

**Committee of Practitioners Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday, April 2, 2025**  
**In Person and via Zoom**

The April 2, 2025 meeting of the Nebraska Committee of Practitioners was held in person at Tom Dinsdale Automotive Conference Room 1708 S Webb Rd, Grand Island, NE 68803.

Dr. Bill Heimann, Committee Chair, called the Committee of Practitioners meeting to order at 9:02 AM on Wednesday, April 2, 2025.

**Members in Attendance**

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

**NDE Staff in Attendance**

Ann Carmoney  
Lane Carr  
Allyson DenBeste  
Dottie Heusman  
Anne Hubbell  
Derek Ippensen  
Steph Knust  
Julie Otero  
Michelle Rezek  
Zainab Rida (Zoom)  
Tate Toedman  
Shirley Vargas  
Erika Wibbels  
Beth Wooster  
Rhonda Wredt  
Benjamin Zink

**Not in Attendance**

Andy DeFreece  
Scott English  
Liz Hamm  
Melody Hobson  
Janice Paling  
Phillip Picquet  
Hillary Rasmussen

**Guests**

Taylor Esparza  
Mackenzie Hahn  
Lindsey Luly  
Angie Nasr

**Welcome & Introductions:**

This COP meeting was held In Person and Zoom on April 2, 2025. Bill Heimann, Committee Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves.

**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 October 23, 2024 meeting:**

Tina Forté made a motion to approve the October 23, 2024 minutes. Brent Cudley seconded the motion. Motion unanimously approved.

**Federal Funds USDE Updates:** Beth Wooster, ESEA Programs Office Administrator, stated what was shared at the conference in Austin was that we should have close to regular funding in all ESSA grants for the 2025-2026 school year. Preliminary Allocations will be a bit delayed this year. It is unknown what will occur after the 2025-2026 school year to the ESSA programs as it is dependent on Congress.

Lane Carr, Office of Policy & Strategic Initiatives, summarized the discussions that were held in Washington, D.C. last week of March. He stated that Commissioner Maher and staff continue to watch what occurs daily. NDE is taking a multi-faceted approach on strategies and thinking through the next steps.

**Multi-District Agreements:** Beth reported the ESU's are working hard to complete the multi-district agreements with the school districts that will participate in consortia for Title II-A, Title III and Title IV-A for the 2025-2026 school year. There are a few more ESUs that will be providing the Title III consortia in the coming year.

**Nonpublic Consultations:** Tate Toedman, Title II Consultant/Nonpublic Ombudsman, stated the public schools should be working with their nonpublic schools on consultation for Title I as well as Titles II-V. There was a change on where public-school districts obtain the consultation forms. Title I consultations are still in the CDC (Consolidated Data Collection) within the portal. The Nonpublic consultations for Within Boundaries are new and can be found as its own application within the portal. This message has been sent out, but some staff that work with the consultation are still not aware of the change. If district personnel are having issues with accessing the Within Boundaries consultation form, they can contact Tate, and he will be able to guide them through. Consultations should be completed by April 30, 2025, and uploaded in the two applications. Our NDE Federal programs team will be doing an office hours on Wednesday, April 9<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am CT.

**Title III Rule 15 Updates:** Julie Otero, Title III Director, shared that with the approved state ESSA Plan Rule 15 will need to be changed due to the federal requirements. Section 007.01B will be deleted which will no longer allow students to be dismissed from the English Language Program via an IEP status. This component within the Rule is currently being reviewed by the State Board of Education. It will follow a process of public input prior to being approved.

**Nebraska Comprehensive Literacy State Development Program Grant:** Allyson DenBeste, Academic Officer and Office Administrator, Teaching, Learning, and Assessment shared there are two separate projects and Allyson explained the differences between them. Literacy has been a strong focus of the department for a long time. The NDE is working to support LEAs and other entities in taking a comprehensive view of their literacy programs and using or combining available resources to address needs. Allyson provided additional details of the CLSD grant and how those funds can be used to impact literacy goals. ([here](#))

**Resource Allocation Reviews for CSI, CSI-ATSI, & ATSI Schools:** The COP heard from Shirley Vargas, School Transformation Officer, related to the resource allocation review process. She provided the group with a [link](#) to a set of materials which include an overview of the process, a sample agenda, a protocol to conduct a discussion, and a supplemental document with additional information on resource allocation. The group provided verbal and written feedback on the resources shared.

