

Committee of Practitioners Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 23, 2024
In Person and via Zoom

The October 23, 2024 meeting of the Nebraska Committee of Practitioners was held in person at Firespring, 1201 Infinity Court, Lincoln, NE 68512.

Dr. Bill Heimann, Committee Chair, called the Committee of Practitioners meeting to order at 9:07 AM on Wednesday, October 23, 2024.

Members in Attendance

Anne Caruso
Brent Cudly
Scott English
Tina Forté
Anita Harkins-Mehsling (Zoom)
Bill Heimann
Tara James (Zoom)
Kim Jonas
Barry McFarland
Ita Mendoza
Marco Pedroza
Phillip Picquet
Hillary Rasmussen (Zoom)
Matt Rohlfen (Zoom)
Kris Schneider (Zoom)
Melanie Stepp (Zoom)
Heather Stukey
Kamau Turner

NDE Staff in Attendance

Ann Carmoney
Lane Carr
Liz Hamm (Zoom)
Dottie Heusman
Melody Hobson
Anne Hubbell
Derek Ippensen
Julie Otero
Janice Paling
Michelle Rezek
Tate Toedman
Shirley Vargas
Erika Wibbels (Zoom)
Beth Wooster
Rhonda Wredt
Benjamin Zink

Not in Attendance

Andy DeFreece
Stephanie Knust
Kathleen Riley
Robert Ziegler

Guests

Taylor Esparza
Mackenzie Hahn
Lindsey Luly
Seth Lutz
Angie Nasr (Zoom)
E. Nora (Zoom)

Welcome & Introductions:

This COP meeting was held In Person and Zoom on October 23, 2024. Bill Heimann, Committee Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves. He welcomed the new committee members and noted the changes for the new voting members; Barry McFarland, Lexington PS Elementary Principal and Melanie Stepp, O’Neill Public School teacher. Replacing Previous Members: Changes: Matt Rohlfen replaced Michelle Hensley at Boystown, Kathleen Riley replaced Deb Ross at Hastings Head Start. Changes to assignments: Hillary Rasmussen moved from a principal to a 7-12 Teacher/Data Steward at Litchfield. NDE staff changes are Tate Toedman for Jim Kent, Michelle Rezek for Amanda Noonan, Liz Hamm for Brian Welch, Erika Wibbels for Jan Handa, and Janice Paling NDE Program Specialist joined the ESEA team.

Nebraska Open Meeting Acts (NOMA) Reminder:

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

Open for public comments:

Bill asked if there were any public comments. None was requested.

Approval of Minutes for March 20, 2024 meeting:

Brent Cudly made a motion to approve the March 20, 2024 minutes. Anne Caruso seconded the motion. Motion unanimously approved.

NDE COP Process Rules – Management:

A call was made for the 2024-2025 Chairperson. Phillip Picquet nominated Bill Heimann and Kamau Turner seconded the motion. No other nominations were made. Motion unanimously approved Bill Heimann for the 2024-2025 chairperson.

Dottie Heusman, Assistant Administrator/Title I Director and Bill briefed the committee on the Ad-Hoc committee who included Bill Heimann, Brent Cudly, Heather Stuke, Kim Jonas, and Dottie Heusman. They met to discuss geographic locations of members, their roles in their current position, and the bylaws for required positions on the committee. Based on this, two additional members were invited to join the group, Melanie Stepp-Title I Teacher at O-Neill Public Schools and Barry McFarland-Principal at Lexington Public School.

Nebraska Tydings Waiver Request:

Beth Wooster, ESEA Programs Office Administrator, shared Nebraska applied for a Tydings Waiver to allow one more year to use the 2022-2023 funds for Title I-A & School Improvement, Title II-A, Title III-A, Title IV-A & 21st Century. The hope is to have approval from the US Department of Education within the next week or two. This will not hurt districts, but will allow more time to use the funds, rather than returning to ED. The 15% waiver request for Title I for districts receiving \$50,000 or more is still in effect, so only those districts that haven't had a 15% waiver request in the past 3 years can request that if needed.

Emergency Relief Grants:

Lane Carr, Office of Policy & Strategic Initiatives gave an update on the waiver request for State set-aside allocations and extensions for some district projects. He wants to encourage all districts to tell your ESSER story to share the great things that have been done with the funding.

