

ESU #1
Annual Report
2023-24



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ESU #1 Annual Report 2023-24



Bill
Heimann

a note from the administrator

This annual report serves the following purposes:

- ▶ to provide an overview of the services offered by Educational Service Unit #1;
- ▶ to meet legal requirements as set forth by state statute; and
- ▶ to provide information about ESU #1 activities to area schools, our board of directors and the public.

ESU #1 provides assistance to local school districts through core services, which include staff development, technology and media services. We provide the educational programming and services necessary for area school districts to reach their goals of improving student learning and enhancing the capacity and skills of their staff. We respond to the requests of the 23 public K-12 school districts in ESU #1, and our highly qualified staff partner with them to deliver services efficiently and effectively.

In addition, contracted special educational services are provided to schools, as well as grant activities and cooperative purchasing programs. ESU #1's Tower School is a Level III program for students. Tower staff also conduct outreach for schools to support student needs. The Migrant Education Program and Early Learning Connection are located at ESU #1 and serve an area covering multiple ESUs to give support to schools, students and their families.

Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Rule 84 establishes a level of performance for ESU accreditation. We provide financial support for projects on behalf of all public schools, such as internet filtering, ACT preparation through OnToCollege, instructional leadership training, AIMSweb, board policy, legal updates and much more!

On behalf of the ESU #1 Board of Directors, I am pleased to present this annual report that highlights the efforts of our staff in assisting area schools to make a difference in the lives of both students and educators. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Dr. Bill Heimann, Administrator



ESU #1 Annual Report 2023-24

about ESU #1



ESU #1

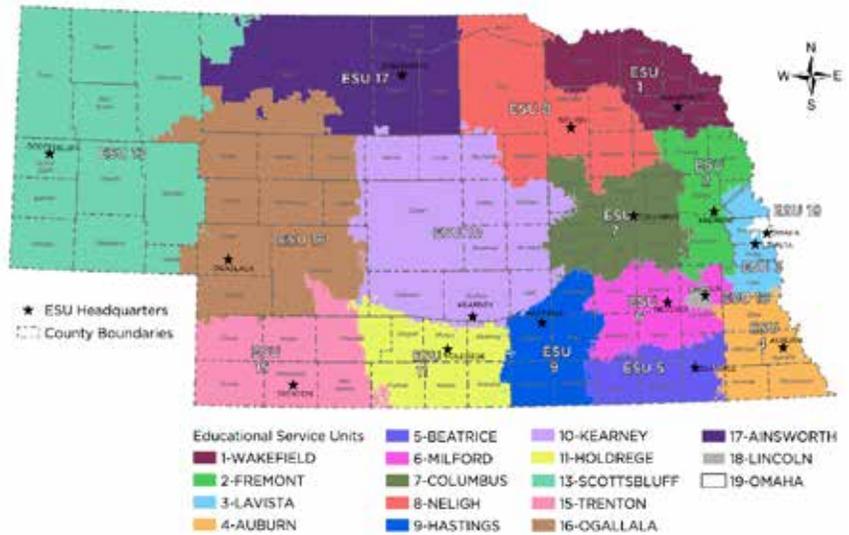
Educational Service Unit #1 provides services to the local school districts in Cedar, Dakota, Dixon, Knox, Thurston and Wayne counties in northeast Nebraska. ESU #1 is one of 17 Educational Service Units statewide.

The service units were created by the state Legislature in 1965 and later placed under the jurisdiction of the Nebraska Department of Education.

Historically, the purpose of the ESUs has been to provide services that individual school districts can't economically or efficiently provide for themselves. As school districts identified new needs, the diversity of services offered by the ESUs evolved.

ESU #1 is headquartered in Wakefield and provides a variety of special education, staff development, technology and media services to the 23 school districts in its six-county area. ESU #1 also operates the Level III program at the Tower School in Wayne.

The ESU #1 service area covers 2,926 square miles and includes more than 11,500 students and approximately 1,200 teachers. Moreover, the ESU #1 service area includes three Native American reservations: the Santee, Winnebago and Omaha.



board of directors



Board

ESU #1 Board of Directors members are elected to four-year terms, one representative from each of the 10 election districts.

