



Legislative Report

Reporting on Nebraska Revised Statute

§ 79-2607

September 2025

I. Introduction

Pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statute (NRS) §79 2607, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) is required to develop and implement a professional learning system designed to provide sustained professional learning in evidence-based reading instruction. This system is intended for teachers who work with children from age four through third grade in approved or accredited schools, as well as teachers employed by early childhood education programs approved by the State Board of Education. In addition to professional learning, the system must include information and strategies to help teachers support children and families in working with local family literacy centers, strengthen home and family literacy programs, and improve reading instruction for young learners.

Approved or accredited elementary schools and early childhood education programs are responsible for ensuring that teachers of children from age four through third grade are aware of the professional learning system and ensure that these teachers receive adequate training in evidence-based reading instruction so they are equipped to effectively teach reading.

To further support classroom practice, the NDE is directed to collaborate with Educational Service Units (ESUs) to provide regional literacy coaches to elementary schools. These coaches offer job-embedded professional learning for teachers in kindergarten through third grade, with a specific focus on evidence-based reading instruction.

The statute also requires that, on or before September 30 of each year, the Commissioner of Education submit an electronic report to the Clerk of the Legislature. This report must address the status and use of the professional learning system as implemented across the state. This initial report reflects the planning and activities that have taken place since the enactment of NRS §79-2607 in April of 2024.

II. Development of the Nebraska Literacy Project

To fulfill the requirements of NRS §79-2607, the NDE launched the Nebraska Literacy Project, built upon five guiding tenets. Each tenet is anchored in statute or best practice and provides a framework for statewide collaboration in literacy. Dedicated leadership teams oversee the tenets, setting goals, identifying strategies, and tracking progress. Since July 1, 2024, these teams have convened weekly with Commissioner Maher and other agency leaders to align efforts, share updates, and ensure coordinated action amongst stakeholders. The Nebraska State Board of Education approved the Nebraska Literacy Project Plan (Appendix A) on February 6, 2025. A summary of each tenet follows.

Tenet 1: Professional Learning System

Description

High quality professional development for all educators who teach literacy for students age 4 through 3rd grade grounded in the science of reading to ensure that educators have skills in evidence-based instructional practices.

Goal

Ensure all Nebraska educators who teach students age 4 through 3rd grade are implementing evidence-based literacy instruction grounded in the science of reading.

Major Accomplishments

- **Convened the Nebraska Literacy Advisory Panel.**
 - Developed the *Science of Reading Professional Learning Rubric* (Appendix B), which specifies the components required for teachers to be adequately trained in evidence-based reading instruction.
- **Identified list of approved providers to meet the requirements of NRS §79-2607.**
 - Through a Request for Information (RFI) process, submissions from professional learning providers were evaluated, resulting in 38 providers who meet the standards outlined in the Science of Reading Professional Learning Rubric, benefitting Nebraska schools by helping to ensure quality and consistency in professional learning.
- **Assessed professional learning across Educational Service Units (ESUs).**
 - Conducted an initial survey to evaluate the extent of professional learning opportunities in evidence-based literacy instruction across each ESU region.
 - Followed up with individual meetings to identify local needs, priorities, and opportunities.
- **Supported literacy-focused professional learning in higher education.**
 - Partnered with the University of Nebraska-Omaha, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and University of Nebraska-Kearney to expand opportunities for educator training in evidence-based literacy practices.
- **Initiated efforts to streamline reading screener assessments.**
 - Began reducing the number of approved screeners under the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act to address inconsistencies and increase alignment in identifying students needing additional reading support.

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Balancing flexibility with consistency.** With a large number of accredited elementary schools and early childhood education programs approved by the State Board of Education across Nebraska, sites need flexibility to structure professional learning in ways that fit their local contexts. At the same time, ensuring that every teacher of students age 4 through 3rd grade receives high-quality, evidence-based training remains a challenge. The Science of Reading Professional Learning Rubric is being used to provide statewide consistency while allowing for local adaptability.

