

Committee of Practitioners Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 20, 2025
In Person and via Zoom

The October 20, 2025 meeting of the Nebraska Committee of Practitioners was held in person at Nebraska Department of Education, 500 South 84th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68510.

Dr. Bill Heimann, Committee Chair, called the Committee of Practitioners meeting to order at 9:01 AM on Monday, October 20, 2025.

Members in Attendance

Anne Caruso
Brent Cudly
Scott English
Tina Forté
Bill Heimann
Tara James
Kim Jonas (Zoom)
Barry McFarland
Ita Mendoza
Marco Pedroza
Matt Rohlfen
Kris Schneider (Zoom)
Melanie Stepp
Heather Stukey
Kamau Turner
Bob Ziegler (Zoom)

NDE Staff in Attendance

Ann Carmoney
Lane Carr
Jamie Cook
Allyson DenBeste
Tom Goeschel
Dottie Heusman
Melody Hobson
Anne Hubbell
Derek Ippensen
Steph Knust
Lisa Laws (Zoom)
E Nora (Zoom)
Julie Otero
Janice Paling
Michelle Rezek
Zainab Rida
Tate Toedman
Shirley Vargas
Erika Wibbels
Beth Wooster
Rhonda Wredt
Benjamin Zink

Not in Attendance

Andy DeFreece
Anita Harkins-Mehsling
Amanda Morris
Phillip Picquet
Hillary Rasmussen
Kathleen Riley

Guests

Taylor Esparza
Mackenzie Hahn
Lindsey Luly

Welcome & Introductions:

This COP meeting was held In Person and Zoom on October 20, 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 April 2, 2025 meeting:

Tina Forté made a motion to approve the April 2, 2025 minutes. Heather Stukey seconded the motion. Motion unanimously approved.

NDE COP Process Rules -Management and Revision:

Election of Committee of Practitioners Chairperson: A call was made for the 2025-2026 Chairperson. There were two nominations made prior to the meeting. However, one of those nominees declined the nomination. No other nominations were made during the meeting. Kamau Turner made motion to nominate Bill Heimann and Marco Pedroza seconded the motion. Motion was unanimously approved.

Revised COP Process Rules: Dottie Heusman, ESEA Programs Title I Director & Assistant Administrator, stated she had reviewed a few other states' COP process rules and noted Nebraska's had not been revised for quite some time. She noted the specific changes and additions to the COP process rules including a change to three-year membership term, elect chairperson in the fall, combined sections and listed them under Meetings and Agenda. Sections added were Committee Member Expenses and Other to capture miscellaneous procedures. Barry McFarland motioned to approve the updated COP Process Rule. Tara James seconded the motion. Motion was unanimously approved.

Paraprofessional Qualifications: Beth explained we would like to add the WorkKeys by ACT back to one of the accepted assessments for Para Qualification, it was never discontinued on the Staff reporting and there have been several paras that have moved in from other states that have WorkKeys. Secondly if we change the passing score from Writing - 3, Reading - 4, Math - 4 to 4's across the board, this will give paras a National Certification. She also explained the Project Para is now housed by NDE and would continue to be free for Nebraska schools. There will be a \$5 charge per assessment for other states wishing to use Project Para. Brent Cudly motioned to approve accepting WorkKeys and revise scoring to all 4's. Tara James seconded the motion. Motion was unanimously approved.

Literacy Project Update: Allyson DenBeste, Academic Officer and Office Administrator, Teaching, Learning, & Assessment shared the Revised Statute 79-2607 required NDE to develop a professional learning system. It was communicated with elementary schools and early childhood education programs to ensure teachers are aware of the PD requirements and ensure these teachers receive adequate training in these systems of training. Since July 1, 2024 the Nebraska Literacy Project was launched and 5 guiding tenets provide structure for the process. Dr. Staven oversees the work.

Tenet 1: Professional Learning system. Eight approved screeners have been approved for this year. IRIP reporting comes to NDE and then is reported to the legislature. Initiated efforts will streamline the reading screener assessments with the support of the Buros Institute at UNL. A grant is being pursued so the first 2-3 years the screener can be paid for by this grant.

Tenet 2: Curriculum and Teacher Preparation Aligned to Evidence-Based Reading Instruction. This involves the work on HQIM across the state. Growth has been seen in adoption of HQIM in elementary ELA. Adoption of HQIM has occurred and it is not clear about implementation so there will be more focus on that area.

Tenet 3: Regional Literacy Coaches. Coaches are being hired in two phases. Phase 1 is implemented, and Phase 2 is in the works to have regional literacy coaches in all ESU's across the state. Coaching observations are using the IPG. The RLC have also held Roadshows to support all districts in their regions.

Tenet 4: Data Collections to Evaluate Effectiveness. This is data collection but isn't mandated by the legislature. There is overlap with the CLSD grant for this tenet.

Tenet 5: Family Literacy and Pre-K Programs. An advisory committee was established and developed a Family Literacy Implementation Toolkit for schools. A Family Literacy Resource site was launched as well.

