



Annual Report

2025-26

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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 Title I, Part C 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, 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.

Bill Heimann

Bill Heimann, ESU 1 Administrator

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Core Services

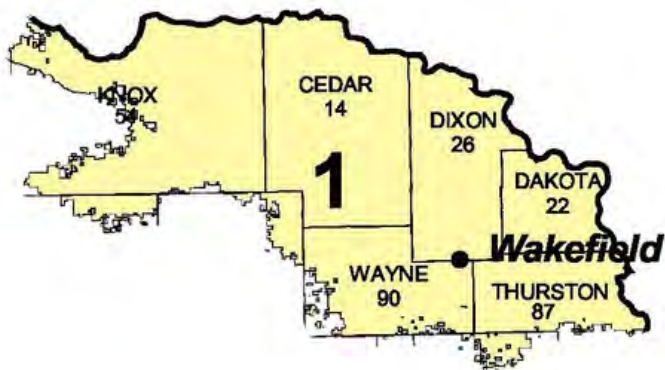
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Board of Directors

ESU 1 Board of Directors members are elected to four-year terms, one representative from each of the 9 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 2025-26 school year were:

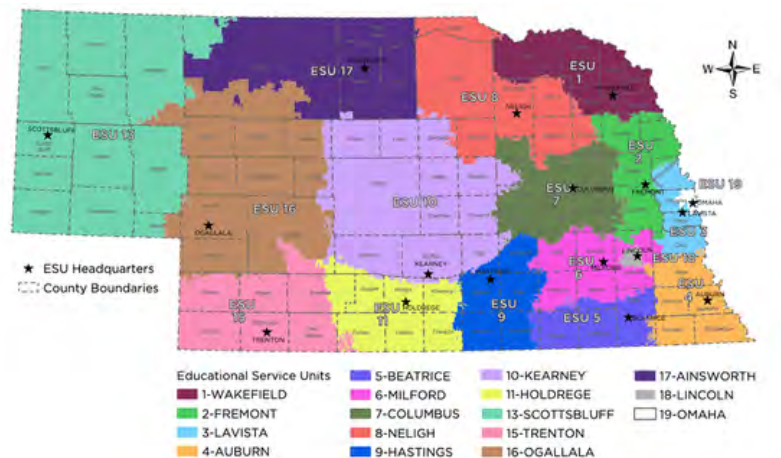
- Josiah Boneschans, Secretary (District 1)
- Amy Brand (District 2)
- Jim Gunsolley (District 3)
- Bob Hayes (District 4)
- Susan Strahm, Vice President (District 5)
- Jean Dorcey (District 6)
- Dr. Kim Snyder (District 7)
- Adrian (AJ) Johnson, President (District 8)
- Tabitha Gilsdorf (District 9)

Advisory 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 2025-26 school year were:

- Mark Lenihan (Wayne Co.)
- Josh Weber (Knox Co.)
- Mike Pattee (Dixon Co.)
- Joey Lefdal (Dakota Co.)
- Daryl Schrunk (Cedar Co.)
- Kamau Turner (Thurston Co.)



About 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 10,898 students and 1,064 (FTE) teachers. Moreover, the ESU 1 service area includes three Native American reservations: the Santee, Winnebago and Omaha.

Budget

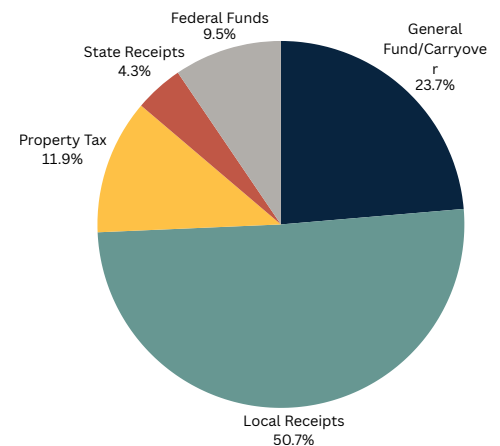
Each ESU is financed through a combination of property tax funds, state funds and service contracts with individual school districts.

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	\$10,709,177
Property Tax	\$2,515,184
State Receipts	\$907,369
Federal Funds	\$2,006,622

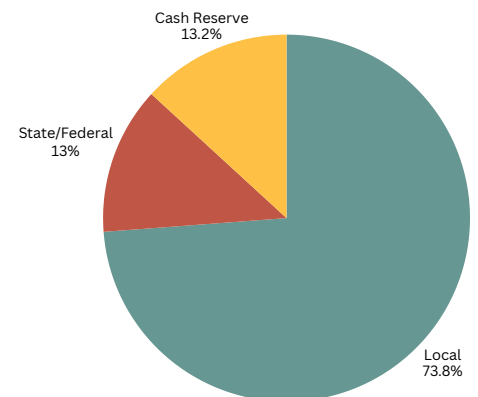
TOTAL: \$21,138,352



Budgeted Expenditures

Local	\$15,601,230
State/Federal	\$2,787,122
Cash Reserve	\$2,750,000

TOTAL: \$21,138,352





**“Every student can learn,
just not on the same day
or in the same way.”**

—GEORGE EVANS

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 prepare students to be contributing members of society and experience success in a variety of settings.

