



NEBRASKA
INNOVATION

GRANT PROGRAM

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT
December 2022

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1 Executive Summary

The Nebraska Department of Education Innovation Fund and Innovation Grant Programs were created with the passage of Legislative Bill (LB) 519, effective August 30, 2015. On October 20, 2016, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) requested applications for grants through the Innovation Grant Program.

This competitive grant program provided funding to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to support the development, expansion, and investment in innovative best practices to improve educational outcomes for students in K through 12, while helping them pave their paths toward successful education and college and career readiness.

The Nebraska State Board of Education approved five applications between June and August of 2019. The approved recipients and their respective projects have demonstrated substantial growth, from increased engagement to improved student achievement. The projects have grown leaps and bounds over the past two years, incorporating cutting-edge technology, innovative teaching methods, and an emphasis on enriching students' overall academic experience. The programs have helped set the stage for high expectations in the development of evidence-based practices intended for dissemination and possible replication throughout the state of Nebraska.

This report summarizes the progress of the Innovation Grant and highlights important developments and amendments that have occurred in the past year while shedding light on future endeavors of the Innovation Grant.

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2 Background

The Innovation Grant was initially appropriated \$2.7 million to carry out the provisions established in LB519. During fiscal years 2020 and 2021, the bill appropriated 17 percent of the Nebraska Education Improvement Fund, managed by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), to be used for the Innovation Grant Fund. This competitive grant program provided funding opportunities to LEAs to support the development, expansion, and investment in innovative best practices that improve:

- *education outcomes for early childhood, elementary, middle school, or high school students, and*
- *transitions between any successive stages of education or transitions between education and the workforce.*



3 Year in Review 2022

3.1 Education Innovation Network for Asynchronous Professional Learning Education (EIN for APL)

3.1.1 About

Online, asynchronous learning (often referred to as e-learning) has become prevalent in many corporate and nongovernmental organizations because it provides greater access and flexibility to meet the needs of professionals in work settings. An EIN for APL was established to advance the effective use of online, asynchronous learning for education professionals – teachers, early childhood care providers, professional staff, administrators, and faculty – in Nebraska's educational institutions.

The APL network was focused on providing the training and resources needed for participants to create asynchronous professional learning courses to educators across the state using the NDEs Learning Network site and their own district and Educational Service Unit (ESU) Canvas platforms. The NDE contracted with Vivayic, a Lincoln-based company, to assist in providing support to the project. Vivayic has been an expert in consulting and providing services to their clients on digital learning strategies since 2006. The project provided an annual opportunity for NDE, ESU, and school district staff to participate in the project by joining a cohort of learners.

It is important to note that although the project experienced some disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic, the outcomes and current participation show strong support for the need of asynchronous professional learning to continue and grow throughout Nebraska.

2021-2024: Budget: \$600,000 for 3 years plus an additional year at \$165,000

3.1.1 Progress

Project time period: May 2019 through December 2022

Participants received:

- Training and coaching on Instructional Design and Accessibility/Universal Design
- Planning and development of resources to ensure effective outcomes utilizing APL
- Application of effective instructional methods for APL
- Training on Articulate 360® including in-depth training of Storyline and Rise 360



- Assessment and measurement in APL
- Training and management of APL through learning management systems (Canvas)
- Weekly one-on-one coaching on APL projects including access to APL design professionals
- A collection of best practices, tools, and templates
- Access provided to EIN for APL Hub as well as a day of training on how to use the hub

Participants (with approval of their supervisor) provided:

- Time and availability for in-person training (up to 9 days); spent 8-12 hours per month in virtual training and to engage in peer learning and coaching conversations, and complete individual projects
- Purchase of software for a seat license of Articulate 360 (statewide purchase made this cost lower)
- Travel expenses – No travel expenses to in-person training events were reimbursed (Articulate training in Lincoln for 3 cohorts and virtual for 1 cohort).

Timeline of the Project Cohorts



Jan 2022 – Phase 2 of project begins

Phase 2 moved to the creation of resources for use in scaling the project to a sustainable and statewide opportunity and the training of Cohort 4, the final training group. Vivayic teamed with a small group of Cohort 1 – 3 APL participants to determine what resources were needed and how to develop a system for sustaining APL work across the state, in addition to statewide scaling of the training. Vivayic and the NDE will then build out the needed resources and help to deploy them. These resources will be housed inside the NDE Canvas Learning Network site. An initial deployment for feedback took place on July 11, 2022 and kicked off Cohort 4. Suggestions for additional resources and other improvements to the EIN for APL hub were collected through this meeting. Additionally, work continued on the EIN for APL hub based on the feedback that was received. In addition, Cohort 4 completed their Canvas and Articulate training during the Fall of 2022 and continue to work on their projects and receive assistance during weekly office hours.