Dr. Jamie Cook, Literacy Officer gave the CLSD Updates: \$55 million dollar grant over a five-year period with NDE having funding for years 1 and 2. Work will continue to secure the funding for years 3-5. NDE staff meets weekly with the CLSD grant recipients. The CLSD Program's purpose is to advance literacy skills, including pre-literacy skills reading, and writing, for all children from birth through grade 12. The goal is to increase third-grade proficiency on NSCAS ELA to 75% by 2030. This grant has a larger scope of students than the state goal. 46 subgrants were awarded to districts or consortiums and of those represents 68% of the districts, about 218,000 students across the state. Year 1 concluded on 9-30-2025 and year 2 began on 10-1-2025. Overall summary, there are challenges, opportunities and next steps that NDE is working on and involving our education partners for support with these. The Sherwood Grant is another grant that Dr. Cook is working on. More information will be provided in the future concerning this grant. It will directly impact the principals and leaders in schools in the area of reading and writing.

Federal Programs Updates

Title I-A: Educationally Disadvantaged: Dottie Heusman, Assistant Administrator/Title I Director shared an update on the Title I funds and the decrease of overall amounts; 2024-2025; \$90,471,477, 2025-2026; \$78,512,965 for a total deduction of \$11,958,512. This deduction in overall funds made a major impact on the amount of money to be allocated to the school improvement amounts so that amount is less than \$600,000. The committee gave input to NDE about their thoughts on how to help focus the allocations.

Title I-A School Improvement (1003a) CSI/SFI: Michelle Rezek, Title I School Improvement Specialist shared information on the CSI school visits that are occurring this year. The NDE team that are conducting these are Dr. Shirley Vargas, Amanda Morris, Dottie Heusman and Michelle Rezek. During this visit the focus is on an overall discussion with the school team about implementation of activities per grant submission, progress shown toward improvement and classroom observations. A report is sent after the visit regarding what was observed and the next steps.

Title I-C: Benjamin Zink, Title I-C Specialist, shared that the program commonly called the Migrant Education Program is a federally funded, state operated program that serves the children of ag workers who move frequently. Evaluation results from the 2023-24 program year showed that we had 5,263 migratory children in Nebraska which is an increase of over 500 from the previous year and met 13 of our 15 Measurable Program Outcomes. We have consolidated from 13 projects to 9 for the 2025-2026 program year to help us navigate flat funding from the Office of Migrant Education and rising costs which has been off to a great start. Sub-allocations increased for every project due to consolidation and a \$500,000 increase in our allocation from the USED.

Title I-D: Neglected At-Risk Delinquent: Ann Carmoney, Title I Part D Specialist, reported the annual performance review window is now open until November 8th for facilities to report their data. The Title I-D grant is now open. The information on collecting facilities October count is going out the week of October 20th with the deadline of December 19th.

Title II-A: Improving Teacher Quality & Nonpublic: Tate Toedman, Title II Consultant/Nonpublic Ombudsman shared a new resource on Title II-A will be released in early November which is a

collaboration of two II-A State Coordinators (Nebraska and Washington), State Education Technology Director's Association (SETDA), ASCD/ISTE, Learning Forward, and Full Scale (formerly the Aurora Institute and the Learning Accelerator). This has been developed over the last year. It is to support LEAs and SEAs.

Title III: Language Acquisition: Julie Otero, Title III Director shared the ELPA21 Summative Assessment data showed an increase of 39% taken from 2021-2025 and for the screener there was a decrease of 24% of screeners so far in the 2025-26 school year compared to last year at this time. She also shared this past June the Rule 15 was updated by the State Board of Education. It will be posted on the website upon receiving the governor's signature. ELPA workshops will be offered for free to educators in January, April, and June 2026. Anne Hubbell, Title III Specialist shared information regarding the final year of Project Assets, EL Adviser reports, and all the canvas courses that support EL instruction.

Title IV-A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE): Tate stated that in the ESSA grant there is one question for each of the three areas of Title IV-A, describe the district's goal(s) (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time bound) for the funds being used in each section. If the district does not have funding in the section for the 2025-2026 school year, please indicate N/A. Well Rounded, Safe and Healthy Students, and Effective Use of Technology. This is for the public reporting requirement under Title IV-A that we have been reminded needs to be done and reported on our website as a publicly reporting requirement. Next year districts will be reporting on the success of reaching their goal as well as setting the goal for the next year. This will be a Likert scale self-evaluation, from unsuccessful/not started to very successful. The 2022-23 public reporting of funding expenditures has been updated on the website and working on the 2023-24, which will be published in early 2026. All of these are ongoing requirements of the grant.

Dottie shared all spending must occur for the Stronger Connections grant by September 30, 2026. All districts have been reminded about this and are sending in the reimbursements they have.

Title IV-B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC): Erika Wibbels, 21st Century Community Learning Center Specialist, gave updates on their program. \$1 million was awarded out for the 2025 grant competition. This adds on 120 building sites with 11,000 students being served with \$5.5 million funding grantees. Each year we collaborate with partners to hold the annual GetConnected Statewide Afterschool Conference for professional development with 239 in attendance this year. NDE staff is monitoring 30 sites this year as well as preparing for the 2026 grant competition. NDE contracts with Beyond School Bells to aid in professional development. On the national level, October 23rd is Lights on Afterschool and we receive a proclamation from the governor. The 2025 afterschool data was released on October 15th. Nebraska City MS was the program highlight.