During the 2025-26 school year, four certified teachers, along with other itinerant service providers and para-educators, served a total of 27 students from 18 area school districts in person at Tower School. In addition, Tower School staff provided outreach supports and services to 66 students from 16 area school districts.



Title I, Part C Education Program

The ESU 1 Title I, Part C Education Program works to ensure migrant children have access to the same educational opportunities as other students. The program provides supplemental educational and support services to reduce barriers to learning caused by frequent moves and the challenges of a migratory lifestyle.



The program focuses on school readiness, math and English language arts instruction, graduation support and services for out-of-school youth. Title I, Part C also provides family literacy opportunities through Family Engagement Meetings to help families support their children's learning.

During the 2025-26 reporting year, our team provided services to migrant students and families throughout northeast Nebraska. Program highlights include:

- Child count was 500 as of 5/31/2026.
- We served 469 students during the year.
- We delivered 82 instructional services.
- We delivered 468 support services.

Services provided included academic instruction, in-home support, learning materials, health service assistance, translation and interpretation services, clothing assistance, parent education focused on math and reading at home and referrals to community agencies and organizations.

Through partnerships with schools, families and communities, Title I, Part C continues to support migrant students by helping them overcome barriers and succeed academically.



**"A child without education is
like a bird without wings."**

—TIBETAN PROVERB

Early Learning Connection and Professional Development Grants

Northern Early Learning Connection Partnership

Nebraska's Early Learning Connection (ELC) is an integrated system of early childhood professional development. Its mission is to build an effective, coordinated system for preparing, supporting and recognizing the early childhood care and education workforce in order to provide high-quality programs for Nebraska's young children and their families. It was designed to support the career and professional development of all Nebraska early childhood educators who provide care and education programming and services for young children birth through age eight.

The Northern Region ELC supports three Educational Service Units (ESU 1, ESU 8, ESU 17), four Planning Region Teams (1, 8, 17, 29) and 16 counties: Antelope, Boyd, Brown, Cedar, Cherry, Dakota, Dixon, Holt, Keya Paha, Knox, Madison, Pierce, Rock, Stanton, Thurston and Wayne.

According to the Nebraska Early Childhood Record System, there were 2,963 participants who attended 230 events in the Northern Region from January 2025 to January 2026. Participants at the Northern Region events came from 79 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. The Early Childhood monthly newsletter distributed by the ELC reaches 928 early childhood professionals. Additionally, the Northern ELC partnership supported five early childhood conferences. These in-person professional development events across the Northern Region had a total of 381 participants during 2025.



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 eight) within family childcare homes, centers and preschool programs. Services provided include one-on-one coaching sessions, small-group coaching sessions and large-group coach cadre meetings.

Small-group coaching participation increased by 55%, and one-on-one coaching participation increased by 37.5% from the previous year.

Four Northern Region Coach Cadre meetings provided networking, Domain 4 activities focused on assessing the coaching partnership, guest speakers, and shared resources and support. In response to needs identified by coaches, a four-session Wellness Education Series was developed, along with learning on the Mondo Method with Dr. Alexa Yunes-Koch to strengthen coaches' ability to support educators around challenging behaviors. A book study of *The DOSE Effect* extended this neuroscience-based learning.

In collaboration with ELC-CC consultants statewide, coaches were also offered After Hours Cadre meetings, Coaching to Success, Domain training and an *Onward* book club. Ongoing evaluations were added to gather timely feedback and make responsive changes to coaching supports and professional learning.

Birth to Five Professional Development Specialist

Kary Pfeil, Birth to Five Professional Development Specialist, provides targeted support to school districts and early childhood community programs to strengthen instructional quality, developmentally appropriate practices and assessment for children from birth to age five.

Through ongoing professional development and individualized coaching, support has been offered in the areas of effective teaching practices, curriculum implementation, formative and observational assessment, and the integration of Tier 1 and Tier 2 strategies. In addition, Kary supports the Getting Ready process through fidelity and internal coaching.



As of August 2026, services have been extended to 16 districts and programs, reaching a diverse group of professionals including administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, service providers, childcare providers and directors.

A total of 139 participants have engaged in training or received direct support. These services have been delivered through professional development sessions, coaching, informational meetings and classroom observations, contributing to high-quality early childhood education across the region.

Core Services

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

The Teaching and Learning Team makes concerted efforts to assist districts at ESU 1, in local school buildings and virtually. They've hosted more than 7,523 attendees, including teachers and administrators, through more than 458 virtual and/or district on-site training events during the 2025-26 school year.

