



TO: Clerk of the Legislature  
FROM: Dr. Brian L. Maher, Commissioner of Education  
SUBJECT: Reading Improvement Act Collection Legislative Report  
DATE: September 1, 2026

To whom it may concern:

This report is submitted pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statutes §79-11,157.01 and §79-2607, which together require the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to collect and report annual information related to reading disability identification across grade levels, early literacy intervention, and professional learning. This is the third annual report submitted under §79-11,157.01 and the first year in which teachers trained data collected under §79-2607 has been incorporated. Data reflects the 2025-2026 reporting period.

Through three years of reporting under §79-11,157.01, Nebraska has continued to build toward a more consistent early literacy system grounded in evidence-based practices, with the transition to a single statewide screener marking a significant step in that direction. Regarding students evaluated for a specific learning disability in reading, the data provides a picture of evaluation patterns across Nebraska, though it has limitations that are important to understand before drawing conclusions. The addition of teachers trained data under §79-2607 connects student identification and intervention outcomes to the professional learning infrastructure that supports them. Nebraska's decision to transition to a single statewide approved assessment for K-3 reading screening, DIBELS 8th Edition, with required implementation beginning in 2027-2028, reflects NDE's commitment to the consistency and coherence that stronger literacy outcomes require.

Should you have any questions about the contents of this report, please reach out to Jamie Cook, Literacy Officer at [Jamie.cook@nebraska.gov](mailto:Jamie.cook@nebraska.gov).

Sincerely,

Brian L. Maher, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Education

# Reporting on Nebraska Revised Statute § 79-11,157.01

## I. Introduction

Pursuant to [Nebraska Revised Statute \(NRS\) §79 -11,157.01](#), on or before July 1 of each year, each school district shall provide to the State Department of Education, information relating to dyslexia. Such information shall include, but not be limited to, the number of students in each public school in such district:

- (a) 'Tested'<sup>1</sup> for a specific learning disability (SLD) in the area of reading, including tests that identify characteristics of dyslexia and the results of such tests.
- (b) Identified as having a reading issue, including dyslexia, pursuant to the assessment administered under the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act (NRIA); and
- (c) Identified as described in subdivision (b) of this subsection that have shown growth on the measure used to identify the reading issue.

## II. Background

To further inform reading improvement in Nebraska, districts are required to submit the following additional data elements related to the NRIA:

- the number of students in each public school evaluated (tested) for a SLD in the area of reading.
  - This should include children and students assessed with instruments that identify the characteristics of dyslexia.
- the results of the evaluation (testing) to determine eligibility under the category of SLD in the area of reading.
- the number of K-3 students identified as having a reading deficiency according to assessments administered under the requirements of the [Nebraska Reading Improvement Act](#), Nebraska Revised Statute §§79-2601 to 79-2607; and
- the NRIA assessment(s) used for grades K, 1, 2, and 3;
- the number of K-3 students:
  - who met or exceeded the **spring** NRIA Approved Assessment threshold and do not require an Individual Reading Improvement Plan (IRIP);
  - who were assessed in the **spring** using an NRIA Approved Assessment;
  - who did not receive the **spring** NRIA Approved Assessment;
  - who were enrolled at the time of **spring** NRIA Approved Assessment;
  - who made growth per requirements of the NRIA;
  - who exited an IRIP during the school year by meeting the NRIA Approved Assessment thresholds in the winter and/or spring assessment period.

This year's data reflects the July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, reporting period. School building level data was collected regarding kindergarten through third grade students screened per the NRIA and students ages three to 21 who were evaluated (tested) for a SLD in reading, since the law requires such reporting.

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<sup>1</sup>The word "tested" is used in the state statute; however, in terms of determining eligibility for special education, students are evaluated using multidisciplinary tools and not tested.

### III. Data

| Statewide Data                                                                               |                                                                                                                     |                                                                                 |                                                                                |                                                                 |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The number of students identified as having a reading deficiency and placed on an IRIP (K-3) |                                                                                                                     |                                                                                 |                                                                                |                                                                 | Total Number of Students: 25,211                                                     |                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                              | The number of students who met or exceeded the spring NRIA Approved Assessment threshold and do not require an IRIP | The number of students assessed in the spring using an NRIA Approved Assessment | The number of students who did not receive the spring NRIA Approved Assessment | Total enrollment at the time of spring NRIA Approved Assessment | The number of students that made growth on the NRIA Approved Assessment <sup>2</sup> | The number of students who exited an IRIP during the school year by meeting the NRIA threshold in the winter and/or spring assessment period <sup>3</sup> |
| <b>Kindergarten</b>                                                                          | 15,548                                                                                                              | 19,723                                                                          | 961                                                                            | 20,684                                                          | 6,216                                                                                | 3,955                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>First</b>                                                                                 | 15,353                                                                                                              | 20,152                                                                          | 768                                                                            | 20,920                                                          | 4,710                                                                                | 2,201                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Second</b>                                                                                | 15,132                                                                                                              | 21,180                                                                          | 573                                                                            | 21,753                                                          | 6,079                                                                                | 2,150                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Third</b>                                                                                 | 16,341                                                                                                              | 21,994                                                                          | 655                                                                            | 22,649                                                          | 5,567                                                                                | 2,188                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                 | 62,374                                                                                                              | 83,049                                                                          | 2,957                                                                          | 86,006                                                          | 22,572                                                                               | 10,494                                                                                                                                                    |

During the 2025-26 school year, 25,211 students in kindergarten through grade three were identified as having a reading deficiency and placed on an IRIP. Of those students, 89.5% (22,572) demonstrated growth on the NRIA Approved Reading Assessment during the school year and 41.6% (10,494) made sufficient progress to exit an IRIP by meeting the NRIA threshold during the winter and/or spring assessment period. These data points highlight the meaningful progress students are making through targeted instruction and intervention and the positive impact of early literacy support statewide.