- **Limited dedicated funding.** State funding was specifically allocated for regional literacy coaches, rather than the broader professional learning system. As a result, the system must honor and integrate training that has already occurred, provided it aligns with the criteria established by the Science of Reading Professional Learning Rubric.

Next steps

- Beginning in 2026, expand the annual data collection currently known as, “NRS §79-11, 157.01” to include information on the number of teachers of children age four through 3rd grade in approved or accredited schools, as well as teachers employed by early childhood education programs approved by the State Board of Education who have been adequately trained in evidence-based reading instruction.
- Continue to communicate to approved or accredited schools and early childhood education programs approved by the State Board of Education of their obligation under Nebraska Revised Statute §79-2607 to ensure teachers are aware of the professional learning system and are adequately trained.

Tenet 2: Curriculum and Teacher Preparation Aligned to Evidence-based Reading Instruction

Description

Sustained teacher preparation programs and PreK-3 curriculum, instruction, and assessment grounded in the science of reading using high-quality materials.

Goal

Ensure that Nebraska schools and Nebraska educator preparation programs provide curriculum, instruction, and materials aligned with evidence-based practice instruction for English Language Arts.

Major Accomplishments

- **Implemented a revision of Rule 20, Regulations for the Approval of Teacher Education Programs.** With the revision of Rule 20 on June 2, 2024, Nebraska Educator Preparation programs are expected to include science of reading instructional practices for teacher candidates.
- **Developed and issued Rule 20 Guidance: 5.02H Instructional Strategies (Appendix C).** This guidance outlines the essential concepts and principles that teacher candidates must master upon entering the profession. It also provides educator preparation programs with a course-audit tool and a curated list of high-quality instructional materials to strengthen coursework alignment.
- **Enhanced collaboration with Nebraska’s 16 educator preparation programs.** The NDE established stronger communication channels to support integration of science of reading instructional practices into preparation programs. These partnerships have proven highly productive, fostering shared efforts to ensure teacher candidates are well prepared to deliver effective reading instruction.

- **Updated Nebraska's Instructional Materials Professional Development (IMPD) Network.** The IMPD Network works to promote the consistent use of high-quality instructional materials across all grades and subject areas to help support access to rigorous content, improve student learning, and provide teachers with effective tools for instruction.

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Lack of clarity in requirements.** While Rule 20 (Regulations for the Approval of Teacher Education Programs) requires teacher candidates to receive course content in the science of reading, it does not specify what that content must include or how compliance will be evaluated.
- **Limited detail in course syllabi.** Course syllabi, the primary documents used to describe program content, often provide insufficient detail to show how the science of reading is integrated within instruction.
- **Insufficient focus on curriculum literacy.** A review of syllabi suggests that many educator preparation programs prioritize unit and lesson planning over curriculum literacy. In addition, higher education faculty report limited access to high-quality instructional materials to use with teacher candidates.

Next Steps

- Continue to collaborate with Educator Preparation Programs to refine Rule 20 implementation guides and establish an appropriate compliance structure, a process that will require time, support, and continued communication and accountability.
- Develop a strategy for aligning the Rule 20 requirements with other NDE initiatives, including promoting and supporting the use of high-quality instructional materials. Future planned updates to Rule 20 will provide additional opportunities to strengthen collaborative partnerships with educator preparation programs.

Tenet 3: Regional Literacy Coaches

Description

Established a network of literacy coaches across the state who are trained in the science of reading and evidence-based instructional practices. This network of coaches will provide sustained support services to Nebraska schools. This tenet was made possible through the state appropriation of \$1.85 million through 2027.

Goal

Develop a network of Regional Literacy Coaches who will provide sustained, job-embedded training and support for evidence-based reading instruction for school system leadership teams across the state.

