



## PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM RATIONALE

**DATE:** March 1, 2024

**TO:** Brian L. Maher  
Commissioner of Education

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

**PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM:** Approve the reappropriation of ESSER statewide set aside funds for specific projects and authorize the Commissioner to contract.

**AGENDA ITEM TYPE:** Action

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

Nebraska's ESSER III state plan, approved in June 2021, identified five funding priorities for statewide activities:

- Access to comprehensive mental health services
- Reimagined family and community engagement
- High-quality professional learning & bolstering the teacher pipeline
- Focus on acceleration
- Data, technology, infrastructure, and systems

The total ESSER III appropriation for Nebraska was \$546 million. Ninety percent of those funds (\$492 million) flowed through directly to districts, and, in compliance with federal law, the NDE reserved 10 percent (\$54 million) for statewide activities. Of that \$54 million, \$11 million was statutorily reserved for summer and after school programming, and roughly \$2 million for administration of grant programs. The NDE was required to describe the use of funds in the ESSER plan, aligned to the five priority areas detailed above.

With seven months remaining in the ESSER III grant cycle, the NDE is closely monitoring projects approved by the State Board, and has identified several contracts that are under budget. As such, roughly \$11 million for statewide projects are available for reinvestment.

The NDE has identified the following projects, and recommends the following contracts. This item was reviewed by the Budget and Finance Committee at their February committee meeting.

- Reimagined family and community engagement
  - A. Support for Translation/Interpretation Services, Family and Parent Engagement Training, and Community School Planting → \$250,000
    - Contractor: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
    - Provide training and support for culturally and linguistically responsive family and community engagement.
    - Identify sites ready for community schools, consult with community and school leaders, and provide technical assistance. Cover conference attendance costs for interested school districts.
    - Purchase and deployment of translation and interpretation technology
    - Training for parents and community members for becoming interpreters.
    - Support for community collaboratives and Bring Up Nebraska members to attend conferences.
    - Facilitator and coordinator support to evaluate and coordinate final projects between NDE, NCFE, and partners.
    - Sustainability planning and evaluation.
  
- High-quality professional learning and bolstering the teacher pipeline
  - B. Large Scale Science Professional Development → \$150,000
    - In partnership with ESUs, provide regional roll out and professional development opportunities over the summer for science standards.
    - Provide stipends for science educators, instructional support staff, and others.
    - Cover related costs for convenings.
  
  - C. Foundational Literacy Professional Development → \$6 million
    - Contractor(s): Yet to be named; RFP will be developed
    - Seek waiver from US Department of Education to extend liquidation timeline for this project to June 2025 for the following reasons:
      - After analyzing student achievement data, the NDE sees continued recovery in mathematics, *but not as much progress in English language arts.*
      - In addition to Nebraska's earliest learners, there is a need to address secondary literacy.
      - The NDE included a biennial budget request for early literacy for the past three biennia, and continues to see a potential for funding this year. However, to ensure some progress is made on this critical issue, the NDE is proposing a year-long professional development using ESSER funds.
      - The NDE has made several critical investments in reading and has an opportunity to double down on these through targeted, intensive professional development.
    - Activities in this initiative may include:
      - Conduct a comprehensive statewide literacy needs assessment, develop a literacy steering committee, draft state-level vision, theory of action, and strategy (July-August)
      - Craft a strategy for continued regional support through the upskilling and training of ESU literacy cadre members and staff developers.

