

State Accreditation Committee (SAC)

April 16th 2026

Committee Meeting Minutes

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at approximately **9:00 a.m.** by **Chair Dale Hafer**. A quorum was declared present.

Members present: Brad Dirksen, Courtney Feeney, Dale Fornander, Dale Hafer, Gina Bittner, Joel Bednar, Kim Saum-Mills, LeeAnn Amm, Rebecca Dunn, Teresa Perkins, Vickie Kauffold, Susanne Cremer, and Sarah Salem.

Members absent: Dan Schnoes, Heather Philips, Jeff Ganz, Marco Pedroza, Mitch Kubicek, Nicole Regan, Stacie Hardy, and Wayne Brown.

The **NDE staff** members facilitating the meeting were Decua Jean-Baptiste, Todd Wolverton, Sandra Suiter, and Jalyn Zweerink.

Approval of Agenda

A motion was made to approve the agenda as presented.

- **Motion:** Vicki Kauffold
- **Second:** Dale Fornander

Of the 21 total committee members, 11 voted yes; 10 members were not present. The motion **carried**.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the **December 11, 2025**, meeting were reviewed.

- **Motion to approve:** Gina Bittner
- **Second:** LeeAnn Amm

Of the 21 total committee members, 11 voted yes; 10 members were not present.

The motion **carried**.

Welcome and Introductions

Decua Jean-Baptiste provided housekeeping information and welcomed **Jalyn Zweerink**, the new Office Associate for Accreditation. Members participated in brief introductions and shared personal and professional “wins.”

Teacher Certification Updates

Presenter: Katelyn Larson, Director of Teacher Certification

Updates were provided on educator certification trends, shortages, and regulatory changes, including:

- Reduction in unfilled and vacant teaching positions statewide, with continuing shortages in special education.
- Progress and outcomes of apprenticeship programs.
- Updated certificate expiration dates (September 30).
- Elimination of transcript requirements for Nebraska institution completers in certain cases.
- Lowering credit hour requirements for local substitute permits.
- Introduction of Para substitute permits.
- Clarification of alternative permits vs. alternative certificates.
- New flexibility for renewing expired certificates through coursework or equivalent professional development.
- Upcoming legislative and rule changes, including LB1022 and anticipated Rule 24 updates.

The committee discussion focused on the practical implications of certification changes for districts, including staffing flexibility, application timelines, and compliance considerations. Members also sought clarification on certificate renewal pathways, particularly for expired certificates, alternative permits, and the use of equivalent professional development.

Presentation: Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTC)

Presenter: Scott English, Superintendent, DHHS YRTC Schools

Mr. English provided an overview of special purpose schools under YRTC, including:

- Mission and structure of YRTC schools in Kearney, Hastings, Lincoln, and Whitehall.
- Student population characteristics and average length of stay.
- Challenges related to fragmented credits, transitions back to districts, and coordination across systems.
- Steps taken to create continuity across YRTC schools (common curriculum, grading philosophy, PLCs).
- Emphasis on stabilizing students academically and emotionally to reduce recidivism.
- Staffing, professional development, and instructional supports.

Committee members asked questions related to student transitions, collaboration opportunities, and enrollment numbers. The committee expressed appreciation for the presentation and the work being done.

Accreditation Updates

Middle School Athletics (Rule 10)

Presenter: Todd Wolverton

An update was provided on discussions with the Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA) regarding potential governance of middle school athletics and the committee's prior Rule 10 recommendations.

Key points:

- NSAA is in the early stages of discussion and data collection.
- Significant diversity exists across districts regarding middle school athletics needs.
- Concerns were raised about capacity, cost, and unintended consequences.
- Clarification that SAC intended to remove middle school athletic participation limits as an accreditation issue, not to assign governance to NSAA.

*Committee discussion emphasized the advisory role of the State Accreditation Committee to the Commissioner of Education and the importance of clearly documenting intent within the meeting minutes. Members agreed that, if references to middle school athletics are removed from Rule 10, governance would **default to local school districts**, consistent with current practice and local control, **rather than transferring authority to the Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA)**. The committee noted that this clarification is important to prevent misinterpretation, ensure accurate understanding among affected parties, and clearly distinguish accreditation oversight from athletic governance.*

Rule 10 Revisions Update

Presenter: Brad Dirksen

Anticipated revisions discussed included:

- The committee previously approved recommendations related to:
 - Revisions to the violation process.
 - Transitioning from waivers and modifications to pilot programs and processes.
 - The elimination or modification of references to middle school athletics within Rule 10.
- Additional revisions under consideration include:
 - Incorporating statutory requirements currently addressed in Rule 17 into Rule 10.
 - Adding administrator professional development requirements.
 - Making routine language, clarity, and alignment updates.

The 2025-26 Teacher Vacancy Survey, conducted in fall 2025 by the NDE, combines data from ESUs, public school districts, and nonpublic schools to produce statewide counts. This data is summarized and shared with the USDE and educational entities in Nebraska. <https://www.education.ne.gov/educatorprep/teacher-shortage-survey/>

Carnegie Unit / Instructional Units Discussion

A recap of the December Carnegie presentation was provided, along with feedback from a follow-up survey.

Four themes were discussed:

1. Hurdles and unintended consequences
2. Existing flexibility under Rule 10
3. Readiness for systemwide change
4. Implementation and cost concerns

Committee consensus:

- Rule 10 already provides meaningful instructional flexibility.
- Greater communication to districts about existing flexibility is needed.
- No immediate action recommended to change instructional unit requirements.
- Continued long-term discussion about simplification is appropriate.

Annual Accreditation Report and School Approval

The committee reviewed accreditation numbers for the 2026–2027 school year:

- 244 public schools
- 78 nonpublic schools
- 5 special-purpose schools
- **Total:** 327 accredited schools

A motion was made to approve the schools recommended for **continued accreditation** for 2026–2027.

- **Motion:** Sarah Salem
- **Second:** Tersea Perkins

At the time of the vote, **13 committee members were present** and voted **yes**; the remaining members were not present. The motion **carried**.

No schools were recommended for conditional accreditation.

Committee Membership

Information was shared regarding upcoming committee members' term expirations and the reappointment process. Members whose terms expire in June were informed they would receive follow-up communication to indicate their interest in continuing service.

It was noted that the Commissioner of Education makes all committee appointments and reappointments. Members who do not wish to continue serving were encouraged to submit recommendations for potential replacements. The importance of maintaining diverse representation on the committee was emphasized, and appreciation was expressed for members' continued service and commitment.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Joel Bednar and seconded by Vikie Kauffold.

The meeting adjourned shortly after **12:15 p.m.**

The next SAC meeting is scheduled for **December 10, 2026**.