<sup>2</sup> Note: Applied only to students who had been placed on an IRIP at any point during the 25-26 SY.

<sup>3</sup> Note: Did not count students who exited and were placed back on an IRIP during the 25-26 SY.

Statewide data collection has provided valuable insight into early literacy outcomes, but it has also highlighted limitations in how results can currently be interpreted across Nebraska. Districts have used a variety of Approved Reading Assessments, each with different scales, scoring processes, and approaches to measuring growth. As a result, growth reported across different assessments is not perfectly comparable and should be interpreted with caution.

Under the NRIA, there are multiple student subgroups that are not required to be screened. [NRS 79-2603](#): *Each school district shall administer an approved reading assessment three times during the school year to all students in kindergarten through grade three, except for any student receiving specialized instruction for limited English proficiency who has been receiving such instruction for less than two years, any student receiving special education services for whom such assessment would conflict with the individualized education plan, and any student receiving services under a plan pursuant to the requirements of section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794, or Title II of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. 12131 to 12165, as such acts and sections existed on January 1, 2021, for whom such assessment would conflict with such section 504 or Title II plan.”* Although not required, many districts continue to screen all students.

The guidance of the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) has been that students receiving special education services or services under Section 504 are required to participate in Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) 8th Edition screening unless participation conflicts with the student's IEP or 504 plan, as outlined in the NRIA. Local teams are responsible for making that determination at the student level. Districts are encouraged to establish clear local policies and procedures for how they approach screening decisions for K–3 students with IEPs and 504 plans.

Students with IEPs who do not have reading-related goals and are identified as below or well below benchmark require an IRIP. For a student with an IEP, however, decisions regarding how the student's identified reading needs will be addressed must be coordinated through the student's IEP Team. The district's standard IRIP process should not operate independently of the IEP Team when decisions may affect the student's special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, accommodations, or other components of the student's IEP.

The IEP Team should consider the student's screening results and other relevant data in the context of the student's disability, present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, progress in the general education curriculum, and existing IEP. The team should determine whether the newly identified reading needs require changes to the student's IEP, including, as appropriate, goals, specially designed instruction, accommodations, services, supports, or progress monitoring. IDEA requires the IEP Team to review and revise the IEP, as appropriate, when information indicates a lack of expected progress in the general education curriculum or identifies additional educational needs.

Students whose IEPs already include reading goals, specially designed instruction targeting the identified reading skills, and progress monitoring related to reading do not require a separate IRIP when those components satisfy the applicable IRIP requirements. The district should ensure that the required IRIP components are identifiable within the student's IEP and that implementation of the reading supports remains the responsibility of the IEP Team.

Teams should collaboratively determine how screening, intervention, accommodations, specially designed instruction, and progress monitoring work together to support the student's literacy needs.

For students with IEPs, the IRIP process should complement—not operate separately from or supersede—the IDEA-required IEP process.

To strengthen consistency statewide, the NDE completed a comprehensive review of Nebraska’s approved literacy screeners in partnership with the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) and the Buros Center for Testing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The review examined the technical adequacy, classification accuracy, content coverage, and usability of approved screeners to determine their effectiveness in identifying students at risk for reading difficulties. Findings from this report informed the NDE’s selection of DIBELS 8th Edition as Nebraska’s single statewide literacy screener beginning with the 2027-2028 school year. The 2027-2028 school year will serve as a “hold-harmless” implementation year during which districts are strongly encouraged to adopt DIBELS 8th Edition, with statewide implementation required beginning in the 2027-2028 school year. Over time, this will allow teachers, school leaders, and state policymakers to identify significant gains, establish meaningful school-level goals, evaluate statewide trends, and work toward reducing the number of students requiring an IRIP more clearly.

When reviewing district use of Approved Reading Assessments, it is also important to note that district counts across assessment types should not be added together to determine the total number of districts. Districts are required to use one Approved Reading Assessment at each grade level, but a district could use different approved assessments across grades. As a result, some districts may appear under more than one assessment.

| Assessment Name                                         | Kindergarten | First | Second | Third |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------|--------|-------|
| DIBELS 8th Edition<br>(Required for the 27-28 SY)       | 71           | 71    | 71     | 68    |
| Acadience Reading                                       | 58           | 58    | 58     | 58    |
| AimswestPlus                                            | 24           | 23    | 23     | 22    |
| Amira                                                   | 3            | 2     | 2      | 2     |
| FastBridge Suite                                        | 43           | 43    | 41     | 39    |
| i-Ready                                                 | 2            | 2     | 2      | 2     |
| MAP Suite                                               | 34           | 36    | 38     | 32    |
| MAP Growth/NSCAS<br>Connected Model<br>(3rd grade only) | X            | X     | X      | 9     |
| MAP Growth<br>(3rd grade only)                          | X            | X     | X      | 5     |
| Star Suite                                              | 8            | 8     | 8      | 7     |

## Specific Learning Disability in Reading Data Results

| Statewide Data                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The number of students in each public school evaluated (tested) for a Specific Learning Disability in the area of reading, ages 3 to 21, including tests that identify characteristics of dyslexia: | <b>Total Number of Students:</b><br><br>11,229                                                                                                  |
| The results of the evaluation (testing) to determine eligibility under the category of SLD in the area of reading:                                                                                  | <b>The number of students determined eligible with an SLD in basic reading, reading fluency, and/or reading comprehension:</b><br><br>5,144     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>The number of students determined not eligible with an SLD in basic reading, reading fluency, and/or reading comprehension:</b><br><br>6,085 |

During the 2025-2026 school year, 11,229 Nebraska students ages 3 through 21 were evaluated or reevaluated for a Specific Learning Disability in the area of reading, including evaluations that may identify characteristics of dyslexia. Of those students, 5,144 (45.8%) were determined to be eligible for special education services under the category of SLD in basic reading, reading fluency, and/or reading comprehension.