- Provide an opportunity for a year-long professional development for K-5 teachers focused on high-quality reading instruction and implementation and provide stipends to participating educators.
  - Support the development and implementation of professional learning for teachers to provide foundational literacy to secondary students.
  - Design and launch an early literacy network focused on pre-k through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade educators and providers. Align efforts with existing early learning coordinators, and promote best practices aligned to Nebraska Reading Act.
  - Support the implementation of high-quality instructional materials and resources.
- Focus on acceleration
  - D. NWEA – MAP (2023-24 Coverage) → \$2 million
    - In January 2023, the State Board voted to continue making both MAP Growth and NSCAS Growth available to all schools. The NDE requested additional funds in its deficit budget request, but these were not fulfilled by the legislature.
    - As such, the NDE must cover the additional cost with these funds.
  - E. Nebraska Growing Readers Supplement → \$1.5 million
    - The State Board approved an original appropriation for the Nebraska Growing Readers program in September 2023. Impact since that time:
      - 608 early childhood sites
      - 21,120 children reached
      - 34,688 books distributed
    - Training and additional support have been provided to childcare workers and parents in engaging with Growing Readers materials.
    - Additional private funding has been secured by local communities, and there is still opportunity and potentially for DHHS investment, though this has not happened yet.
    - Adding additional funding will deepen and expand the program, by adding more books to current sites, and expanding the reach of the program.
    - More information can be found here: <https://www.singasonofsixpence.org/news/nebraska-growing-readers/>
  - F. Supplemental Funding for reVISION → \$500,000
    - Subrecipients: Various Schools
    - reVISION provides Nebraska schools with the opportunity to analyze and transform their current CTE systems in order to improve their ability to educate a qualified workforce that meets industry needs within an ever-changing economy.
    - reVISION funds supplement staff training and purchase equipment to meet community needs based on this alignment process. Each year, more funding is requested than available from Perkins funds.
    - NDE provided additional funding for reVISION in 2022 using ESSER II

funds.

- More information on the selection process can be found here: [education.ne.gov/nce/revision](http://education.ne.gov/nce/revision)
- The State Board will see the full list of awardees later this spring/early summer.

G. Labor Data Dashboard to Support reVISION → \$300,000

- Contractor yet to be named; RFP process underway
- To better support the reVISION process, schools need access to coherent, easily accessible and understandable data.
- The NDE has begun conversations with the Department of Labor on the need for a new site which would provide labor market, demographic, and workforce data in a more user-friendly way.
- A contractor is needed to create the website and conglomerate all regional data into one place.
- Using this investment, DOL and NDE can maintain the tool into perpetuity.

H. Work-Based Learning (WBL) Platform → \$250,000

- Contractor yet to be named; RFP process underway
- One of Nebraska's key indicators of CTE success is access to and completion of work-based learning. While significant progress has been made at the postsecondary level to encourage and facilitate WBL, a similar infrastructure to connect employers with high school students does not exist.
- The NDE has been working closely with InternNE, Aksarben, and the Department of Economic Development to expand access to internships. Business leaders have also expressed a need for this infrastructure.
- The NDE is ready to launch an RFP to solicit bids for the creation of a tool to help high schools, high schoolers, and employers navigate work-based learning.
- Once the tool is created, NDE has continued funding to support its maintenance.

I. Transportation Support for Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI) → \$150,000

- Contractor/Subrecipient: ESU4
- Ensure students attending the NCECBVI have access to transportation through the purchase or renting of a bus or van.

J. Investments and Training for Systems Involved Youth → \$200,000

- Contractor: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
- Host *Educational Planning Conference* for government agencies, facilities, and schools serving systems-involved youth (Summer/Fall 2024)
- Purchase, deploy, and support the training for education technology to support youth who are incarcerated.
- Develop and deploy training to support the educational needs of youth in the foster care system and those who are highly mobile.

- Provide continued support to the NDE to fulfill the memorandum of understanding and study between probation, DHHS, NDE, and the court system.
- Sustainability planning.

**PROPOSED BOARD MEETING (MONTH/YEAR):** March 2024

**ESTIMATED COST:** \$11.3 million

**FOR CONTRACTS AND GRANTS:**

- Indicate the Funding Source: ESSER State Set Aside
- New or Renewal: New/Renewal
- If renewal, date of first approval: N/A

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

- Indicate the method of procurement: See above
- Rationale for method of procurement: N/A
- Rationale for contractor selection: N/A

**FOR GRANT SUBAWARDS:**

- Describe the grantee selection process: N/A
- New or Renewal: N/A
- If renewal, date of first approval: N/A