- **Assessment Support (NSCAS, ACT, MAP, AIMSweb)** — Throughout the 2025-26 school year, the ESU 1 Teaching and Learning Team provided assessment support for area schools relating to NSCAS (Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System), ACT, AIMSweb and MAP Growth. In addition, the ESU 1 Teaching and Learning Team assisted schools in reading and analyzing reports, provided schools with considerations on using reports for instructional planning and participated in training in order to meet the needs of area schools.
- **ESU 1 Instructional Leadership Series** — Dr. Phil Warrick facilitated a two-day Instructional Leadership Training on May 27-28, 2026. In the 2025-26 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 for focused conversation supporting instructional leadership.
- **OnToCollege** — OnToCollege is an online resource that prepares juniors and seniors for the ACT Test. All ESU 1-area districts have access to instructional videos, quizzes, sample tests, test-taking strategies and individual and aggregate results data.
- **New Teacher Cadre & Strategies for Successful Teaching** — ESU 1 provided comprehensive support for teachers through targeted professional learning and instructional coaching initiatives. The New Teacher Cadre provided opportunities for educators to develop skills in classroom management, instructional technology, establishing routines and procedures, self-care and professional growth planning. In addition, Strategies for Successful Teaching, launched in 2025-26, was a new support system focused on effective classroom management, instructional planning for all learners and assessment practices, with the goal of increasing educator effectiveness and improving student achievement through ongoing modeling and instructional support.
- **Nebraska's Statewide Literacy Project and Regional Literacy Coaches** — As part of the Nebraska Statewide Literacy Project in conjunction with the Nebraska Department of Education's Strategic Plan, Regional Literacy Coaches provide sustained support and build the capacity of Nebraska educators in the science of reading. Within the rollout of the two-phase Regional Literacy Coach Plan (beginning Spring of 2025), ESU 1 was included in Phase 1 and has been a leader in the development of coaching systems of support, facilitation of collaborative professional learning and continued implementation of classroom coaching.

Technology Infrastructure

The Technology Department continued to strengthen technology systems and infrastructure across ESU 1 districts. Support was provided for district network, security, filtering, firewall and infrastructure needs, along with ongoing improvements to shared tools and services that help schools operate safely and efficiently.

During the 2025-26 school year, district-focused projects included work in network reliability, cybersecurity readiness, identity and access management, device and system support, artificial intelligence and shared infrastructure services. ESU 1 also provided AI guidance and training to help educators and district staff use these tools responsibly for their own work and in support of student learning.

Collaboration remained a key part of this work. The Technology Department hosted six LAN manager meetings, giving district technology leaders opportunities to share information, discuss emerging technologies and coordinate responses to evolving cybersecurity threats.

Tech Department support also extended to E-Rate planning and filing, with districts assisted in funding requests totaling more than \$188,000 for critical technology and connectivity needs.



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 through Innovation 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 RealCare Baby checkout to area districts. The Media Center also fills individual orders for binding and laminating for administrators, teachers and staff at schools in the ESU 1 service area.



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 and licensed audiologist, works in collaboration with speech-language pathologists to provide audiological screenings and evaluations to children in their schools and at a soundproof testing suite at the Wakefield office.

More than 12,000 screenings and evaluations were completed during the 2025-26 school year.

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 Individualized Education Program (IEP), Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) and Student Assistance Team (SAT) meetings; assists schools with equipment needs for students; and advocates for families and children who have a hearing loss.

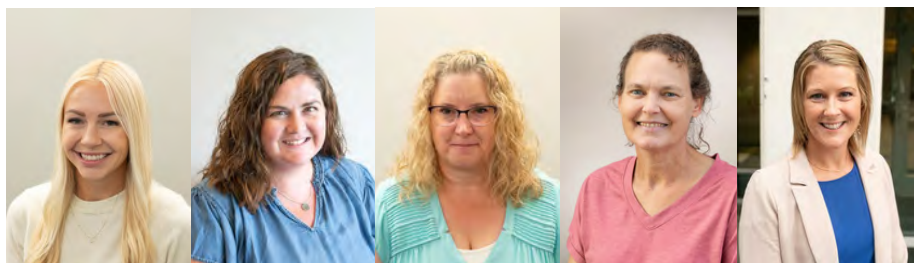
During the 2025-26 school year, the ESU 1 Deaf Education Program consulted on or provided services to approximately 54 children.

Vision/Orientation & 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 2025-26 school year, two teachers of the visually impaired provided direct or consultative vision services and evaluated 36 students in 14 different school districts in ESU 1. Orientation & mobility services were provided to 5 students in 3 districts within the ESU 1 service area, as well as to 2 students from ESU 8.



