

**Committee of Practitioners Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, March 31, 2026  
In Person and via Zoom**

The March 31, 2026 meeting of the Nebraska Committee of Practitioners was held in person at Grand Island Public School Islander, Annex Bldg, 3025 College St. Grand Island, Nebraska 68803.

Dr. Bill Heimann, Committee Chair, called the Committee of Practitioners meeting to order at 9:07 AM on Tuesday, March 31, 2026.

**Members in Attendance**

Anne Caruso  
Brent Cudly  
Tina Forté (zoom)  
Anita Harkins-Mehsling (zoom)  
Bill Heimann  
Tara James (zoom)  
Kim Jonas  
Barry McFarland  
Phillip Picquet (zoom)  
Hillary Rasmussen (zoom)  
Kathleen Riley  
Matt Rohlfen  
Kris Schneider  
Heather Stucky  
Bob Ziegler

**NDE Staff in Attendance**

Ann Carmoney  
Ryan Foor  
Dottie Heusman  
Melody Hobson  
Anne Hubbell  
Steph Knust (zoom)  
Amanda Morris  
Julie Otero  
Janice Paling  
Michelle Rezek  
Zainab Rida  
Tate Toedman  
Shirley Vargas  
Erika Wibbels  
Beth Wooster (zoom)  
Rhonda Wredt  
Benjamin Zink

**Not in Attendance**

Andy DeFreece  
Scott English  
Ita Mendoza  
Marco Pedroza  
Melanie Stepp  
Kamau Turner

**Guests**

Taylor Esparza (zoom)  
Lindsey Luly  
Angie Nasr

**Welcome & Introductions:**

This COP meeting was held In Person and Zoom on March 31, 2026. 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 20, 2025 meeting:**

Anne Caruso made a motion to approve the October 20, 2025 minutes. Brent Cudly seconded the motion. Motion unanimously approved.

**Public Meetings Requirements** – Dottie Heusman, Assistant Administrator for Federal Programs presented the committee with the public meetings requirements for Nebraska. After consulting with Dr. Ryan Foor and NDE legal team per Nebraska State Law the Committee of Practitioners meeting is required to be a public meeting. One requirement that has to be met is that only half of the meetings per calendar year can have a virtual component and must be recorded. The committee discussed keeping the Lincoln and Grand Island locations with one of them to offer a virtual option. A new paragraph was added

to the Committee of Practitioners Process Rules under the Meetings and Agendas section to ensure this requirement is in the rules. The addition to the Process Rules to read: Therefore, using the current meeting schedule of two meetings per year, one meeting may have a virtual option, and one will not. Tina Forté made a motion to approve. Barry McFarland seconded the motion to approve this addition to the process rules to cover this expectation. Motion unanimously approved.

**Federal Program Administrator Updates:**

**State Single Audit:** Beth Wooster, ESEA Office Administrator updated the committee on the State Single Audit for Title I-A, Title III and Title IV-A that occurred December 2025 through March 2026. There were no programmatic corrective actions but one recommendation. Because of this recommendation, we will be developing procedures for assuring that appropriate processes are in place in case of staff turnover. NDE will also not allow changes to the Title III data after the June 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. This will make it possible for Title III allocations to be posted and loaded into the GMS on time and without changes. Program staff will be auditing data for any large discrepancies during the month of June to help catch problems early.

**ESEA Distinguished Schools February 2026:** Beth gave a brief update on the two schools who were recognized at the conference. Bridgeport Elementary was recognized for category 1 – Exceptional Student Performance and Academic Growth. They sent eight staff members to the conference to celebrate their recognition. Omaha Public Schools Adams Elementary was recognized for category 2 – Closing the Achievement Gap between Student Groups. They sent three staff members and three staff from the District’s Title I Office to celebrate their recognition.

**PathwiseK12 Parent Notices (Formerly TransACT):** Beth shared that Nebraska will no longer be offering a statewide contract due to a decrease in federal funding. The use of TransAct has also been tracked over the past three years showing a significant decline.

**Federal Funding updates and Timeline Preliminary Allocations for 2026-2027:** Beth reported Nebraska received the preliminary allocations on March 13, 2026. The slight increase in the Title I allocation can be explained by the total increase in Title I nationally. The almost 12 million dollar decrease in funding in 2025-26 makes this increase welcomed. It is expected that this will help provide a slight increase in CSI funding as well. Title IV-A went down because it is based on the previous year’s Title I-A allocation. Level funding nationally explains why there was not a change in many of the other program’s funding. Title III, McKinney-Vento and Title I-D allocations are based on identified student numbers reported compared to other states. We are expecting final allocations by July 1st.