This data represents only those students evaluated or reevaluated during the 2025-2026 reporting period, not the total number of students currently identified with an SLD in reading statewide.

**Several factors may influence year-to-year results, including district referral and evaluation practices, the number of students due for reevaluation, and efforts to distinguish reading difficulties related to a disability from those associated with other factors, such as gaps in instruction.**

There are also important limitations to consider when interpreting the data. Students with reading difficulties or characteristics of dyslexia may receive support through multiple pathways, including an IRIP, a Section 504 plan, or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students with characteristics of dyslexia may also qualify for special education under other disability categories. Additionally, because the SLD data includes students ages 3 through 21, while the NRIA focuses specifically on students in kindergarten through third grade, the two data sets should not be directly compared. Together, however, they provide information on how Nebraska schools identify and support students experiencing reading difficulties.

#### 4th Grade NSCAS ELA Proficiency by Eligibility Category

| Disability Category          | Percent Proficient NSCAS ELA 2022 | Percent Proficient NSCAS ELA 2023 | Percent Proficient NSCAS ELA 2024 | Percent Proficient NSCAS ELA 2025* |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Specific Learning Disability | 12%                               | 13.30%                            | 14.50%                            | *                                  |
| Other Health Impairment      | 25%                               | 24.68%                            | 28.89%                            | *                                  |
| Emotional Disturbance        | 27%                               | 27.92%                            | 32.37%                            | *                                  |
| Autism                       | 28%                               | 31.73%                            | 36.27%                            | *                                  |
| Intellectual Disability      | 42%                               | 37.50%                            | 38.94%                            | *                                  |
| Speech Language Impairment   | 43%                               | 42.20%                            | 53.27%                            | *                                  |
| No Disability                | 57.79%                            | 61.68%                            | 66.0%                             | *                                  |

\* Data pending public release. Results remain under embargo and will be added when officially available.

NSCAS English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency rates for fourth-grade students identified with an SLD in any area have shown modest improvement over the past three years of reporting, increasing from 12% in 2022, 13.3% in 2023, 14.5% in 2024. At the time of this report, 2025 assessment results remain under embargo and not yet authorized for public release; therefore, 2025 results are not included in this analysis. The data will be incorporated following the conclusion of the embargo period and official public release.

The continued improvement reflected in the publicly available data is encouraging and provides an important indicator of progress for students with disabilities. Nebraska continues to strengthen a comprehensive approach to improving literacy outcomes that extend beyond proficiency rates alone. Statewide efforts are increasingly focused on the use of multiple measures of student growth and progress, expanded access to evidence-based literacy instruction and intervention, effective use of assessment and progress-monitoring data to inform instructional decisions, and implementation of tiered systems of support designed to respond to individual student needs. Together, these efforts are intended to strengthen instructional practice, support earlier and more effective intervention, and build the capacity of schools and districts to improve literacy outcomes for students with disabilities over time.

While the number of students identified with a SLD in reading is a useful data point, it does not fully capture how effectively a district is supporting literacy development for all students. Identification

rates reflect only those students who meet the criteria for special education services under SLD and do not encompass the broader range of interventions and supports that districts provide before, during, and beyond the evaluation process.

A district with a comparatively lower percentage of students identified under SLD in reading may, in fact, be implementing strong multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and evidence-based literacy practices that reduce the need for special education referrals. Conversely, higher identification rates do not necessarily indicate weaker instruction; they may instead reflect more rigorous screening procedures, a heightened focus on early identification, or shifts in local practices to better capture students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Additionally, student outcomes in literacy are influenced by multiple factors that extend beyond the act of identification, including the quality of core instruction, the availability of targeted interventions, teacher expertise in structured literacy, and the fidelity of implementation of individualized supports. For this reason, examining overall identification numbers in isolation risks misrepresenting district efforts and outcomes.

A more accurate measure of how well districts are supporting students with, or at risk for reading difficulties includes reviewing progress-monitoring data, growth in reading proficiency, access to high-quality interventions, and long-term outcomes such as grade-level reading achievement. By triangulating identification data with these broader indicators of instructional quality and student performance, a clearer picture emerges of whether districts are effectively fostering literacy success for all students, including those with disabilities.

#### **IV. Summary**

Through three years of reporting under §79-11,157.01, Nebraska has continued to strengthen a more consistent early literacy system grounded in evidence-based practices. The transition to a single statewide screener represents a significant step toward greater consistency in identifying and responding to students' early literacy needs. Data related to students evaluated for a SLD in reading also provides insight into evaluation patterns across Nebraska; however, limitations within the available data should be considered when interpreting findings or drawing conclusions.

#### **V. Conclusions or Recommendations**

Nebraska educators continue to show a strong commitment to identifying and supporting students with reading difficulties, including those exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia. The data collected through three cycles of reporting under NRS §79-11,157.01 demonstrate progress and points to continued priorities for the state as we move forward.

##### **Early Intervention and Identification**

Early identification of students with reading difficulties, including those exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia, remains central to Nebraska's approach. Kindergarten has consistently shown the highest IRIP exit rates across all reporting cycles, which reinforces the importance of early, targeted support. The NDE will continue to use IRIP data to identify districts experiencing elevated rates of reading difficulty and to target regional support accordingly, in partnership with ESUs and Regional Literacy Coaches.

### **Consistent Assessment and the Transition to DIBELS 8th Edition**

Nebraska's move to DIBELS 8th Edition as the single statewide approved screener in 2027-2028 is the most significant change affecting early literacy data in the coming years. Variability across screening tools has been an ongoing limitation for both the NRIA and in SLD reading data. Adopting one tool with consistent threshold scores and a strong technical foundation will improve the comparability of early literacy identification data and support more consistent instructional decision-making across districts. Districts are encouraged to use the 2026-2027 school year to prepare, whether by implementing DIBELS 8th immediately or building toward required implementation next year.