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

—HELEN KELLER

Transition

The ESU 1 Transition Program supports students with disabilities ages 14 and older as they prepare for life after high school through career exploration, postsecondary planning, employment readiness and connections to community resources.

This year, ESU 1 received more than \$10,000 in grant funding to support transition programming, including the first-ever Job Expo at Wayne State College. More than 120 students registered to attend and connected with over 20 businesses to explore career pathways and participate in hands-on activities designed to build employment skills. ESU 1 also hosted an Agency Fair to help students and families learn about services and supports available after high school and make connections with agencies that may assist them in the future. In addition, district teams participated in the annual Indicator 13 Workday to strengthen transition planning and compliance.

Through collaboration with schools, businesses, agencies and families, the ESU 1 Transition Program continues to expand opportunities and support successful transitions to education, employment and independent living.

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 2025-26 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 foster independence.



**“Education is the most powerful weapon
which you can use to change the world.”**

—NELSON MANDELA

**“Education breeds confidence.
Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace.”**
—CONFUCIUS



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 2025-26 school year, ESU 1 school psychologists conducted nearly 500 academic and behavioral evaluations, provided individual and group counseling sessions to over 100 children and adolescents, completed over 50 behavioral intervention plans and/or functional behavioral assessments and collected data on over 3,500 students in the areas 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 30 Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) who collaborate to provide comprehensive assessment, intervention and consultation services for children and young adults from birth through age 21. The department is committed to a team-based approach, partnering with families, educators and early childhood programs to support communication development and educational success.

ESU 1 SLPs provide direct therapy and consultation services in areas including articulation, language, voice, fluency, hearing, phonology, childhood apraxia of speech, literacy readiness, social communication/pragmatics, autism spectrum disorder and other communication-related disorders. They serve as advocates for children and families, helping ensure access to appropriate services and educational opportunities. In collaboration with the ESU 1 audiologist, the department also assists in providing hearing screenings for students throughout ESU 1 member districts.

During the 2025-26 school year, the ESU 1 Speech and Language Department provided services to more than 1,200 children across the region, making a meaningful impact on communication, learning and overall student success.





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

The Early Childhood Special Education Program (ECSE) provides services to children with disabilities from birth through age five 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 2025-26 school year, ECSE/EDN served more than 327 children by providing evaluations, consultations and/or direct services. 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 prenatal/postnatal health fairs.

Special Education Teams

Improving Learning for Children with Disabilities (ILCD)

According to 92 NAC 51.004.13, all Nebraska school districts participate in an ongoing review of their special education programs through the Improving Learning for Children with Disabilities (ILCD) process. As part of Nebraska's continuous improvement framework, district teams analyze data, identify priority areas for improvement, determine measurable goals and implement a Targeted Improvement Plan (TIP) designed to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Consistent with Nebraska's statewide focus on literacy, districts engage in continuous improvement efforts centered on core evidence-based instructional practices, including systematic and explicit instruction, quality student practice and response opportunities, corrective and constructive feedback, and instruction adjusted using data. The TIP process is aligned with district accreditation, MTSS and other school improvement initiatives to ensure a coordinated approach to improving student achievement. ESU 1 partners with district leadership teams throughout the process by providing technical assistance, data support, professional learning and implementation coaching to support successful implementation and improved student outcomes.

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 2025-26 school year, team members provided services that included assistive technology consultations within individual districts they serve and short-term equipment loans.

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 team's main purpose is to screen for visual acuity difficulties in children and youths who have hearing loss and fit the profile for Usher syndrome.

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 31 children.

The ASD team is composed of the region's ASD coordinator, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, early childhood specialists and special education teachers. The ASD team has focused its 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 ADOS team administered the ADOS-2 assessment ten times this year, four of which occurred in the South Sioux City school district.

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

Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (Birth–Age Five)

ESU 1 provides early intervention and early childhood special education services for children birth through age five using evidence-based practices that support positive outcomes for children and families.

In collaboration with area school districts and community partners, ESU 1 assists with ChildFind activities to identify and serve eligible children as early as possible.

Services are grounded in Nebraska's Routines Based Early Intervention (RBEI) framework and emphasize strong partnerships with families.

Through the use of routines-based assessment and planning, Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs), Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Primary Service Provider (PSP) teaming and coaching practices, ESU 1 supports families in building the skills and confidence needed to promote their child's learning and development during everyday activities and routines.

Intervention and supports are provided in natural learning environments whenever appropriate, allowing children to learn and practice skills where they live, learn, play and interact with others.

This approach aligns with Nebraska Department of Education priorities focused on improving child outcomes, strengthening family capacity, increasing meaningful participation in inclusive settings and ensuring positive results for young children with disabilities.

This work supports Nebraska's implementation of federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements and Results Driven Accountability (RDA) efforts focused on improving outcomes for infants, toddlers, preschool children and their families.

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, Title I, Part C 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.