



PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM RATIONALE

DATE: November 19, 2024

TO: Brian L. Maher
Commissioner of Education

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

PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM: Accept funding for the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) Pilot program, 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 50% 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.

Funding from the U.S. Department of Education was denied, so the NDE pursued opportunities to pilot GEAR UP services with local funding. The Susan T. Buffett Foundation has accepted the NDE's pilot proposal which consists of:

1. Research and pilot nationwide best practices, serving families and students better with innovative and evidence-based programs, resulting in an evaluation report that will provide strong evidence to support a future GEAR UP application by May 2027.
2. Build the capacity of NDE to successfully apply to future GEAR UP funding cycles by employing a staff devoted to GEAR UP initiatives, continuous improvement, and stakeholder engagement from January 1, 2025 through August 31, 2027.
3. Implement and translate best-practices to support English Learning (EL) students into actionable models that other districts can replicate from pilot school trials at South Sioux City Community Schools and Omaha Public Schools, and expanded pilots in Year 2.

Timeline:

- June – Information Item with Budget and Finance Committee
- August – State Board acceptance of funds, contracting, and granting pending notification from the USDOE.
- December – State Board acceptance of grant funds, slight change in scope and new source, contracting, and granting.

PROPOSED BOARD MEETING (MONTH/YEAR): December 2024

ESTIMATED COST: \$5 million.

FOR CONTRACTS AND GRANTS:

- Indicate the Funding Source: Local Foundation Grant 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: Districts identified for CSI or CSI-ATSI in the federal accountability system, serving high percentage of students living in poverty, and meeting federal specifications for qualifications.
- New or Renewal: New
- If renewal, date of first approval: N/A