The board meets in regular session on the second Tuesday of each month at the Central Office in Wakefield. Board members during the 2023-24 school year were:

- ▶ Adrian (AJ) Johnson, president (District 8)
- ▶ Sally Reinert, vice president (District 2)
- ▶ Susan Strahm, secretary (District 5)
- ▶ Josiah Boneschans (District 1)
- ▶ Jim Gunsolley (District 3)
- ▶ Julie Schamp (District 4)
- ▶ Traci Haglund (District 6)
- ▶ Tucker Hight (District 7)
- ▶ Tabitha Gilsdorf (District 9)
- ▶ Shannon Johnson (District 10)



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advisory council

Council

ESU #1 is accredited by the Nebraska Department of Education and is assisted by an advisory council composed of area superintendents, one each from the six counties we serve, representing both large and small school districts.

The council reviews, recommends and supports the services offered by ESU #1. Advisory council members during the 2023-24 school year were:

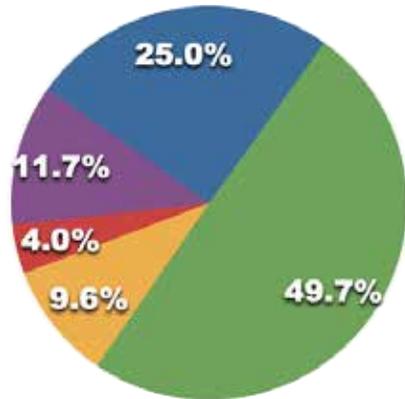
- ▶ Matt Farup (Wayne Co.)
- ▶ Chris Look (Knox Co.)
- ▶ Brendan Calahan (Dixon Co.)
- ▶ Rony Ortega (Dakota Co.)
- ▶ Paul Hans (Cedar Co.)
- ▶ Stacie Hardy (Thurston Co.)



budget

Budget

Each ESU is financed through a combination of property tax funds, state funds and service contracts with individual school districts. Because the ESU #1 service area includes several counties, the modest contribution by taxpayers provides a base from which the unit functions.

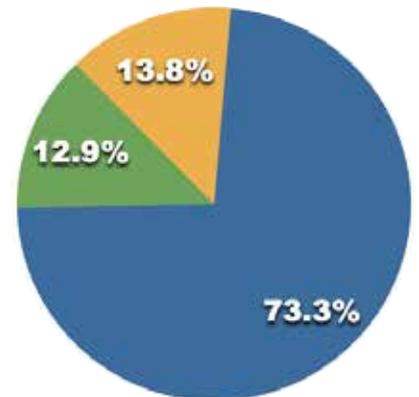


Budgeted revenue

▶ General fund/carryover...	\$5,000,000
▶ Local receipts	\$9,922,901
▶ Property tax.....	\$1,927,658
▶ State receipts.....	\$796,326
▶ Federal funds	\$2,328,975
TOTAL	\$19,975,860

Budgeted expenditures

▶ Local	14,647,360
▶ State/federal/local	\$2,578,500
▶ Cash reserve.....	\$2,750,000
TOTAL.....	\$19,975,860



early learning connection professional development system grant



Northern Early Learning Connection Partnership

The Northern Early Learning Connection (ELC) grant is designed to ensure that educators who work with children birth to age eight have access to high quality professional development opportunities. According to the Nebraska Early Childhood Record System, there were 3,425 participants who attended events in the Northern Region from July 2023 to March 2024. A majority of these events were offered at no cost to the participants.

The Northern Region events were attended by participants from 77 counties across the state.

Our web presence, including the ELC Facebook page and a monthly newsletter, impacts approximately 1,200 early childhood professionals in the Northern region.

Early Childhood Coach Consultation

The ESU #1 Early Learning Connection Coach Consultant works collaboratively within ESUs 1, 7 and 8 to ensure an equitable comprehensive array of support that is responsive to the needs of coaches who serve early childhood educators and parents caring for children (birth through age 8) within family childcare homes, centers and preschool programs. Services provided include one-on-one coaching sessions, small group coaching sessions and large group coach cadres meetings.

During the 2023-2024 school year, the coach consultant provided 69 one-on-one coaching sessions, 29 small group coaching sessions and three large group coach cadre meetings.

PreK-2 Professional Development Specialist

Kary Pfeil, the PreK-2 Professional Development Specialist, offers support for school districts and their partners to improve early childhood practice, instructional quality and transitions for young children.

Through professional development and coaching, support is available in the following areas: appropriate teaching practices, curricular support, formative assessment and observational assessment, Pyramid Model practices, transition practices, school and out-of-school time continuation, and family engagement. The PreK-2 Professional Development Specialist also assists with the New Teacher Cadre training provided by ESU #1.