**NDE's Strategic Plan Process:** Lane Carr, Office of Policy & Strategic Initiatives, shared NDE is entering a new strategic plan process. He explained how NDE is getting feedback on this process. He introduced the group to a SWOT Analysis, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The members then completed their own SWOT based on their thoughts on the Nebraska Education System - their school, ESU, Region, State, and so forth. Discussion was held at lunch about what they had placed in each of the boxes. The following step will be for Lane to take this information to the NDE to help frame the work of the Strategic Plan.

**NAESPA Conference Update:** Beth shared a few pictures from the February National ESEA Conference in Austin, and about the two Nebraska Distinguished Schools that were recognized. Central Elementary from Kearney was recognized for Category 1 - Schools exhibiting exceptional student performance and academic growth and they sent ten staff to represent their school. Harney Elementary from South Sioux

City was recognized for Category 2 - Schools that have closed the achievement gap between student groups, and they sent five staff to represent their school. Other members from the COP that attended shared thoughts about the Conference. It was so nice to have such a great Nebraska presence this year.

### **Federal Programs Updates**

**Title I-A: Educationally Disadvantaged:** Dottie Heusman, Assistant Administrator/Title I Director shared there were no changes to the federal law including guidance changes that have occurred, and do not anticipate any changes to the procedures for grants in the Title I section for next year.

The ESEA team has been working with several districts to make sure that all Instructional Paraprofessionals are qualified. No matter when paras are hired the rules about their qualifications are still in effect. All Instructional Paras in a Schoolwide building or paras that are paid with Title I funds in a Targeted Building need to be qualified *prior* to working with students.

Based on Federal Census Data some districts in the state will have their allocations reduced or completely cut for the following year. These allocations may affect their basic formula funding or concentration, targeted and EFIG funding. These reductions or leveling off have nothing to do with the current changes at the USED.

**Title I-A School Improvement (1003a) CSI/SFI:** Michelle Rezek, Title I School Improvement Specialist shared information for the 2025-2026 CSI Schools this year. There were 30 CSI Schools identified and 34 schools were identified as CSI/ATSI. Grant awards were given to those 64 schools in the amount ranging from \$58,719 to \$150,000. The amounts were set based on previous years on the list, student population, and number of student groups that were listed. Grants have all been reviewed and are currently back at the district level for corrections or final approved. Grant applications were done at the district level rather than the school level this year.

For the 2023-2024 CSI grants, there were some districts that didn't spend all of their funds, so those funds were reallocated giving around \$13,000 to each building that was on the 2024 list and still on the list in 2025. The schools were given parameters about ways to spend the money and the schools have done an excellent job responding to how they will use their additional funds and have assured us they will spend all their 2023-2024 funds and the additional allocation by 9-30-2025.

Michelle shared a few highlights from the CSI work sessions that were held throughout the state for all 64 buildings.

**Title I-C:** Benjamin Zink, Title I-C Specialist, shared the program underwent a routine single program audit with only two exit findings. The findings were to change the name of the grant to Migrant Education State Grant Program and increase documentation on the negotiation portion of the sub-grant process. These are in process and will be implemented for the 2025-26 program year. He stated the name of the program will also change due to the politicization of the term "migrant" and will now be called Title I, Part C Education Program.

He shared the 2023-24 evaluation results, successes and challenges. Informed the committee that the 2024-25 Non-public consultations will be reported separately through his office by the Title I-C projects who are the LEAs conducting the consultations. For the upcoming 2025-26 program year, they are in the process of consolidating to nine projects to help navigate flat funding from the Office of Migrant Education and rising costs. This is being done by folding most of the district projects into regional projects and a new project will be created to serve southeast Nebraska.

**Title I-D: Neglected At-Risk Delinquent:** Ann Carmoney, Title I Part D Specialist, reported the TIPD facilities have completed their year data.

**Title II-A: Improving Teacher Quality & Nonpublic:** Tate Toedman, Title II Consultant/Nonpublic Ombudsman shared the new guidance since the last meeting. They can be found on the Federal Programs Title II Supporting Effective Instruction [webpage](#).

**Title III: Language Acquisition:** Julie Otero, Title III Director and Anne Hubbell, Title III Specialist shared information regarding the NPD Grant called Project Assets. The last cohort will start in June of 2025 and the last Family Leadership Institute will begin in the fall.