### **Data Quality and Collection Improvements**

To improve data quality and accuracy, the NDE will continue working to refine the data collection methods and guidance provided to districts in each reporting cycle. A specific priority is the exploration of student-level data integration that would reduce the reporting burden on districts and improve the precision of the data in this collection.

### **SLD in Reading Data**

Over three reporting cycles, the NDE has emphasized that the SLD in reading data should be interpreted with caution. The limitations of this data, including the breadth of the SLD disability category, the influence of three-year reevaluation cycles under Rule 51, and the role of alternative disability eligibility categories should not be overlooked when drawing conclusions from the results. Even so, the NDE encourages districts to consider SLD in reading evaluation patterns as one indicator within a broader picture of how early literacy systems are functioning. A district with stable or rising SLD evaluation numbers but strong IRIP exit rates tells a different story than one where evaluations are rising and few students are exiting their IRIPs, which would signal gaps in early literacy intervention that warrant closer attention.

## **VI. Appendices or Attachments**

- [Appendix A- District Level Data Per District](#)
- [Appendix B- School Building Level Data Per District](#)
- [Appendix C-Communicating NRS 79-11.157.01 to Stakeholders](#)

# Reporting on Nebraska Revised Statute § 79-2607

## 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 that provides sustained professional learning in evidence-based reading instruction. The system is intended for educators who work with children from age four through grade three in approved or accredited schools and early childhood education programs approved by the State Board of Education. The statute also calls for information and strategies that help educators engage children and families in literacy development, connect families with local literacy resources, and strengthen home and family literacy practices.

Approved or accredited elementary schools and early childhood education programs are responsible for making educators aware of the professional learning system and providing adequate training in evidence-based reading instruction to those responsible for teaching children from age four through grade three.

NDE is also directed to collaborate with Educational Service Units (ESUs) to provide regional literacy coaches to elementary schools. These coaches provide job-embedded professional learning for kindergarten through grade three educators, with a focus on evidence-based reading instruction and its application in classroom practice.

These efforts are connected through NebraskaREADS, which serves as a single point of reference for Nebraska's statewide literacy initiatives and resources. NebraskaREADS provides a coherent structure for communicating and aligning the state's work related to evidence-based literacy practices, professional learning, instructional resources, assessment, leadership, and implementation support.

NRS §79-2607 requires the Commissioner of Education to submit an electronic report to the Clerk of the Legislature on or before September 30 of each year addressing the status and use of the professional learning system. This report provides an update on the continued development and implementation of Nebraska's professional learning system and highlights major accomplishments, emerging opportunities, and next steps in advancing evidence-based literacy practices across the state.

## II. Background

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, the tenet lead teams have convened weekly 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 the goals and progress of each tenet follows.

### III. Data

#### Tenet 1: Professional Learning System

##### Description

High quality professional development for all educators who teach students age 4 through 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are implementing evidence-based literacy instruction grounded in the science of reading.

##### Major Accomplishments

**Professional Learning Rubric for Educators Across Contexts.** The NDE developed and disseminated the final draft of Nebraska Literacy Project Evidence-Based Reading Instruction Professional Learning Document for Professional Learning for Educators Supporting Literacy Across Contexts (Appendix B).

This document was developed to support implementation of NRS §79-2607 and provides guidance for determining what constitutes high-quality professional learning focused on evidence-based literacy practices for educators who support literacy development but do not provide direct reading instruction. Examples of these educators may include specialists such as art, music, physical education, library, technology, and other educators who provide instructional support for children ages 4 through grade 3.

This rubric differs from the Nebraska Literacy Project Evidence-Based Reading Instruction Professional Learning Rubric. While the original rubric outlines the comprehensive knowledge needed for educators who directly teach reading, this rubric identifies the foundational literacy knowledge and evidence-based literacy practices that educators in other instructional roles should understand to support literacy development across settings.

The document establishes a baseline for determining whether a professional learning opportunity provides the essential literacy knowledge necessary for an educator in these specialized roles to be considered adequately trained under NRS §79-2607. It is not intended to represent all professional learning an educator may need, but rather the foundational literacy knowledge that should be applied and reinforced across a variety of instructional contexts.

In addition to developing the framework, the NDE developed a professional learning course specifically designed for educators who support literacy development but do not provide direct reading instruction. The course is available at no cost to Nebraska districts, schools and educators, and provides an accessible pathway for educators to build the foundational knowledge and practices identified in the rubric. Upon successful completion of all required course outcomes, an educator in these roles will have met the professional learning expectations to be considered adequately trained in the awareness and understanding of evidence-based literacy practices, grounded in the science of reading, as outlined in NRS §79-2607.

**Nebraska Leads Literacy.** The NDE launched Nebraska Leads Literacy (NLL) during NDE Administrator Days in July 2026. NLL is a statewide leadership development initiative designed to strengthen the capacity of district and building leaders to lead, implement, and sustain literacy improvement efforts grounded in evidence-based literacy practices and the Science of Reading.

Through a cohort-based model, NLL provides leaders with professional learning, individualized coaching, practical implementation resources, and opportunities to collaborate with leaders across the state. The initiative focuses on strengthening instructional leadership, supporting the implementation of high-quality instructional materials, using literacy data to inform decision-making, improving classroom observation and feedback practices, and building systems that support sustainable literacy improvement.

Following the July launch, NDE hosted an informational webinar in August to provide district and school leaders with an overview of the initiative and participation process. The first application window will close in August, with the inaugural NLL cohort beginning in mid-September 2026. Through this initial cohort and future expansion, NDE is building a statewide network of leaders equipped to translate Nebraska's evidence-based literacy priorities into effective and sustainable practices at the district and school levels.