As of May 2024, 17 districts or programs have received support including administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, service providers, and childcare directors. In total, 131 participants have participated in training or services being offered. These supports were offered through professional development opportunities, coaching, leadership meetings, informational meetings, and classroom observations.

Early Childhood MTSS Facilitation

The Early Childhood MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) Implementation Facilitator for region 3 is Meagan Rodriguez. She supports leadership teams at a systems level (childcare programs, school districts, Head Start programs, and state and local agencies/organizations within the region) to implement the Pyramid Model Framework to ensure that a comprehensive array of early childhood supports that contribute to positive outcomes for programs, children and families.

As of April 2024, Meagan has added three new districts that have begun implementation, supported eight Early Childhood Leadership Teams, and facilitated four overviews in new districts.



title IC migrant education grant

Migrant Education Program

The ESU #1 Migrant Education Program (MEP) works to ensure that migrant children fully benefit from the same free public education provided to other children. To achieve this, the MEP provides supplemental educational and support services to help reduce disruptions to learning and other concerns that result from repeated moves and/or the migratory lifestyle.

Our focus areas are school readiness, math and English language arts instruction, and graduation or services to out-of-school youth. In addition to providing educational and support services, the MEP sponsors family literacy services for migrant children and their families through Family Engagement Meetings. During the most recent reporting year, our team achieved a number of successes for our program and the students we serve.

- ▶ Increased child count from 519 in the previous reporting year to 572.
- ▶ We delivered 54 instructional services.
- ▶ We delivered 213 support services.
- ▶ We have served 222 students in total so far this year.

Services provided to our students included, but were not limited to, assistance with obtaining health services; translation and interpretation services; in-home instruction to pre-K students, school-aged students and out-of-school youth; purchase and supply of learning materials; purchase of clothing; parent training related to math and reading at home; and referral services from agencies and organizations all over northeast Nebraska.

This Summer, we hosted a Newcomer Summer School Program, a Migrant Education Family Day, and Family Zoo day for our students and their parents.





Teaching and Learning Team

ESU #1 core services includes the Professional Services Team. The team collaborates to provide integrated support for partner districts and includes Teaching and Learning, Technology, Communications and Media. Core services provide the following:

- ▶ instructional training for administrators and teachers to ensure student learning and success;
- ▶ technology training and support for districts, administrators and teachers; and the provision of ancillary resources through the media center.

Teaching and Learning Team

Our Teaching and Learning Specialists make a concerted effort to assist districts at ESU #1, in local school buildings and virtually. They've hosted more than 3,800 total participants, including teachers and administrators, through more than 330 virtual and/or district on-site training events during the 2023-24 school year.

- ▶ **NSCAS Growth (Nebraska Student Centered Assessment System)** — As Nebraska continues to transition to the NSCAS Growth Assessment Model, which combines NWEA MAP Growth (Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress) and Nebraska's Statewide Summative Assessments, the ESU #1 Teaching and Learning Team provides support to area schools. Support includes assisting schools in reading and analyzing reports, providing schools with considerations on using reports for instructional planning and participating in training in order to meet the needs of area schools.
- ▶ **Principal Instructional Leadership Series** — Phil Warrick facilitated a two-day Principal Leadership Training on May 31 and June 1, 2023. In the 2023-24 school year, ESU #1 provided leadership training and support via the leadership cadre. In addition, Principal Zoom Groups, consisting of small groups of administrators, met monthly via Zoom for focused conversation supporting instructional leadership.
- ▶ **OnToCollege (John Baylor)** — ESU #1-area districts participated in OnToCollege during 2023-24. OnToCollege is an online resource that prepares juniors and seniors for the ACT Test. All participating districts have access to instructional videos, quizzes, sample tests, test-taking strategies and individual and aggregate results data.
- ▶ **MTSS** — ESU #1 provides training and coaching support to more than 26 schools. Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a systematic framework of providing high-quality instruction using evidence-based practices tailored to meet the academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs of all students across three tiers of support. Data-based decision making and problem solving assist in identifying supports, and classroom coaching ensures fidelity of implementation. An MTSS Google Site contains training resources, and reading intervention training and support is provided. LETRS professional development focuses on the science of reading and quality reading instruction at the elementary level.



Technology Team

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Instructional materials

ESU #1 provides a variety of instructional materials to school districts in Cedar, Dakota, Dixon, Knox, Thurston and Wayne counties. As a participant in IMat (a subgroup of Nebraska's Teaching & Learning with Technology affiliate group), ESU #1 secures digital rights to instructional video titles and services to benefit students. Other services include access to online content such as World Book Online.

