



PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM RATIONALE

DATE: July 16, 2025

TO: Brian L. Maher
Commissioner of Education

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

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PROPOSED AGENDA ITEMS: Nebraska Improvement Grant Projects (BF.032025.003)

AGENDA ITEM TYPE: Action

RATIONALE/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Statutory Context:

Nebraska Revised Statute 79-1054 established the Innovation Grant Program, with guidelines that have shifted over time. Prior to 2025, grants and awards have been focus on innovative solutions for today's schools, teachers, and students.

In May 2023, the State Board approved a third cohort of 2- and 3-year innovative network grants. Results of these investments can be found in the NDE's Legislative Report here: [793 20241127-133811.pdf](#).

The following projects sunset at the end of June 2025:

- Nebraska Career Connections
- SMART Tutoring
- Future Ready Digital Learning Collaborative
- Beyond School Bells
- Zearn (ended after one year)
- School Transformation Network
- Every Day Counts (Addressing Chronic Absenteeism)

- Learning Platform - As statutorily required, the State Board discussed standards the learning platform should meet and criteria to prioritize grant applications in May and June 2024. The State Board approved criteria and priority areas at their August 2024 meeting.

NDE Improvement Grant

With changes to statute in 2023 and 2024, the Innovation Grant Program was renamed the Improvement Program Fund, shifting the focus away from new and exciting opportunities that *may* create an impact for some or all of Nebraska’s students and toward evidence-based programs that *will* have a measured impact in schools and on students across the state.

According to NRS 79-1054, in fiscal years 2025 through 2029, the NDE shall use these lottery funds on four categories of programs:

- i) Teacher recruitment and retention,
- ii) Improvement for schools and school districts,
- iii) Improvement in student performance in the subject areas of reading and mathematics, and
- iv) Other improvement areas identified by the state board.

With the passage of LB296 (the “Bellwether bill”), the NDE must now use Improvement Funds to hire registrars. These positions, and the requisite expenses for their work, would provide continuity of educational services to students experiencing the justice system.

Approved Projects:

At their June meeting, Board members approved the following projects:

- Every Day Counts - Metro Omaha Education Consortium (MOEC) Attendance Network (\$250,000 per year, \$500,000 total)
- Literacy Screener Study with UNL Buros Center (\$75,000)

Proposed New Projects:

NDE developed a request for proposal (RFP) which closed in mid-July. Staff from the NDE reviewed submitted projects, and have identified the following vendors for improvement activities.

Vendor	Scope of Work	Amount
Education Resources Strategies (ERS)	Design a statewide secondary instructional planning guide and provide support to a high school redesign and strategy planning cohort.	\$301,000
District Management Group (DMGroup)	Provide support to school teams to implement rapid cycles of improvement to increase math and literacy outcomes. Provide support with schedule design to maximize student and staff time.	\$133,000
Child Trends	Provide support to school building leaders to increase capacity in data literacy, lead improvement teams, and develop strategic action plans for improvement.	\$172,546

For the purposes of developing the systems-involved youth data sharing system, the NDE will contract for the following activities:

Vendor	Scope of Work	Amount
Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)	Project Manager/Business Analyst (OCIO) - Perform project management tasks, assist in gathering business requirements, focus groups, information sessions	\$157,000
Office of the Chief Information Officer (or Independent Contractor)	Technical Support - Provide infrastructure, coding data transfer and reporting support for project.	\$100,000

PROPOSED BOARD MEETING (MONTH/YEAR): August 2025

ESTIMATED COST: \$863,546

FOR CONTRACTS AND GRANTS:

- Indicate the Funding Source: Improvement Grant Funds (Lottery)
- 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: Competitive
- Rationale for method of procurement: Request for Proposals (RFP)
- Rationale for contractor selection: Vendors were scored on a rubric developed by the NDE to evaluate ability to meet specified improvement activities listed in the request for proposals. Cost estimates were reasonable, significant history of prior success, and strong evidence-basis for the vendor.

FOR GRANT SUBAWARDS:

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