Lane shared information about the various projects that the state has done; \$12 million invested for mental health supports, training for thousands of educators and expansion of tier 2 and 3 support; Supported a number of pilot projects with community and rural schools for the wrap around services; over \$1.4 million in innovative educator shortage grants; \$8 million in acceleration activities, Math Acceleration in partnership with our ESU's, Zearn Math, a product we purchased, utilized and expanded with the remaining funds to go towards the Literacy Project. Committee members shared some of their successes and challenges.

As of 10-22-24 Nebraska was granted an extension waiver for late liquidation for projects including expanded learning funds for Summer and Afterschool and ARP-HCY grant until March 28, 2026. This will allow the state and a few districts to keep liquidating their funds. These districts have contracts with community-based organizations to provide wraparound services for homeless children and youth. The state is utilizing the extension to continue a contract with Central Plains Services.

ESSER Reimbursements are winding down. Forty-nine districts have not submitted their reimbursement requests to claim all of the allocations. Our ESSER team is working with those districts to support this work to get all the allocations expended.

Ann Carmony, shared information about the ARP-HCY state set aside funds that were used for professional development and trainings. The full amount was obligated and NDE received a late liquidation extension through March 28, 2026. The bulk of these funds are in a contract with Central Plains Services of Nebraska based out of Broken Bow. They have offices across the state and have a youth homelessness program that works primarily with foster, Title I-D, migrant and homeless youth. Districts will be able to utilize them for resources to continue wrap around services. Elkhorn Public Schools is using a portion of these funds for mental health services for those students who lost their

homes in the tornado this year. The last portion of the funds were spent at six shopping events in Scottsbluff, Lexington, Hastings, Kearney, Crete, and Columbus which had high homelessness populations.

Federal Support Guidance Document:

Dr. Shirley Vargas, Administrator, School & District Support presented a draft document to the group for the members to review. The intent of this document, Federal Designation Overview and Support Guidance, will include new information and will be updated yearly. The group broke into small groups to review the document and give their feedback. Shirley will send the next draft to the committee members for feedback prior to the final draft. This is a document that she hopes to have out to all districts in a month.

NAESPA LEA AFFILIATE Membership:

Beth announced the National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators (NAESPA) has created a Local Education Agency (LEA) Affiliate Program for district staff that work with Federal Programs. The cost of the program is \$199. Some of the benefits include access to free webinars throughout the year, participation in the Effective Programs and Conference Planning Committees, and if attending either in person or virtually access to all the video programming from the upcoming Conference for a year (which normally costs \$199). The expectation is that as this program grows it will offer the opportunity to collaborate with district staff from across the nation and build support for those doing the important work around federal programs. Additional information can be found at <https://www.eseanetwork.org/LEA>.

Nebraska Distinguished Schools – ESEA Conference:

Beth stated two schools will be recognized as National ESEA Distinguished Schools. The data that is used to determine CSI, TSI, and ATSI schools basically runs in reverse to determine which schools would represent Nebraska best in one of the three categories: 1) Schools exhibiting exceptional student performance and academic growth. 2) Schools that have closed the achievement gap between student groups. 3) Schools that show excellence in serving special populations of students (e.g. homeless, migrant, English learners, etc.) The schools selected must have a minimum of 40% poverty and not be recognized as a Blue Ribbon School the same year. The schools selected will be invited to attend the [National ESEA Conference](#) in Austin, TX.

Annual Federal Programs Newsletter:

The Annual Federal Programs Newsletter was shared, and the committee discussed other information that would be needed by stakeholders. The group indicated they appreciate this document and the information that is provided. In the future they suggested to add Shirley’s Federal Designation Overview and Support Guidance document. The migrant survey link didn’t get added, so Beth will send it out to districts in a separate email. Ensuring districts understand the new reimbursement process in section fifteen will be important to continue to share. Sections for Teacher Loan Forgiveness and the Teacher Vacancy Survey information were added this year.