Media center

The ESU #1 Media Center provides instructional assistance for schools in northeast Nebraska by supplying professional development resource materials, programs and inventory distribution for assistive technology and special education department inventory and equipment, as well as Real Care Baby checkout to area districts. The Media Center also fills individual orders of binding and laminating for administrators, teachers and staff at schools in the ESU #1 service area.

Technology infrastructure

The Technology Department has been instrumental in strengthening our schools' technology and infrastructure. We've streamlined the management of district firewalls, filtering, and other security tools, making them more efficient and secure. We've also expanded our support services to all ESU #1 districts, helping them improve and strengthen their own technology infrastructure.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of ESU #1, and the Technology Department is no exception. During the 2023-24 school year, we hosted eight LAN manager meetings. These meetings are crucial for fostering communication and planning between area districts, allowing them to tackle new technologies and emerging security threats together.

Our commitment to supporting schools extends to E-Rate needs. This year, we helped schools secure significant savings, totaling up to \$545,000 in funding requests.





special education services

ESU #1 Special Education staff are committed to meeting the diverse needs of the families, students and schools in our service area. Our expert service is focused on increasing student achievement through collaborative problem solving and relationship building. It is a privilege to serve the districts and families in the ESU #1 service area.

Audiology

The ESU #1 Audiology Department, consisting of one full-time certified/licensed audiologist and assisted by the speech/language pathologists, serves children with audiological screening, testing and follow-ups in their homes, schools and in a soundproof testing suite at the Wakefield office.

More than 13,000 screenings and follow-up tests were completed during the 2023-24 school year. In addition, the ESU #1 audiologist serves students involved in the Northeast Regional Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Deaf education

The ESU #1 Deaf Education Program provides direct and consultative services to students from birth to 21 years of age who have a verified hearing loss. The program offers in-services to staff; provides input at Individual Education Program (IEP), Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) and Student Assistance Team (SAT) meetings; assists schools with equipment needs students; and advocates for families and children who have a hearing loss.

During the 2023-24 school year, the ESU #1 Deaf Education Program consulted on and served over 35 children.

Early Childhood (ECSE) and Early Development Network (EDN)

The Early Childhood Special Education Program (ECSE) provides services to children with disabilities from birth through age 5 using a Primary Service Provider (PSP) approach.

Families receive support from one of four geographically based teams that minimally consist of an early childhood special education teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist, services coordinator and a speech language pathologist. In addition, the teams have access to a vision consultant, deaf educator, audiologist and school psychologist as needed. One team member is selected as a primary provider to work closely with each family while receiving support from an entire team of experts.

Together, the child's parents and the PSP develop child and family outcomes and goals. The PSP uses evidence-based intervention practices to work toward achieving those outcomes and goals. This approach focuses on relationships with families, building the capacity of the child's parents, caregivers, and/or preschool teachers and increasing opportunities for growth within the context of everyday routines and activities.

The Early Development Network (EDN) provides services and supports specifically for children birth to age 3 and their families. The goal of the EDN is to provide coordinated services for families as conveniently as possible. EDN Services Coordinators are instrumental in working with agencies in the community that provide services to make sure the child and family get the help they need.

During the 2023-24 school year, ECSE/EDN served more than 350 children by providing evaluations, consultations and/or direct services. Of the children served, ECSE and EDN also assisted with early childhood screenings, kindergarten roundups, teacher trainings and pre-service presentations at local colleges, community nights, school registration nights and pre-natal/post-natal health fairs.

Physical and occupational therapy

Three physical therapists and eight occupational therapists served more than 650 school-aged students and completed dozens of evaluations during the 2023-24 school year. Through consultations with students and their families, as well as school personnel, therapists work to enhance learning and participation, achieve physical milestones and to foster independence.

Program supervision

The primary function of the Special Education Director is to recruit qualified personnel to fulfill the requirements of contracting districts, in addition to the assignment, supervision and support of staff. A secondary function is to provide consultation to area districts on matters that include budget assistance, student placement, federal and state mandates and other related issues.

School psychology

The ESU #1 School Psychology Program provides services in consultation, assessment and intervention to assist educators, parents and other professionals in understanding the learning, social-emotional and behavioral needs of students, and in identifying effective strategies to help children be successful learners.

During the 2023-24 school year, ESU #1 school psychologists conducted nearly 500 academic and behavioral evaluations, provided individual and group counseling sessions to over 75 children and adolescents, completed over 50 behavioral intervention plans and/or functional behavioral assessments and collected data on over 3,500 students in the area of reading fluency, reading comprehension and math to help guide instructional decisions and changes.