Major Accomplishments

- **Launched Regional Literacy Coach (RLC) Network**
 - Phase I coaches hired across 7 Educational Service Units (ESUs), targeting regions with the lowest-performing 3rd grade Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) English Language Arts (ELA) scores, in each Nebraska Multi-Tiered System of Support (NeMTSS) region, along with ESU 18 (Lincoln Public Schools), and ESU 19 (Omaha Public Schools).
 - Phase II recruitment is underway, with 13 coaches currently serving in the Network (Appendix D).
- **Developed Statewide Training System**
 - Established HEROES (Helping to Elevate Reading Outcomes for Every Student) summer training for 2025 and 2026. In partnership with the AIM Institute, delivered professional learning to 200 public and nonpublic educators, using a seat-allocation system to ensure equitable participation.
- **Created Systems and Structures for Implementation**
 - Initiated the Regional Literacy Coach Roadshow model, with each Nebraska Multi-Tiered System of Support (NeMTSS) region hosting five professional learning sessions based on the Florida Center for Reading Research Literacy Coaching modules. Target audiences include district and teacher leaders
 - Continued development of a statewide literacy coaching model to expand capacity and ensure consistent implementation across regions.

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Vacancies in certain regions.** Phase II ESUs will not have their staff fully onboarded until the end of school year 2025-2026. Phase I coaches are stretched to not only meet the needs in their own ESU, but to provide support to the other ESUs not in Phase I who fall within their NeMTSS region.
- **Limited funding for coach professional development and hiring.** While state funding was provided to hire regional literacy coaches, the funding was not sufficient to support a full-time position in every ESU. Some ESUs chose to reallocate funds from other areas to support full-time literacy coach positions, while others supported partial positions or combined the role with additional duties beyond literacy coaching.
- **Variability across ESUs.** Differences in capacity, staffing, and interpretation of allowable activities and expenses have led to inconsistencies in implementation. Regional Literacy Coaches and Tenet 3 leads have made this a priority for targeted support to ensure a strong focus on alignment.
- **Uncertain long-term sustainability.** Current funding expires in June of 2027, creating uncertainty about long-term stability and viability of the coaching model.

Next Steps

- Complete Phase II hiring to achieve statewide coverage.
- Expand training and professional learning opportunities for coaches and school participants.
- Finalize onboarding structures to ensure consistent preparation of new RLCs.

- Scale the *Roadshow* model across all regions.
- Conduct evaluations to measure impact and inform improvements with a goal of long-term sustainability.

Tenet 4: Data Collections to Evaluate Effectiveness

Description

Data collections measuring the effectiveness of literacy initiatives and implementation of professional development in evidence-based reading.

Goal

Develop comprehensive data collections to measure the effectiveness of professional development and monitor improvement trends in student reading outcomes.

Major Accomplishments

- **Conducted Pilot Site Analysis:** In 2024, the NDE leveraged remaining pandemic relief funds to establish pilot professional development programs through UNO, UNL, and UNK focused on the science of reading. One major accomplishment in Tenet 4 was the review of early results from pilot sites to assess the efficacy of professional learning initiatives and return on investment.
- **Analyzed Educator Preparation Data:** The NDE annually analyzes the preparedness for strong instructional strategies for first and third year teachers through a self-assessment and corresponding assessment from their school leaders. This year, the NDE included questions on the science of reading to gauge teachers' understanding and implementation of effective reading instruction. The tenet 4 team also examined 1st and 3rd Third-Year Teacher Surveys to establish baseline data on the relationship between educator preparation programs and the impact of the integration of the science of reading in preparation coursework.
- **Reviewed Data Landscape:** Conducted an inventory of existing and potential data sources to provide a clearer picture of progress in reading achievement of Nebraska students.
- **Strengthened Legislative Reporting:** NDE strengthened data collection processes and contributed to the drafting of the NRS 79-11,157 report to the Legislature.
- **Designed District Practice Study:** NDE designed a study to examine district-level practices for developing student individualized reading improvement plans.