**Single Statewide Reading Assessment.** The NDE completed a comprehensive review of Nebraska's approved literacy screeners in partnership with the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) and the Buros Center for Testing at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. The review examined the technical adequacy, classification accuracy, content coverage, and usability of approved screeners and provided information that NDE used to select Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) 8th Edition as Nebraska's single statewide literacy screening assessment for grades K–3.

To support a successful statewide transition, the 2026–27 school year will serve as a hold-harmless implementation year during which districts are strongly encouraged to adopt DIBELS 8th Edition, with statewide implementation required beginning in 2027–28. Following the selection, NDE began developing resources, training, and professional learning opportunities to support consistent administration and effective use of screening data across Nebraska.

As part of this implementation support, NDE, in partnership with UNL WORDS, hosted three DIBELS administration trainings during summer 2026, with sessions held in western, central, and eastern Nebraska to increase statewide access. More than 300 educators participated in these training sessions, building their knowledge and skills for consistent administration of the DIBELS 8th Edition screener.

NDE continues to develop plans for ongoing training, resources, and implementation support as Nebraska transitions to a single statewide K–3 literacy screening assessment. This transition is expected to increase consistency in identifying students who may be at risk for reading difficulties, strengthen the comparability of literacy data across the state, and support more coherent instructional and literacy improvement efforts across Nebraska.

**Literacy Advisory Panel.** The NDE continued its partnership with the Nebraska Literacy Advisory Panel, a group of literacy experts from across the state committed to strengthening literacy outcomes for Nebraska students. Throughout the year, NDE and the Literacy Advisory Panel met

monthly to share updates on statewide literacy initiatives, gather feedback from the field, and seek input on the resources, guidance, and support needed by Nebraska educators, schools, districts, and communities.

In addition to monthly meetings, Literacy Advisory Panel members participated in focused subcommittees that provided expertise and recommendations to inform several key statewide literacy efforts. These included the review of Nebraska's literacy screeners; development of the Professional Learning Rubric for Educators Supporting Literacy Across Contexts; development of supplemental resources and recommendations to complement Nebraska's Statewide Literacy Plan; and resources to support the effective implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM).

The continued engagement of the Nebraska Literacy Advisory Panel provides an important connection between NDE's statewide literacy priorities and the experiences and expertise of educators and literacy leaders across Nebraska. This partnership allows a focus on statewide resources and implementation supports that are informed by the field and responsive to the needs of Nebraska schools and communities.

**Statewide Literacy Data Collection.** Spring 2026 marked Nebraska's first statewide collection of data on educators teaching children age 4 through grade 3 who are adequately trained in evidence-based literacy practices. Based on the statewide data collection, 4,540 of 12,193 district-reported educators of children age 4 through grade 3, or 37%, met the criteria for being adequately trained. This initial collection establishes a statewide baseline for monitoring progress over time and provides information to support the continued development and implementation of Nebraska's professional learning system for evidence-based literacy instruction.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

- Building shared responsibility for literacy. Building understanding among all educators of their role in literacy development, including those who do not provide direct reading instruction.
- Adolescent literacy. Broadening Nebraska's Science of Reading efforts beyond early literacy to address literacy instruction and professional learning across the PK-grade 12 continuum.
- Limited dedicated funding. Developing a sustainable statewide professional learning system within available resources, while recognizing and integrating prior professional learning that meets the criteria established in Nebraska's Science of Reading Professional Learning Rubric. State funding specifically supports regional literacy coaches, requiring the broader professional learning system to build upon and leverage existing professional learning opportunities.

### **Next Steps**

- Expand access to evidence-based literacy professional learning. Continued statewide implementation of professional learning aligned to Nebraska's literacy rubrics, with increased opportunities for educators across roles and setting to build the knowledge needed to advance literacy outcomes.
- Extend literacy professional learning across the PK-12 continuum. Define the essential knowledge and evidence-based practices for effective adolescent literacy instruction, grounded in the Science of Reading, with attention to strategic, targeted instruction and coherent literacy systems across grade levels.

- Measure progress and use data to guide future investments. Use statewide adequately trained educator data, DIBELS implementation, and other implementation measures to identify gaps, target resources, and monitor growth in educator and leadership capacity over time.

## **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 (EPPs) provide curriculum, instruction, and materials aligned with evidence-based reading practices grounded in the science of reading and to Nebraska's College and Career Ready Standards for English Language Arts.

### **Major Accomplishments**

**Ongoing implementation of NDE Rule 20: Regulations for the Approval of Teacher Education Programs (Appendix C).** In response to Rule 20 revision in June 2024, Nebraska EPPs continue to integrate the science of reading into coursework and programs for pre-service teachers, ensuring candidates develop the essential knowledge and skills necessary to become effective teachers of reading. In 2025, the NDE provided both guidance and recommendations for compliance with the requirements of Rule 20, including roles and activities for each stage of implementation. Nebraska's 16 EPPs submit a report of progress toward those recommendations annually for review and further commendations and recommendations by the NDE's Offices of Teaching, Learning & Assessment, Accreditation, and Literacy.

EPPs are consistently making strides and enhancing their programs to ground candidates in the science of reading. Per NDE recommendations, institutions are identifying the professional learning needs of faculty and provide training. All EPPs have established internal literacy advisory committees and identified roles and activities to support ongoing integration. The committees are continuing to audit course syllabi and course sequences, incorporating content and materials aligned to evidence-based reading practices. Additionally, several of the EPPs have developed new, required foundational reading courses. The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), in its latest review of over 700 elementary teacher preparation programs and their alignment to scientifically based reading instruction, recognized four Nebraska programs for their exemplary approach to reading foundations. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Doane University, Concordia University, and College of Saint Mary received "A-plus" NCTQ ratings.