ESU #1 psychologists continue to implement and encourage the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and the development of mental health supports.

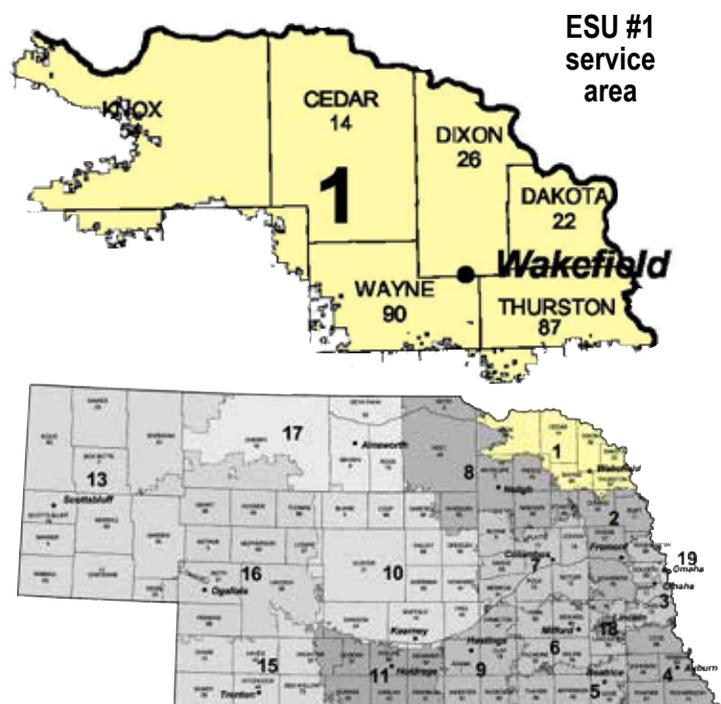
Speech/language

The ESU #1 Speech and Language Department consists of 24 speech and language pathologists (SLPs). The department focuses on a team approach, working together to provide assessment and intervention services to students from birth to 21 years of age.

The SLPs serve students in areas that adversely affect student's education, such as articulation, language, phonology, apraxia, voice, fluency, literacy readiness, hearing, social skills, autism and other disorders.

Assisted by the audiologist, they also participate in providing hearing screenings to all students in ESU #1 districts. They work as a team with local school districts in providing direct and consultative services, as well as advocate for families and children with speech, language and hearing disorders.

During the 2023-24 school year, the ESU #1 SLPs served more than 1,200 children.



Tower School Level III Program

Tower School in Wayne, Nebraska, was built during the fiscal year of 1992-93 and provides contracted services to school districts in an alternative setting and on an outreach basis. The Tower School program consists of two specialized classrooms with students placed in classrooms based on individual needs.

The services Tower School provides focus on applied behavior analysis, social skills, functional skills, daily living skills, job skills and transition skills and ultimately prepares students to be contributing members of society and experience success in a variety of settings.

During the 2023-24 school year, four certified teachers, along with other itinerant service providers and paraeducators, served a total of 28 students from 15 area school districts in-person at Tower School. In addition, Tower School staff provided outreach supports and services to 45 students from 14 area school districts.



Transition

The ESU#1 Transition Program helps students with disabilities, 14 or older, bridge the gap between school experiences and adult life, and helps students function as productively and independently as possible. More than 140 area students received transition services during the 2023-24 school year, either through Zoom or in-person visits, using transition assessments, mock and informational interviews, information about college programs and outside agency programming.

Our transition specialist made 150 in-person or Zoom visits to ESU #1 districts this school year, coaching teachers to assist students, parents and general ed teachers in completing formal and informal transition assessments to have data-based post-secondary transition goals, plans and activities.

ESU #1 hosted an Indicator 13 workday in February to assist districts with reviewing student transition plans.

Visual/orientation and mobility services

The ESU #1 Vision Program provides individualized learning environments, working to meet the unique needs of students with verified visual impairments.

Services provided include direct teaching in the areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum for students who are blind or visually impaired, including compensatory access skills, braille instruction, orientation and mobility, social interaction, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, sensory efficiency, career education, assistive technology and self-determination. Consultation, material preparation/adaptation, braille and large print textbook sourcing, functional vision assessments and orientation and mobility evaluations were also provided.

During the 2023-24 school year, two teachers of the visually impaired provided direct or consultative vision services and evaluated 40 students in 15 different school districts in ESU #1. Orientation & mobility services were provided to 2 students in 2 districts within the ESU #1 service area, as well as to 4 students from ESU #8.



