



PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM RATIONALE

DATE: July 16, 2024

TO: Brian L. Maher
Commissioner of Education

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

PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM: Accept the US Department of Education Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) funding, and authorize the Commissioner to enter into contracts and subawards to carry out grant activities.

AGENDA ITEM TYPE: Action

RATIONALE/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Context:

GEAR UP is a discretionary grant program of the US Department of Education designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The program provides seven-year grants to states to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. In addition to these services, GEAR UP funds provide college scholarships to students served.

Nebraska is one of the only states that has not accessed a statewide GEAR UP grant. As such, the NDE applied for GEAR UP on May 4 after months of collaboration with partners including:

- EducationQuest
- Mentor Nebraska
- Nebraska SMART Tutoring (Nebraska State College System)
- Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
- Susan T Buffett Foundation

The NDE applied for \$5 million per year, for the next seven years. As part of the application process, the NDE was required to secure a dollar-for-dollar match from partners, meaning the total potential impact is \$70 million. Additionally, the application required gubernatorial consultation, and a signature from Governor Pillen, which NDE secured.

NDE anticipates notification of award status mid- to late-August.

Approach and Focus

As NDE was considering statewide activities, reviewing data, and consulting with stakeholders, a focus on schools serving English Learners emerged. As such, conversations began with schools with high EL populations, those identified for additional support through the AQuESTT federal accountability system, and those meeting federal specifications for participation. These schools include:

Target Middle Schools	Target Feeder High Schools
BARR MIDDLE SCHOOL	GRAND ISLAND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
WALNUT MIDDLE SCHOOL	
LEWIS & CLARK MIDDLE SCHOOL	SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL
	BUENA VISTA HIGH SCHOOL
CULLER MIDDLE SCHOOL	LINCOLN NORTHEAST HIGH SCHOOL
	LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL
FREMONT MIDDLE SCHOOL	FREMONT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
LEXINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL	LEXINGTON HIGH SCHOOL
MADISON MIDDLE SCHOOL	MADISON HIGH SCHOOL
RALSTON MIDDLE SCHOOL	RALSTON HIGH SCHOOL
SCHUYLER MIDDLE SCHOOL	SCHUYLER CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
BLUFFS MIDDLE SCHOOL	SCOTTSBLUFF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
SOUTH SIOUX CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL	SOUTH SIOUX HIGH SCHOOL
WAKEFIELD HIGH SCHOOL (serving grades 7-12)	

Each school participating will be supported with resources to hire one full-time employee and support the individual needs of their students to achieve federally aligned goals and objectives. This employee will stay with the middle and high schools through the duration of the grant.

In addition to tailored supports for identified districts, the NDE is also pursuing statewide activities focused on career planning and postsecondary readiness and access. These strategies include mentoring and tutoring, and a statewide focus on FAFSA completion. The latter is especially pertinent as the state begins to require FAFSA completion for graduation.

Timeline:

- June – Information Item with Budget and Finance Committee
- August – State Board acceptance of funds, contracting, and granting pending notification from the USDOE, anticipated by August 20, 2024.
- September – Begin contracting and subawarding to districts.

PROPOSED BOARD MEETING (MONTH/YEAR): August 2024

ESTIMATED COST:

\$35 million in Federal funding; \$35 million match in-kind, staffing, or scholarship support.

FOR CONTRACTS AND GRANTS:

- Indicate the Funding Source: Federal Funds
- New or Renewal: New
- If renewal, date of first approval: N/A

FOR NEW CONTRACTS OR OTHER CONTRACTS REQUIRING PROCUREMENT:

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

FOR GRANT SUBAWARDS:

- Describe the grantee selection process: Schools identified for CSI or CSI-ATSI in the federal accountability system, serving high percentage of students living in poverty, with EL rates above state average (8%), and meeting federal specifications for qualifications
- New or Renewal: New
- If renewal, date of first approval: N/A