**Federal Waivers:** Beth shared information about Federal Waivers vs EdFlex Waivers. Looking at what Iowa received with their approved waiver, most of the components would be what an EdFlex waiver would allow. Beth also shared the eleven statutory or regulatory requirements that cannot be waived. There was discussion around what the benefits of having a waiver might mean for Nebraska.

**Federal Designation Updates:** Amanda Morris, Director of School Improvement shared information about the number of Federal Designation exits in the Fall of 2025, and where current numbers of CSI, ATSI, and TSI Designations stand. Amanda gave an update on current CSI work, including that 12 CSI Support Sessions were held across January and February for all CSI/CSI-ATSI schools. Additionally, Amanda shared that she and members of the CSDS and Federal Programs team have completed 11 site visits as part of more rigorous actions for CSI Cohort 1 (2018) schools in the Fall and will complete 16 in the Spring of 2026. Amada and Michelle, Federal Programs Specialist shared an overview of how the 2025-2026 Title I-A funds for CSI work were allocated to CSI schools.

**Federal Accountability Designation Data Reports:** Amanda shared background information about the existing AQuESTT reports available for school and district leaders. She listed common feedback around requests to this report and shared an example of an updated report for feedback.

During the working lunch the group members had small table discussions on the Federal Accountability Designation Data Reports that Amanda had presented. NDE Staff members sat at a variety of tables to help support this discussion. After lunch an open discussion was held.

### **Federal Programs Updates**

**Title I-A: Educationally Disadvantaged:** Dottie Heusman, Assistant Administrator/Title I Director shared that four schools are completing work to move from targeted to schoolwide for the 2026-2027 school year. The supporting evidence is due by April 1<sup>st</sup> with the NDE Federal Programs team reviewing the documentation in late April.

**Title I-A School Improvement (1003a) CSI/SFI:** Michelle Rezek, Title I School Improvement Specialist asked the committee if they had additional questions regarding Amanda's presentation. There was no additional information shared about this topic.

**Title I-C:** Benjamin Zink, Title I-C Specialist, shared the program currently has 3,598 children in the program, spread throughout eight regional and one district projects. The total number is a decrease of 413 from last year at this time. He shared that many families have left or in the process of leaving due to the closing of the Tyson plant in January at Lexington. Staff is tracking where they are relocating and thus far, some are staying in Nebraska, but most are departing the state. Staff are working to connect the families with resources to assist with housing, groceries, or other needs. They are also monitoring the wildfires in western Nebraska and there has been no impact on their migrant families. He reported that North Platte is seeing growth due to work at the Sustainable Beef plant.

The program is currently in the process of switching over how funds are allocated. One allocation has been provided per year in the past but due to a change in how the Office of Budget & Grants Management approaches funding to ensure that the oldest grant funds are spent first, beginning this year there will be two allocations provided per year.

Nebraska Project Directors will attend the Title I-C Invitational Conference in Virginia Beach, Virginia this fall to learn from and network with Title I-C practitioners from across the nation.

**Title I-D: Neglected At-Risk Delinquent:** Ann Carmoney, Title I Part D Specialist, provided an update on the legislative discussion to move/shuffle youth at correctional facilities. They chose not to move students at this time and instead opted for a study to review the ramifications of this action.

**Title II-A: Improving Teacher Quality & Nonpublic:** Tate Toedman, Title II Consultant/Nonpublic Ombudsman shared we are really encouraging districts to have plans for how they are spending their Title II-A dollars, especially those funds geared towards professional development. We are also encouraging districts to work with their nonpublic schools to have plans in place and to have ongoing consultations to ensure good use of the funds and to make sure professional development needs are met. Tate addressed the committee's questions regarding how many districts keep their dollars in Title II-A, he will check and follow up with that percentage but said it tends to be lower compared to Title IV-A moving funds. There are no actual carryover limitations on this program, and it is recommended less than 25% but cannot mandate it. Tate explained an example for the 25-26 funds; districts can carryover funds through the 27-

28 school year to September 30, 2028. Starting with the July 1 date the districts have 27 months to obligate funds.

**Title III: Language Acquisition:** Julie Otero, Title III Director and Anne Hubbell, Title III Specialist reviewed Title III EL and IE definitions and allowable uses. They reminded everyone about the Home Language Survey that is for all new students in every district. An update on the Project ASSETS course is that it is in the final cohort, and the Family Leadership Institute had their final graduation ceremony for all the parents. They provided ELPA21 and Alt ELPA assessment numbers from this year's testing. PathwiseK12 contract will not be renewed by NDE however, individual districts and ESUs are welcome to get their own contracts if they want. The provided EL demographics and anticipated dates for the assessments next year.