National Council on Teacher Quality. (2026, June). *Teacher Prep Review: Reading Foundations*. [Teacher Prep Review](#)

**Collaboration with Nebraska educator preparation programs.** NDE staff across multiple offices continue supporting educator preparation faculty by providing literacy updates, new tools and resources, research articles, and technical support as they integrate the science of reading. Regular NDE communications and opportunities to connect across EPPs have led to enhanced collaboration amongst institutions, for example, several programs are co-developing a process for

vetting materials for Reading Methods courses. The annual progress reports provided by EPPs also elicit feedback on their needs at different stages of implementation. This has allowed NDE staff to design professional learning specifically for EPP faculty. An August 2026 full-day convening will provide a K-3 universal screening and instructional materials training that enhances their science of reading knowledge.

**District adoption and implementation of standards-aligned instructional materials.** Since 2019, the Nebraska Instructional Materials Collaborative (NIMC) has provided guidance and resources for the selection and implementation of materials that meet high expectations for quality and standards alignment. Nebraska districts continue to invest in quality materials for their students. NIMC guidance and a shared, statewide commitment have resulted in steady growth, particularly in the area of K-5 English Language Arts; 80% of districts have adopted standards-aligned core foundational reading materials.

**Support for the implementation of standard-aligned materials.** With the support of Nebraska's Literacy Advisory Panel, new resources are in development to support the implementation of standard-aligned materials. A strong, sustained approach to implementation ensures materials have the greatest impact on teaching and learning, increasing the likelihood that K-3 students acquire the critical foundational reading skills necessary to reach grade-level proficiency.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

- Lack of clarity in requirements. Rule 20 has been further revised since 2025 and is awaiting final signature from the Governor's Office. The revisions further clarify expectations on the preparation of candidates in the science of reading, however, there is still a lack of clarity on specific requirements and how compliance will be evaluated.
- Limited capacity and resources for educator preparation support. While the NDE continues to prioritize support for EPPs with implementing the science of reading, lack of funding and staff capacity limit our ability to provide sustained technical assistance, professional learning, and ongoing implementation to support the varied needs of faculty and institutions. For example, the NDE relies on a small sub-set of employees who have sufficient content expertise to review the annual submissions of progress narratives, course syllabi, and other artifacts from the 16 EPPs and offer substantive recommendations. Without the support of an external reviewer, we are unable to provide the kind of customized support necessary to thoroughly analyze and recommend actions for programmatic improvement.
- Variability of capacity within educator preparation programs. In order to prepare pre-service teachers to be effective teachers of reading, faculty (including adjunct instructors) must have vast expertise with the science of reading, evidence-based literacy practices, and curriculum literacy. While many EPPs are seeking and/or providing science of reading training, there is still variability in knowledge and some EPPs have not been able to address the needs. Ongoing review of syllabi continues demonstrating that coursework does not adequately prepare candidates to understand the characteristics of standards-aligned instructional materials, nor prepare them to effectively use the high-quality foundational reading materials used by the majority of Nebraska districts.
- Lack of funding for sustained implementation of instructional materials. The majority of Nebraska districts have adopted English language arts materials that are high-quality and

aligned to state standards. When materials are used skillfully by knowledgeable teachers, students are much more likely to acquire foundational reading milestones and achieve grade-level proficiency. Budget constraints and lack of time for professional learning often preclude teachers from meaningful, sustained professional learning.

### **Next Steps**

- Continue supporting EPPs to expand their knowledge of the science of reading with the following activities:
  - Design and facilitate professional learning experiences.
  - Share tools and resources related to evidence-based reading practices.
  - Provide frameworks and models designed to enhance the integration of the science of reading.
  - Facilitate regular opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from other institutions.
- Finalize and distribute district guidance for the effective implementation of instructional materials.
- Partner with external organizations to provide regional, curriculum-specific professional learning opportunities for Nebraska educators using common instructional materials.

## **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 (Appendix D). This tenet was made possible through the state appropriation of \$1.85 million through 2027 and has received continued funding for an additional three years, supporting the ongoing implementation and development of the Regional Literacy Coach Network.

### **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**

Nebraska has intentionally built the Regional Literacy Coach Network over time. We began with a planning phase and the hiring of our first cohort of regional literacy coaches.

In Phase One, efforts focused on developing coach training, building knowledge, and establishing a support structure for the initial group of seven coaches. In Phase Two, the network expanded with the addition of new Regional Literacy Coaches, bringing the statewide total to 17 coaches. All 17 coaches are engaged in creating a statewide network for sustained literacy support.

Regional Literacy Coach activity reports collected during the first six months of implementation demonstrate the growing reach of this work. Reporting reflects the phased expansion of the network, with data initially representing the seven Phase One coaches and incorporating additional Phase Two coaches as they began their work.

Across reports submitted through August 27, 2026, coaches reported 439 coaching sessions and more than 1,030 hours of coaching support. Reported activities included job-embedded professional learning (76%), data analysis (64%), PLC/MTSS team support and development (60%), curriculum implementation and alignment support (49%), classroom observations (36%), and lesson planning (31%).

Evidence of changes in leadership and coaching practice is also emerging. Among reports identifying observable changes, 73% noted stronger knowledge of the science of reading, 59% reported stronger use of data in leadership or coaching meetings, 57% identified clearer expectations for evidence-based reading instruction, and 51% reported stronger knowledge and use of high-quality instructional materials.

As the network continues to grow, the focus is shifting from establishing the coaching structure to sustaining a professional learning community that continuously strengthens literacy instruction across Nebraska. This is the embodiment of Tenet 3: creating a statewide network of highly trained literacy coaches who provide sustained support to schools and help educators implement evidence-based practices to improve literacy outcomes for Nebraska students.

#### Challenges and Opportunities

While coaches reported numerous successes, the monthly reports also identified several areas for continued growth and support. Scheduling and time constraints were reported by coaches as a barrier to providing consistent coaching services. Additionally, 21% of coaches identified competing initiatives within districts as a challenge, while 26% reported concerns related to staff turnover and curriculum misalignment in 12%.