Julie shared a summary of the ELPA testing session that ran from January 27 to Mar 14, 2025. There's been a 41% increase from students taking the ELPA screener and a 20% increase in students taking the Alt ELPA Summative. 2024-25 SY was the first year of the Alt Screener and 26 students have taken the Alt ELPA screener as of today. She also shared information based on the EdFacts end of year 2023-24 school year and important ELPA dates for the upcoming school year. Collaboration across the state continues to grow with lots of opportunities that are found on the Federal Programs Title III [webpage](#).

**Title IV-A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE):** Tate stated the survey is being finalized to send out by the end of April to complete the federal requirement of reporting and how much funding was spent in the three buckets of Title IV-A: Well-Rounded, Safe and Healthy Students, and Effective Use of Technology. This will be going out to approximately 60-70 districts and ESUs. We still have a little bit of double checking on data we have before requesting the remaining data from the districts. This will be for funds granted for the 21-22 school year no matter what school year they were spent in. The survey will ask for basic contact information from the submitter and the amount of funds spent in each of the three areas for the 21-22 funding which could have been spent in subsequent years because of carryover and waivers. Goals and self-evaluation of goals will hopefully be added to the GMS system for the 25-26 school year.

**Title IV-B: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC):** Erika Wibbels, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center Specialist, gave [updates](#) on their program. She shared a success story from Kimball PS. For the 2025 grant competition there were 20 applicants including one high school and five brand new grantees to the program. There is \$1 million to award per year for the five-year grant period. The proposed awardees will be announced on April 21, 2025. In collaboration with Beyond School Bells, various professional development projects are offered and a statewide conference for afterschool professionals will be held in September.

**Title V: REAP – Rural Education Achievement Program:** Ann Carmoney and Michelle Rezek, REAP Coordinators shared the 2025-26 REAP applications are set to open April 8, 2025 and will close May 13, 2025. The MES and projections were sent out to all LEA's and updates have been made if NDE was contacted. There was an increase in RLIS dual eligibility and for the 2025-26 year only three of the seventeen LEA's who are dual eligible will be taking it.

**Title VII-B: Education of Homeless Children and Youth:** Ann Carmoney, McKinney Vento Coordinator, shared with the ESSER and ARP HCY funded contracts being revoked, the \$350,000 contract with Central Plains Services will no longer continue. Schools can still send out referrals to Central Plains for high school students experiencing homelessness. We are still working with them through Youth Homelessness Systems Improvement (YHSI). Ann serves on 4 sub committees for partnering with other agencies who work with HCY. Goals are to connect all agencies for kids who enter the system or are experiencing homelessness. The National conference for all state coordinators will be in

June in DC. The USED partnered with a new company for all technical assistance for (SAFAL) for NCHE.

**Parent, Family & Community Engagement:** Zainab Rida, Student Services Officer & Office Administrator, Coordinated Student Support Services gave a brief overview on the NE Literacy Project with relation to Early Childhood. There are five tenets 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:** Stephanie Knust, Head Start State Collaboration Specialist provided a reminder regarding Head Start eligibility criteria and provided notice that additional flexibility was added for American Indian Alaskan Native (AIAN) and Migrant Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs in May 2024, and an allowance for excessive housing costs in October 2024. The Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) has fully transitioned to HeadStart.gov: [Head Start | HeadStart.gov](#).

The NE Head Start Collaboration Office is working with SchoolHouse Connection on a Nebraska Early Childhood Homelessness Data Profile/Resource document and will look to replicate work done in Missouri as part of the required HCSO Needs Assessment/Strategic Planning with Head Start grant recipients and others doing similar work. Updated enrollment, funding and staff information for Nebraska HS grant recipients as reported via the 2024 program Information Report (PIR) to Congress is now available. ([Head Start PowerPoint](#))

**Other:** Bill Heimann asked the following COP members whose term is ending in October 2025 if they would like to continue or discontinue their service on the committee. Anita Harkins-Mehsling, Omaha Arch Diocese, Marco Pedroza, LPS, Heather Stukey, ESU #10, and Kamau Turner, Winnebago PS all agreed to stay on.

**Next Meetings:** A survey was sent out for members to mark which dates were the preference for the fall meeting. October 20, 2025 was set for that meeting. It will be held in Lincoln.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:17 p.m.