Title III Rule 15 Updates:

Julie Otero, Title III Director, shared information on Rule 15 forthcoming changes due to the federal requirements. It will go into effect once the state ESSA plan is approved which will be for the 2025-2026 school year. Since Nebraska has the Alt ELPA and the ELPA 21 summative and students with IEPs can be exempted from portions of the assessments in areas that they cannot access, federal guidance given is that districts will no longer be able to dismiss students from EL services based on their IEP status. Rule 15 section 007.01B F

Federal Programs Updates

Title I-A: Educationally Disadvantaged: Dottie shared all 2025 ESSA Consolidated applications were submitted to NDE. Currently the initial reviewers are looking through these and either submitting to Beth for final approval or returning for changes as needed. Title I Aid to Schools for Nebraska for the 2023-2024 year was \$73,914,945. Title I Aid to Schools for Nebraska this year 2024-2025 was \$83,102,108. This does not include a small increase due to revised allocations.

Title I-A School Improvement (1003a) CSI/SFI: Dottie informed the committee that Michelle Rezek will be the lead on the School Improvement work going forward and she would support her work. Dr. Vargas's Office spearheads the program. It is anticipated the new list will be released in mid to late November. There will be schools that are no longer on the list for CSI & CSI-ATSI. Some schools will be added to the TSI List for a student group, but no schools will be added to CSI or CSI-ATSI. Districts will be called by NDE staff to let them know their status off/on as the time comes closer. The team will also be looking at the changes needed to the grant and how much funding each school will receive. The funds are distributed by school rather than by district. Title I School Improvement for Nebraska for the 2023-2024 year was \$5,633,111. Title I School Improvement for Nebraska this year for 2024-2025 was \$6,333,004.

Title I-C: Migrant: Benjamin Zink, Migrant Education Specialist, gave a summary of the Nebraska Migrant Education Program serving the children of migratory ag workers with 70% being Hispanic/Latino, 43% English Learners and over 90% of the moves are within the US. The 2024-25 program year grant is open. \$6,949,941 was suballocated to 12 projects (\$8.1m in 23-24 to 14 projects). Here are the [Title I-C Suballocations for 2024-25](#). For this program year, the number of counties served by ESU 13 and 15 were adjusted in anticipation of growth in North Platte and Lincoln County. Monitoring will continue for ag and migratory trends to determine where our resources should go in 2025-26. Areas with anticipated growth include Dundy and Lincoln Counties. However, increased use of prison labor and amnesty programs have decreased migratory labor in several communities. Benjamin shared the [Nebraska 2022-23 MEP Evaluation Report](#).

Title I-D: Neglected At-Risk Delinquent:

Ann Carmony, Title I Part D Specialist, reported the Title I-D grant is now open and the October count emails will be coming out at the end of the month. The USED has been doing a big data push and will have a conference in November that she will attend. Information from the conference will be shared at the spring COP meeting.

Title II-A: Improving Teacher Quality & Nonpublic:

Tate shared there are no changes in this area and gave an overview of this program. Title II is "Preparing, Training, and Recruiting high-quality teachers, principals, or other school leaders." Definition from law- (1) Increase student achievement consistent with the challenging State academic standards; (2) improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders; (3) increase the number of teachers, principals, and other school leaders who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools; and (4) provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders.

Title III: Language Acquisition:

Julie Otero and Anne Hubbell shared the progress of the 18-month Project ASSETS course with Cohort 1 graduated, Cohort 2 will be completed this fall, Cohort 3 began in June 2024 and Cohort 4 will begin in June 2025. This will be the last cohort of the grant. The Family Leadership Institute is a component of the grant. The ELPA21 Summative and Alt ELPA Assessment window will be January 27–March 14, 2025 with some changes in the number of tasks and questions compared to the 2023-24 year. The number of English Learners in Nebraska is growing. As of October 17, 2024, the number of students

taking the ELPA 21 screener is up about 8.5%. We've had two large districts start using the ELPA21 screeners this year. Collaboration across the state continues to grow with lots of opportunities that are found on [NDE Title III webpage](#).

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

Tate explained the purpose and the requirements for the three areas that spending can occur: Well-Rounded Education (WR), Safe and Healthy Students (SHS), Effective Use of Technology (EUT). All but two districts receive Title IV funding. This program does not have new guidance but has tightened up the guidance and several rules. He explained the requirements; Districts receiving over \$30,000 allocation must spend 20% on safe and healthy, 20% on well-rounded, some money in effective use of Technology and then can spend the remainder in the categories as needed. There is a 15% cap on spending for devices, equipment, software, and digital content. Districts receiving below \$30,000 allocation can spend on activities in at least one of the three categories. There are public reporting requirements that NDE is working on. They include how funds are spent by allowable uses over a 27-month period. Tate suggested surveys to collect this information from districts. He asked the committee for feedback on other ways to make this process work better.