At the same time, the data demonstrates opportunities to strategically target coaching support. Among reports identifying priority populations, 71% indicated support for high-poverty schools, 67% for rural schools, 64% for schools with historically low literacy outcomes, and 52% for schools requesting intensive support.

Based on coach feedback and reported activities, future coaching efforts should continue to focus on strengthening the implementation of evidence-based literacy practices, expanding the use of student data to drive instructional decision-making, and supporting schools in aligning core instruction and intervention systems. Additional opportunities include increasing support for progress monitoring practices, strengthening leadership capacity to sustain literacy initiatives, and helping districts prioritize literacy work amid competing demands. Continued collaboration with NeMTSS, assessment, and special education initiatives may help reduce duplication of efforts and increase coherence across school improvement efforts.

As literacy implementation continues to mature across the state, coaches may also benefit from structures that maximize coaching time, support rural and high-needs districts, and address staffing challenges that can impact long-term sustainability.

#### Next Steps

- Strengthen the statewide Regional Literacy Coach Network by continuing to build shared knowledge and consistent coaching practices across school and teacher-leaders.
- Prioritize support for schools and districts with the greatest needs, including rural schools and schools with historically low literacy outcomes.

- Expand the use of data to inform coaching and instructional decisions by supporting school leaders and educators in using screening, progress monitoring, and other student data to identify needs and guide instruction.

## **Tenet 4: Data Collections to Evaluate Effectiveness**

### **Description**

Data collections are used to measure the effectiveness of literacy initiatives and the implementation of professional development in evidence-based reading instruction aligned to the Science of Reading. Through Tenet 4, NDE is strengthening the data systems needed to monitor implementation, evaluate progress, and support evidence-informed decisions that improve student reading outcomes as required by Neb. Rev. Stat. 79-2607.

### **Goal**

Collect, align, and utilize meaningful literacy data to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy initiatives and evidence-based reading practices, support continuous improvement, inform decision-making, and strengthen student reading outcomes.

### **Major Accomplishments**

**Expanded and Aligned Literacy Data Collections.** The NDE strengthened statewide literacy data collection efforts by reviewing and aligning measures of implementation, professional learning, and student outcomes. Coordination with external evaluation partners and other literacy initiatives further supported alignment in data collection and reporting efforts across programs. Together, these efforts improved the ability to evaluate literacy initiatives, monitor progress across Nebraska, and support continuous improvement at both the state and local levels.

**Strengthened Coordination of Data Efforts Across Tenets.** This year, data collection and evaluation efforts were increasingly coordinated across Nebraska Literacy Project tenets to support a more cohesive approach to implementation and continuous improvement. NDE worked to align data collection activities, reduce duplication of effort, improve communication across teams and projects, and strengthen the use of existing data for system-level decision-making. This coordination helped maximize the value of available data while also identifying areas where additional statewide data infrastructure and sustained capacity are needed to support long-term evaluation and improvement.

**Established a Single Statewide Literacy Screener.** Over the past year, Nebraska selected a single statewide literacy screener and continued implementation planning to support statewide administration. The adoption of a common screening measure creates opportunities for greater consistency in literacy data collection, improved statewide reporting, and stronger alignment of early literacy supports and interventions across districts.

**Expanded Classroom-Level Implementation Data Collection (Instructional Practice Guide – IPG).** The NDE established the infrastructure necessary for districts to submit IPG implementation data. This work represents an important step toward collecting consistent classroom-level implementation data and connecting professional learning efforts with instruction practice.

**Individualized Reading Improvement Plans (IRIPs) Best Practices.** The NDE continued work on the district practice study examining the development and implementation of IRIPs. Progress included the development of an IRIP template and identification of promising district practices, with resources planned for release during the 2026-27 school year to support local implementation efforts as required by [SD3] [SJ4] Neb. Rev. Stat. 79-11, 157.01. These resources are intended to support high-quality implementation of IRIPs and strengthen reading intervention efforts for students needing support.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

- **Limitations in Reporting Requirements:** While progress has been made in expanding literacy-related data collections, important gaps remain in statewide reporting requirements. Some key measures continue to be unavailable at the student level, limiting the ability to fully evaluate program effectiveness and student outcomes across initiatives. For example, available IRIP-related information does not consistently provide child-level data necessary for more detailed analysis of implementation and impact.
- **Timeliness of Data:** Many measures continue to be lagging indicators, including statewide assessment results that are only available after administration. Although NDE is expanding access to additional data sources and more frequent reporting mechanisms, opportunities remain to identify timely and predictive indicators that can better support ongoing decision making and continuous improvement efforts.
- **Classroom-Level Implementation Data:** The NDE has made substantial progress in addressing the need for classroom-level implementation data through the development of a statewide IPG data collection infrastructure. Future efforts in this area will focus on supporting implementation of the tool, evaluating the usefulness and quality of collected data, and determining how best to leverage these data to monitor instructional practices and inform continuous improvement.
- **Integrated Data Infrastructure:** As literacy-related data collections expand, opportunities remain to strengthen the statewide data infrastructure needed to bring key measures together in a more usable and actionable way. Improving how literacy data are organized, reviewed, and shared would support more timely identification of trends, gaps, and implementation needs. Continued coordination and investment across NDE, districts, educators, evaluation partners, and Legislature will be important to ensure that data can be used not only for reporting, but to guide support and improve student outcomes.

### **Next Steps**

- Continue identifying, refining, and validating meaningful measures to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of Nebraska Literacy Project initiatives across all tenets.
- Implement, use, and refine newly established statewide data collection systems, including literacy screening, implementation fidelity, IPG, and IRIP-related data resources, to strengthen continuous improvement efforts and support data-informed decision making.
- **Improved Planning Through Logic Model and Initiative Alignment:** The NDE is working on documentation and planning resources, including a Logic Model and Historical Timeline, to better align literacy initiatives, implementation timelines, and evaluation activities. These resources will strengthen internal coordination, clarify connections between literacy efforts, and support more strategic monitoring of project outcomes over time.
- Use literacy data to identify trends, gaps, and emerging needs and strengthen implementation support statewide. Ongoing data reviews help NDE, and project partners adjust course when needed, target supports more effectively, and build the capacity of educators,

instructional leaders, district teams, and other partners responsible for advancing evidence-based reading instruction.