Title V: REAP – Rural Education Achievement Program: Michelle Rezek, REAP Coordinators shared there were three RLIS districts this year. That grant has been open and been submitted which goes through NDE office. Federal Programs team has been giving guidance based on what they know for the REAP dollars while the federal government is shutdown.

Title VII-B: Education of Homeless Children and Youth: Ann Carmoney, McKinney Vento Coordinator, shared McKinney Vento grants have been State Board approved. Nebraska was cut by 22% overall, so all districts McKinney Vento funding was cut by at least 20%. Two new districts applied for the grant, making 15 total districts who received this grant.

Head Start State Collaboration Office: Stephanie Knust, Head Start State Collaboration Specialist shared grant recipients are finishing up their FY 25 funding. Federal government shutdown has not affected Nebraska Head start services thus far. That may change as program grants end their FY 25 funding cycles and begin FY 26. A few Nebraska program updates are October is Head Start Awareness Month; Two Head Start grant recipients are in the process of hiring new program directors, NCAP and NECC and last Educare Lincoln is the newest Head Start grant recipient in Nebraska and is providing Early Head Start services at this time.

Parent, Family & Community Engagement: Zainab Rida, Student Services Officer & Office Administrator, Coordinated Student Support Services gave a brief overview of Tenet 5 of the Literacy Project and how it ties to the Parent, Family & Community Engagement area. In order to achieve that goal, an advisory committee was convened that meets every month and consists of community members, various district school staff, and NDE staff. Three goals were established 1) Develop a Family Literacy Implementation Guide 2) Explore and develop partnerships with local libraries to provide families and caregivers resources to support home and family literacy programming 3) Identify digital platforms and compile a resource repository that families and communities can access. Resources will support family and children's development. The Family Literacy Implementation Guide is on Canvas as a course intended to provide school staff with the tools they need. A one stop shop was created to house many different resources on the [Nebraska Literacy Project webpage](#).

CSI Resource Allocation and CSI Guidebook from TNTP – Dr. Shirley Vargas, School Transformation Officer reviewed and discussed the updated [Resource Allocation review process](#) and its purpose. Derek Ippensen, Assistant Administrator & Director-Accountability gave a brief overview on the AQuESTT report mentioning that more information is now provided for any schools eligible to exit a designation would have the exit criteria specified in their AQuESTT report. Shirley gave a brief overview on the [CSI Guidebook from TNTP](#) on What They Learned from Work with Nebraska Schools. NDE engaged in a contract with TNTP for three years through a procurement process. They provided learning acceleration support and professional learning for NDE, identified schools and districts that related to how we support Tier 1 core instruction across the classrooms of our identified schools. When this contract ended one of the deliverables resulted in this CSI Guidebook to be used as a resource that a district staff or ESU could see what was implemented, what was learned from it and how that led to a change in practice or student outcome. Shirley asked the committee to review and discuss during lunch the following questions 1) What resonates with you about the resource? 2) What do you find helpful about the resource and 3) What might be missing, needs further clarification, or could be removed. After lunch feedback was provided to Dr. Vargas for consideration regarding next steps.

Tom Goeschel, Director of Grant Compliance Education and Lisa Laws, Grants Training Specialist provided information on travel CFR guidance, travel object codes and the travel documentation that is required. They provided a Travel Fact Sheet and other resources that can be found on the [B&GM webpage](#) and discussed various common findings during audits. They shared their upcoming trainings and updated templates and where they can be found.

Federal Funds – USDE Updates – Lane Carr, Office of Policy & Strategic Initiatives shared information regarding the government shutdown and USED RIF and what it means for the districts and schools. As of now, NDE has not seen a lot of impact on ESEA, IDEA, or Perkins but watching closely the School Nutrition, Early Childhood and HeadStart areas. During this shutdown, the last of the ESSER payments were released to NDE. Lane discussed what comes next with future funds for Titles I-C, II-A, III-A, IV-A, IV-B and Adult Basic Education. He encouraged the committee to consider sharing the impact of these programs to their representatives. He updated the committee on the [2026 Strategic Plan](#) that he had shared

with them at the April 2, 2025 meeting. He anticipates the State Board will meet and refine the draft strategic plan with a vote at the December board meeting. The mission remains the same and added clarity to the values with more definition to these values. The strategic priorities include, accelerate student achievement, growing the educator pipeline, equip learners for the workforce and provide exceptional service.

Other: Beth shared that NAESPA Conference in Denver, Colorado will be February 10-12, 2026. The LEA Affiliate membership that is available to districts is a way to be more involved, get the On Demand for a year and have access to webinars. She announced Nebraska plans to name two Distinguished Schools again this year. This is more important because the Blue Ribbon Schools Program is being dropped.

Next Meetings: Dottie shared the survey results for the next meeting date that will be Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at the Grand Island Public School Islander Annex Building, 3025 College Street in Grand Island.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:01 p.m.