**Title IV-A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE):** Tate stated the districts will start reporting on previous years' goals in Title IV-A this fall in their ESSA consolidated applications. They will be done through a Likert scale self-evaluation rating. The results of the goals and evaluations for the 2025-2026 year are planned to be posted during the winter of 2026-2027. Expenditure data from the 2023-2024 school year will be posted in April.

**Stronger Connections Grant** - Districts should be planning for close out as the funds need to be obligated by September 30, 2026. They should also be looking at sustainability of activities that have been successful. Out of nineteen who applied, seventeen received the grant. Dottie will give an update at the next meeting on the various projects that were funded and the success stories.

**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, shared updates on their program; Chelsea Sidel, Crete named to the National Afterschool Association 2026 Next Generation of Afterschool Leaders, 93% of state funds are awarded to local programs, for the 2026-27 school year 100 sites will have continuation funding, and new cohort grantees will have \$1.6 million dollars to award out with 20 applications being reviewed. They also just finished certifying the 2024-2025 data, with 5 project performance outcomes that are submitted to the federal level with almost 16,000 students served. She reminded the committee April 20-24 is Afterschool Professionals Appreciation week.

**Title V: REAP – Rural Education Achievement Program:** Ann Carmoney and Michelle Rezek, REAP Coordinators shared that any districts that were eligible have reached out. The Master Eligibility spreadsheet has been sent to districts to ensure data and contact information is accurate. REAP applications will be coming out in the spring.

**Title VII-B: Education of Homeless Children and Youth:** Ann Carmoney, McKinney Vento Coordinator, shared preliminary allocations for the 2026-2027 school year have been announced. Monthly homeless liaison meetings are being held via zoom. There will be no carryover for the McKinney Vento grants moving forward. The competitive grant has been moved to a three-year cycle. It is an 18-month grant. The 2027 grant is a continuation of the competitive grant from last year. It will be less detailed to complete.

**Parent, Family & Community Engagement:** Dr. Zainab Rida, Student Services Officer & Office Administrator, Coordinated Student Support Services gave a brief overview on the statewide family literacy hub. An implementation guide has been developed specifically for districts and schools to focus on family engagement activities with assessments and resources. The expanded community engagement provides promotional materials ready for the community members or districts to use. A School Family Literacy network has provided support for family literacy and meets once a month. Family engagement

resources provide videos and sheets for districts to access. March was the National Reading Month with several activities occurring. Melody Hobson, Office Administrator of Early Childhood Education gave an update on the Early Learning Library housed at ESU 3 training center.

**Nonpublic Ombudsman:** Tate Toedman shared that he has received multiple questions with the new federal vouchers and explained how this affects funding for public and nonpublic schools. Little effects from any voucher program federally or state will have an effect on funding. Nonpublic Within Boundaries Consultation is live. NonPublic Title I consultation is live, and there are some issues because of CEP data from a few nonpublic schools. At this time the nonpublic membership report is not yet scheduled to be moved to the Portal but eventually it will.

**Head Start State Collaboration Office:** Stephanie Knust, Head Start State Collaboration Specialist shared the following federal and state program updates: Lizbeth Casco White Announced as Office of Head Start Director – March 4, 2026. Leadership positions at the federal level are filled. Their office is awaiting a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) of Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). The FY26 Appropriations for Head Start included an \$85M increase dedicated largely to cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) which is roughly .6%. A few Nebraska updates for Early Head Start Home-Based services were added in Johnson and Otoe Counties in February 2026. The February 2026 Nebraska program Enrollment included HSP = 98%, EHS = 97%, Overall Total = 97%. She reported due to the government shutdown last fall she was unable to share the following information on the 2025 Nebraska Program Information Report (PIR) Enrollment Statistics Highlights including funded and cumulative enrollment, enrollment by priority criteria, and enrollment percentage of homeless and dual language students - 598 homeless children, 2,189 Dual Language Learner's, and 264 in foster care at any time during enrollment.

**Other:** Dottie shared the dates for the next NAESPA Conference to be held in Louisville, Kentucky are February 24-26, 2027. She also reminded the committee that last fall they approved the change in committee member terms to three years therefore most terms were extended to 2027. She shared some staffing changes at NDE. Staff moving to new positions within the department are Victoria Katzberg, Director of Grant Compliance, Steve Bauers, Administrator of Budget & Grants Management, Dr. Sydney Kobza, Academic Officer for Teaching, Learning & Assessment, and Dr. Ryan Foor, Deputy Commissioner. Cassie Seiboldt accepted a new position and will be leaving the department. Dr. Deb Frison, Allyson DenBeste, Dr. Trudy Clark, and Anne Hubbell are retiring.

**Next Meetings:** Dottie shared the survey results for the next fall meeting date confirmed that the best day to hold the meeting will be Tuesday, September 29, 2026 at the NDE Office in Lincoln. There will be no virtual option for this meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.