- Continue strengthening partnerships that make statewide literacy improvement possible, including collaboration among NDE, districts, educators, external evaluation partners, and the Legislature, to support a coordinated, sustainable approach to improving reading outcomes for Nebraska students.

## **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**

During the reporting period, the NDE continued to build the infrastructure, partnerships, and resources necessary to strengthen family literacy efforts statewide. Major accomplishments included:

- Expanded awareness of family literacy resources. Developed promotional materials for Family Literacy Advisory Committee members to promote the Family Literacy Resource Hub and Implementation Guide within their schools, organizations, and communities (Appendix E). Advisory Committee members used these materials to increase awareness of available family literacy support.
- Celebrated National Reading Month. Coordinated activities during March 2026 National Reading Month to promote the importance of reading and family engagement in literacy. NDE leadership participated by reading books and helping reinforce the message that literacy development extends beyond the classroom and is strengthened through family and community involvement.
- Participated in UNL's Go Big Read initiative. Engaged in the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's Go Big Read initiative as another opportunity to promote a culture of reading and strengthen connections between statewide and community literacy efforts.
- Developed family-focused microlearning resources. Created seven microlearning videos for families that provide accessible, practical strategies families can use to support literacy and language development at home.
- Established a statewide Family Literacy Network. Created a network to connect schools and partners engaged in family literacy work. The network provides opportunities for participants to exchange ideas, identify promising practices, share resources, and learn from successful approaches being implemented across Nebraska.
- Expanded statewide engagement. NDE staff were invited to present on family literacy at statewide conferences, providing opportunities to increase awareness of Tenet 5, share available resources, and encourage greater participation in family literacy efforts.
- Continued stakeholder engagement. The Family Literacy Advisory Committee continued to provide input and guidance to support implementation, resource development, communication, and statewide outreach.

## Challenges and Opportunities

While significant progress has been made, several challenges and opportunities have emerged.

- Participation and scheduling. Coordinating schedules across schools, organizations, and community partners can make it difficult to achieve maximum participation in Family Literacy Network activities. Continued exploration of flexible participation options will help broaden engagement.
- Limited time to engage families. School districts face competing priorities and have limited opportunities to communicate additional information and resources to families. Resources must therefore be concise, accessible, practical, and easy for schools to incorporate into existing family communication strategies.
- Opportunities to scale promising practices. Several Nebraska schools are implementing strong family literacy practices and have expressed a willingness to share their experiences with others. The Family Literacy Network provides an opportunity to identify these promising practices and support peer-to-peer learning across districts.
- Limited dedicated funding. Funding specifically targeted to family literacy remains limited. Additional resources would allow NDE and its partners to broaden statewide outreach, develop additional family-focused resources, increase professional learning opportunities, and provide greater implementation support to schools and communities.

## Next Steps

NDE will continue building upon the infrastructure and partnerships established through Tenet 5. Priorities for the next phase include:

- Grow the statewide Family Literacy Network by engaging additional schools, community organizations, early childhood partners, libraries, and other stakeholders.
- Build upon the active participation of schools currently involved in the network and create additional opportunities for schools to share promising practices and successful strategies.
- Continue quarterly meetings of the Family Literacy Advisory Committee to guide implementation and identify emerging needs and opportunities.
- Develop and disseminate additional practical, accessible resources for families and schools to support literacy and language development at home.
- Increase awareness and utilization of the Family Literacy Resource Hub and Implementation Guide.
- Continue identifying opportunities to align family literacy efforts with existing state, school, early childhood, library, and community initiatives.
- Explore additional funding and partnership opportunities to expand the reach and sustainability of family literacy efforts across Nebraska.

## IV. Summary

The addition of educator training data under §79-2607 provides important context for understanding Nebraska's broader literacy system by connecting information about student identification and intervention with the professional learning infrastructure designed to strengthen evidence-based reading instruction. The transition to a single statewide K–3 reading screener, DIBELS 8th Edition, beginning in 2027–2028, further advances greater consistency and coherence

in how Nebraska identifies student needs, informs instruction, and supports improved literacy outcomes.

## **V. Conclusions or Recommendations**

During the 2025-26 reporting period, Nebraska’s literacy work moved from building the foundational infrastructure of the Nebraska Literacy Project to statewide implementation and increased coherence across initiatives. The NDE expanded professional learning resources, launched new leadership development opportunities, advanced implementation of a single statewide K-3 literacy screening assessment, grew the Regional Literacy Coach Network, continued alignment with educator preparation and high-quality instructional materials, and established new data collections to measure statewide progress.

Together, these efforts reflect a more connected approach to literacy improvement, linking professional learning, leadership, instructional materials, assessment, coaching, data, and family engagement within a coherent statewide system. NebraskaREADS provides a common point of connection for this work, helping educators, leaders, families, and communities understand and access Nebraska’s literacy priorities and resources.

As implementation continues, the NDE’s focus will increasingly shift toward sustaining and refining these systems, using data to guide decisions, and extending a coherent approach to literacy across the PK-12 continuum. Continued collaboration with ESUs, schools, districts, educator preparation programs, families, and statewide partners will remain central to advancing literacy outcomes for Nebraska students.

## **VI. Appendices or Attachments**

- Appendix A- [NE Literacy Project Plan](#)
- Appendix B- [Professional Learning Rubric For Educators Supporting Literacy Across Contexts](#).
- Appendix C- [Rule 20 Guidance](#)
- Appendix D- [Regional Literacy Coaches Model](#)
- Appendix E- [Family Literacy Implementation Toolkit](#)