which was intended to engage families and community members and now will focus more on educators. The registration and attendance have quadrupled.

ESEA Program Updates

Title I-A: Educationally Disadvantaged: Beth and Dottie shared information from their national meetings they continue to hear there will be a reduction in all funding for the upcoming fiscal year. The legal people are predicting a substantial decrease or no additional funding in Title I funds that will be available for the next year.

Title I-A School Improvement (1003a) CSI/SFI: Shirley Vargas, Administrator, School & District Support and Derek Ippensen, Assistant Administrator & Director of Accountability presented information about State and Federal Accountability ([here](#)). Derek shared the updates and changes to the 2023 AQuESTT classification process. The legislature is requiring that student discipline be included in the reporting to NDE. All districts received their embargoed data at the end of October; Excellent, Great, Good or Needs Support to Improve. Shirley shared they are waiting for approval from the USDE on the

ESSA Plan Amendment therefore anticipated changes to the CSI filters are dependent on this approval. One of the additions included on the CSI and ATSI filters was adding the word “AND” to Stage 2 and Stage 3 which will truly identify schools are low across all the indicators. Two new topics will be added to the <https://aquestt.com/resources> page: ESSA Designation Business Rules and Designation FAQ. Public release of AQuESST will be around Thanksgiving. There were 117 ATSI schools from 2019 and it is unknown how many of those will exit the ATSI school list. Forty districts are now identified in CSI.

Title I-C: Migrant: Benjamin Zink, Migrant Director shared the 2023-24 grant suballocations. This year’s suballocation was \$2.6 million less than last year. There were approximately \$2 million in unspent funds from 2022-23 and 50% of those funds will be reallocated to augment the 2023-24 suballocations, which should prevent any loss in programming or services this year. We will post to fill vacancies of our State Identification & Recruitment Coordinator and State Services Coordinator positions with the goal of having both filled by the end of January 2024.

Title I-D: Neglected At-Risk Delinquent: Ann Carmony, Title I, Part D Specialist announced the collection of facility annual performance reviews were due on October 31, 2023. The data collection focuses on the subgroups of youth in facilities. It gathers student demographics, vocational outcomes and academic performances in math and reading. Self-Reviews were conducted by facilities reflecting on the effectiveness of their programs.

Title II-A: Improving Teacher Quality & Nonpublic: Jim Kent, Title II Consultant/Nonpublic Ombudsman reported funding may be reduced in the upcoming fiscal year. He tells the districts it is imperative to have a plan for the use of the funds and any professional development should be sustainable, intensive, collaborative, job embedded, data driven, and classroom focused. Use this strategically for maximum impact on student achievement.

Title III: Language Acquisition: Anne Hubbell, Title III Specialist gave an update on the NPD Grant (Project Assets) which provides a rigorous program of study over the course of 18 months that leads to a micro credential for 320 educators (four cohorts of 80 each) and training in family engagement and literacy for 400 parents/caregivers or ELs. Educator Cohort 1 began with 30 participants in June 2022 and will finish this December and Cohort 2 began with 116 participants combined with Ohio educators in June 2023. Cohort 3 will begin in June 2024. The Family Leadership Institute is a component of the grant and is starting the 3rd cohort.

The Alt ELPA summative field test was given to English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Students who participated in the field test took it in lieu of the general ELPA21 summative and received Individual Score Reports that include proficiency determinations in October. The number of Alt ELPA participants in 2022-23 was 132. The Alt ELPA screener is coming and should be available in August of 2024. The number of English Learners in Nebraska is growing with a 20% increase with the ELPA21 Summative Participants and a 22% increase with the ELPA21 Screener Participants from 2018-19 to 2022-23 school years.

Title IV-A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE):

Dottie Heusman commented there is no new information to share. There is anticipation of reduced funds or no increase in funds in the future. She reminded districts it is imperative to have a focus and a plan for the use of funds.

Title IV-B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC): Jan Handa, 21st CCLC Coordinator shared the next grant competition deadline to apply is February 1, 2024. Continuation grants are only being offered. There are currently 143 sites across the state which are top priority to sustain

therefore they will not be expanding due to allocations received from Congress. The oldest grant is in their 21st year. The RFP will be released on November 8, 2023, and she offered to the committee to provide input on it. She shared they are compiling data from the last twenty years to give to their state evaluator who will have the report available at the first of 2024 and she will submit this to State Board in April. The 2023 Nebraska Afterschool annual conference was in September with 450 participants. 21st Century also had their federal monitoring in October. It went well and they were not expecting any findings.

Title VI: REAP – Rural Education Achievement Program: Ann Carmoney, REAP Coordinator reported for the fiscal year 2023 funds have been distributed to 175 school districts. The deadline for drawing down fiscal year 2021 funds is January 2024. Reminder emails are being sent out. RLIS has three districts who were awarded funds. The RLIS grant is now open in GMS.

Title VII-B: Education of Homeless Children and Youth: Ann Carmoney, the NDE Homeless Liaison reported the McKinney Vento funds have been distributed for the 2023-24 school year. The amount of \$420,012 was awarded to Nebraska this year and 14 districts were funded. The 2023-24 McKinney Vento grant was updated and a revised rubric was used to score districts based on their needs, use of funds, and claiming the funds in a timely manner.

Head Start State Collaboration Office: Stephanie Knust, Head Start State Collaboration Specialist shared each grant recipients have a different funding year. The Office of Head Start on the federal level has committed to funding the October, November, and December grant recipients across the country at 50% so in the event of a government shutdown, none of the programming or services will be affected. Head Start have different service areas, by county not school districts. If a district is having trouble connecting with a Head Start in their area to let her know and she will connect them with the agency that provides services in that area.

2023 ESEA Distinguished Schools for Nebraska: Beth stated two districts will be identified by mid-November for the 2023 ESEA Distinguished Schools of Nebraska award. NDE uses funding from districts that have turned down their Title I funds to help pay for the awarded schools' employees to attend the national conference.

Upcoming Dates: Beth announced the 2024 National ESEA Conference “Create the Possibilities” will be in Portland, Oregon on February 7th – 10th.

Next Meetings:

Beth shared the tentative spring 2024 COP meeting dates will be Wednesday March 20th or Wednesday April 3rd, 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 pm.