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Limitations in Reporting Requirements** - Some key metrics that could provide valuable insight into student outcomes and program effectiveness are not currently required to be reported to the NDE. For example, the absence of student-level data from the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act Reading Screener creates gaps that limit the ability to build a comprehensive, statewide picture of early literacy.

- **Timeliness of Data** - Many of the measures are lagging indicators—such as Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) scores—and are only available post-administration. The NDE is looking at more timely, predictive measures to support real-time decision making and changing course when and if necessary.
- **Classroom Level Implementation Data** - Similarly, while the NDE has input data (e.g., how many teachers or leaders were trained in a particular professional learning) and outcome data (e.g. student achievement data), the missing link is how the science of reading is being implemented in the classroom. The NDE is working to implement a tool which can be consistently applied to observe, coach, and monitor the implementation and impact of all professional learning.

Next Steps

- Continue identifying and validating the most meaningful metrics to measure the effectiveness and impact of each tenet.
- Coordinate Nebraska Literacy Project data collections with other statewide literacy initiatives—such as the Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant and Sherwood Foundation-supported leadership development—to ensure coherence and maximum impact.

Tenet 5: Family Literacy and Pre-K Programs

Description

Development of resources to assist families in accessing local family literacy centers, existing community literacy initiatives, and pre-kindergarten programs in order to strengthen literacy and language development for young children so they begin kindergarten ready to thrive.

Goal

Collaborate with existing community literacy initiatives and pre-kindergarten programs designed to strengthen literacy and language development for young children so children start kindergarten ready to thrive.

Major Accomplishments

- **Established a Family Literacy Advisory Committee (January 2025).** The committee includes representatives from schools, libraries, Educational Service Units, literacy associations, early childhood education programs, and community partners. The Advisory Committee has met monthly since its inception to guide statewide family literacy initiatives.
- **Developed a Family Literacy Implementation Toolkit for schools.** The [Toolkit](#) (Appendix E) enables schools to self-assess current family literacy activities and access resources to implement evidence-based practices. Hosted on the NDE Canvas platform, it provides a user-friendly space for schools to share challenges and successes.

- **Created a Family Literacy Resource Site.** This online catalog centralizes literacy resources for families and community organizations seeking guidance and support.

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Stakeholder Engagement Challenges** - Maintaining consistent engagement and timely contributions from Family Literacy Advisory Committee members remains an ongoing priority to ensure broad stakeholder participation.

Next Steps

- Increase awareness and accessibility of the new digital platform among families, schools, and community partners to maximize adoption.
- Monitor and evaluate resource usage by tracking website traffic and Implementation Toolkit utilization to inform ongoing improvements and measure impact.

III. Conclusion

Much of the work related to Nebraska Revised Statute §79-2607 during the reporting period 2024-2025 has focused on building the infrastructure of the tenet system, establishing a framework that both aligns with statutory requirements and fosters statewide collaboration in literacy. A central priority has been creating coherence with other statewide initiatives—including the Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) federal grant, Rule 20, and Nebraska Revised Statute §79-11,157.01—to ensure efforts are coordinated and aligned, resources are maximized, and progress toward improved literacy outcomes is accelerated across Nebraska.

Appendix A- Nebraska Literacy Project Plan and Overview

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HAjn6JZ0Tw1YAtqj5n5zXcszHc-JGiUA/view?usp=sharing>

Appendix B-Nebraska Literacy Project Professional Learning Rubric

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LNbJbglNnCEdYxy61cFFcS6-l7t9aUv6/view?usp=sharing>

Appendix C-Rule 20 Guidance_5.02H Instructional Strategies

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bBNOF6ZtXQ_Cg4NHKYknhx3qlCKfKg4P/view?usp=sharing

Appendix D-Regional Literacy Coaches Model

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ynmdJ8D3Nkg1ZbTLEmNk6RUG-SVM_bNI/view?usp=sharing

Appendix E- Family Literacy Implementation Toolkit

<https://nebraska.instructure.com/courses/735>