Title IV-B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC):

Erika Wibbels, 21st Century Community Learning Center Specialist, gave updates that all of their funding goes to schools with 40% or more free and reduced student population. They have partnered with several other entities to provide the Get Connected conference in September in Kearney. Also working on the 2024-2026 ELO grants. There just awarded 13 grants for a total of \$700,800. The new 21st CCLC application opens in December 2024, with a grant writing workshop being offered on December 3, 2024. The application window will close on March 1, 2025. 21st CCLC is celebrating 20 years.

Title V: REAP – Rural Education Achievement Program:

Ann introduced Michelle Rezek as the new REAP Coordinator. The REAP/RLIS federal website is now updated. Nebraska has six districts that qualify for the RLIS grant this year. The grant is open and will close the last week of October. She has attended monthly state coordinators meetings, and the group has developed some resources for the districts to use. REAP allocations were down this year.

Title VII-B: Education of Homeless Children and Youth:

Ann announced the McKinney Vento awards were approved by the State Board and went out for the 2024-25 school year. Monthly meetings for liaisons and other providers have been implemented. They are teaming up for referrals with the Migrant program. Monthly meetings with district liaisons have been occurring and now there is a group for Continuum of Care that includes agencies who deal with homelessness to connect service providers and schools. They meet the third Tuesday of every month. Ann will attend the NAECHY Conference next month. NCHE is no longer the TA contract for the USDE. They are now contracted with SAFAL Partners, ICF and Pearl Strategies.

Ombudsperson Update:

Tate explained the Private School Ombudsman role and responsibilities is defined as “to help ensure equitable services and other benefits for eligible children, teachers and other educational personnel, and families, an SEA must designate an ombudsman to monitor and enforce ESEA equitable services requirements under both Title I and Title VIII.

Parent, Family & Community Engagement:

Liz Hamm, 21st CCLC And Family & Community Engagement Specialist gave a brief overview of The School, Family, & Community Engagement Framework. The Statewide Family Engagement Center Grant

is in round two and will run through 2028. The purpose of this grant is to expand the already existing Family Engagement and Family Leadership Programs, through a Special Advisory Committee and trainings, with a focus on Family Literacy. Our partners are the NE Statewide Family Engagement Center, Nebraska Children & Families Foundation, and the National Center for Families Learning. The project will expand upon the current family engagement infrastructure that launched in 2018 and will continue to lead systemic and effective family engagement services, programs, and activities. There are four objectives in which NDE will lead Objectives (1) Provide strong leadership and governance through a Special Advisory Committee and (4) Embed parent participation in local, district, and state policy advocacy and leadership. The new Early Learning Lending Library will be ready for checkout soon and is housed at ESU 3. Schools or childcare providers can check out a variety of bundled kits for a two-week period.

Head Start State Collaboration Office:

On behalf of Stephanie Knust’s absence, Melody Hobson, Office Administrator, Early Childhood Education, shared updates for The Administration for Children and Families which released a final rule on 8/21/24, [Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming](#). The rule updates the Head Start Program Performance Standards to respond to concerns affecting the sustainability of Head Start programs. These updated Performance Standards provide clear federal requirements for: (1) Wages and benefits to support the Head Start workforce; (2) Better integration of mental health across all aspects of Head Start programming; (3) Quality improvement and clarity of requirements in other service areas, including strengthening processes to support child health and safety, enhancing family engagement services, and modernizing the process programs use to identify and meet community needs. There is a new provision allowing programs to deduct excessive housing costs when determining a family’s income eligibility for the program and defining what constitutes “suspension” of a child from the program; (4) The Final Rule also clarifies the definition of “Head Start” and related terms to support shared understanding and clarity.

Other:

Beth welcomed anyone who could attend the National ESEA Conference in Austin, Texas on February 19-21, 2025, please book rooms now as they are filling up quickly.

Next Meetings:

The spring COP meeting will be Wednesday, April 2, 2025 at Tom Dinsdale Automotive Conference Room in Grand Island.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:27 p.m.