*Our vision:
ESU #1 will model excellence by helping
schools increase educators' effectiveness and
student learning as a result of expert services.*

special education teams



Teams

Improving Learning for Children with Disabilities (ILCD)

According to 92 NAC 51 004.13, all districts must participate in an ongoing review of their special education programs using the Improving Learning for Children with Disabilities (ILCD) process. This process involves analyzing data, identifying a focus area for improvement, developing a Targeted Improvement Plan (TIP) and implementing the TIP. This matches the general education school accreditation process to emphasize the importance of ILCD being a part of — not separate from — overall school improvement. ESU #1 takes a collaborative approach to supporting district teams in every stage of the TIP process to ultimately have a positive impact on outcomes for students with disabilities.

Assistive Technology Team

The goal of the ESU #1 Assistive Technology Team is to provide assistance to districts in the determination of a student's need for assistive technology.

During the 2023-24 school year, team members provided services that included assistive technology consultations within individual districts they serve and short-term equipment loans.



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Team

Autism is a behaviorally defined disorder that is generally recognized by disturbances in communication, social interaction and perceptual organization or patterns of behavior. Diagnosed individuals may exhibit a variety of symptoms, ranging from mild to severe, and may display a wide range of skills and deficits. To date, the prevalence of autism has risen to 1 in 36 children.

The ASD team is composed of the region's ASD coordinator, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, early childhood specialists and special education teachers. The ASD team has focused their efforts on expanding the number of team members. The team is working toward having representation at every school district within ESU #1.

The ESU #1's ADOS team, administered the ADOS-2 assessment five times this year, three of which occurred in the South Sioux City school district.

The ASD team regularly convened regarding information of state updates and professional development. ASD team members continued to provide supports (i.e., evaluation and programming) to ESU #1 schools for those students who were demonstrating characteristics of autism.

Usher Syndrome Team

Usher syndrome is an inherited condition that affects both hearing and vision. Currently, there is no cure, which makes early identification paramount in providing appropriate educational programs. The main purpose of the team is to screen those children and youths who are hearing impaired and who fit the profile for Usher's for visual acuity difficulties.



Implementing an early intervention approach

ESU #1 provides early intervention and special education services according to what research indicates as best practice for children birth through age 5. Specifically, ESU #1:

- ▶ collaborates with area school districts to ensure that children who are eligible for early intervention services or children with disabilities and in need of special education and related services are identified and located;
- ▶ connects with families to share information about available services/resources and initiates relationships with families;
- ▶ seeks to understand child and family priorities by conducting an assessment called the Routines Based Interview (RBI);
- ▶ evaluates children's needs to determine eligibility for Early Intervention (age 0-2) or Special Education (age 3-5) services;
- ▶ develops and implements Individual Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) focused on child and family outcomes/goals;
- ▶ gives all eligible children and families a primary point of contact for support while also providing access to all disciplines utilizing a Primary Service Provider (PSP) approach to teaming;
- ▶ builds capacity of the adults interacting with the child most frequently by using coaching as the primary style of interaction; and
- ▶ provides evidence-based intervention, supports and services in natural learning environments (those places where children and their families live, learn, play and interact) to positively impact child growth, development and progress toward outcomes/goals.

ESU #1's approach to early intervention aligns with the Nebraska Department of Education's plan to address the federal initiative, Results Driven Accountability (RDA). The goal of RDA is to improve educational results, functional outcomes and overall demonstration of growth over time for all infants and toddlers with disabilities.



Improvement

agency improvement process

Our mission: Providing innovation, leadership and service

Our Professional Services Team (PST) and LEaD as 1 team (Lead, Explore, and Develop as 1) meet monthly to facilitate the agency improvement process and activities for ESU #1. The teams consist of administration, teaching and learning specialists, special education department coordinators, migrant education and technology personnel. These teams provide guidance, leadership and facilitation to keep continuous improvement activities moving forward.

During the monthly meetings, the teams review ESU, district and other stakeholder data, organize and plan all-staff days, and participate in annual data-retreat activities.

All ESU #1 employees support the continuous improvement process through department goal-setting, participation in all-staff days and data-retreat activities.

Our vision — *ESU #1 will model excellence by helping schools increase educators' effectiveness and student learning as a result of expert services* — and our mission — *Providing innovation, leadership and service* — guide our agency improvement efforts and keep our focus on the needs of our partner districts.