Dec. 2022 – Project concluded



Project Outcomes to Date

- NDE Learning Network, using Canvas Catalog, deployed January 2021
- More than 90 participants have received training through the 4 APL cohorts
- Strong participation in office hours for coaching and project assistance
- All 4 cohorts can create and deploy courses within the NDE Learning network site (<https://canvas.education.ne.gov/>)
- 31 courses (1 in Spanish) published or in development for use in NDE Learning Network
- Additional interest in training of more staff on APL from NDE, ESU, and school district staff
- 18,197 educators have registered and/or completed an APL cohort developed course to date.
- Dedicated support to further develop personalized learning across Nebraska eventually working down to the student level
- Development has begun on larger scale projects in this space, Nebraska's Personalized Learning Initiative will have additional phases over the next several years

3.1.1 Instructional materials – Professional Learning Fellowship & Innovation Network

3.1.2 About

The goal of the “Instructional Materials-Professional Learning (IM-PL) Fellowship & Innovation Network” was to provide a cohort of districts and ESUs with the role-specific knowledge, skills, and tools to plan for and effectively execute the three phases of adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional materials—select great materials, prepare to launch, teach, and learn. The network leveraged a combination of in-person training, school visits, and virtual professional learning communities over the course of 19 months (October 2019 through May 2021). It was designed to equip districts and ESUs with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets that they each need to effectively execute their roles as it relates to the review, adoption, and implementation of high-quality instructional materials. It was also designed to build a strong cohort experience among LEAs and ESUs that they can continue to leverage after the Fellowship ends. The network also included a rigorous evaluation to determine if proposed outcomes were met.

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) has a goal to “create the conditions for high-quality instruction in every classroom, every day” (NDE, n.d., p. 1), which promotes education equity across Nebraska schools. To accomplish this, NDE partnered with Teaching Lab to support school districts through a multistep process to select and



implement high-quality instructional materials (HQIMs) in English language arts, math, and science. NDE and Teaching Lab solicited applications from Nebraska school districts and educational service units (ESUs) to participate in the 2-year Instructional Materials Professional Learning Fellowship & Innovation Network (IM-PL Network). Year 1 spanned the 2019/20 academic year, and Year 2 spanned the 2020/21 academic year. The teaching Lab guided the cohort members through a three-phase structured process: (1) instructional materials selection, (2) planning for implementation, and (3) professional learning and progress monitoring. Each phase included multiple meetings, either in person or virtual and either in a group or one-on-one.

For Year 1, 73 cohort members from 16 school districts and 27 cohort members from 6 ESUs participated in the IM-PL Network, for a total of 100 cohort members. For Year 2, 31 cohort members from 9 school districts and 16 cohort members from 5 ESUs participated, for a total of 47 cohort members. Only 34 cohort members continued from Year 1 to Year 2.

The cost to accomplish this Education Innovation Network was estimated at \$450,000 for contracts and competitive grant support for the Network.

3.2.2 Progress

Overall Takeaways:

- Cohort membership declined greatly from Year 1 to Year 2. There were 100 cohort members in Year 1 and 47 cohort members in Year 2. Only 34 cohort members continued from Year 1 to Year 2.
- All school district and ESU cohort members gained experience in the Teaching Lab process to select HQIMs, plan for and monitor their implementation, and provide professional learning on the HQIMs.
- Teaching Lab resources (meetings, templates, guidance documents, articles, and so on)
- They were well received by cohort members and perceived as useful and beneficial to making progress toward completing milestones.
- Time, money, opportunity for collaboration, and leadership support were the main factors needed for this work to succeed. Cohort members lacked time to complete the milestones in the Teaching Lab process.
- Cohort members experienced more challenges in Year 2 than in Year 1, including a shift in focus related to the Teaching Lab process, and cohort membership and meeting attendance was lower in Year 2 than in Year 1.

Year 1 Takeaways:

- Cohort members noted that the instructional vision-setting milestone was critical to their success, as it solidified the approach by helping all



stakeholders land on the same page. However, it was the IM-PL Network's collaborative nature that provided the support required to pursue their instructional visions.

- Cohort members reported they had gained confidence in the components needed to select HQIMs to participate in the IM-PL Network and demonstrated progression through the various milestones.
- The IM-PL Network made cohort members feel less like they were undertaking a task in isolation and more like they were building a community of professionals seeking the same goal of selecting HQIMs for their students. The collaboration and feedback the network (Teaching Lab and cohort members) provided were key to the success of Phase 1 and even prompted the ESUs to consider creating similar networks.
- The IM-PL Network provided cohort members with focus and a structure for the process of selecting HQIMs. However, cohort members called for scaffolding for several points in the process, requested more content, and desired context-related opportunities for collaboration.
- Cohort members were glad to see NDE's consistency in pursuing these statewide initiatives, but they expressed concern about the alignment of Teaching Lab with previous NDE initiatives. They noted that some alignment was needed to portray a cohesive vision between the similar but slightly differing initiatives and show how they would best complement each other.

Year 2 Takeaways:

- Cohort members highlighted collaboration, communication strategies, designated space, time, and focus as key aspects to the success of their work.
- Meeting attendance was lower in Year 2 than in Year 1. This was likely due to the format of the meetings (virtual rather than in person) and lack of time to devote to the IM-PL Network because of COVID-19 restrictions.
- Cohort members reflected on the sense of community they felt as individuals working together to achieve similar goals in implementing HQIMs in their school districts.
- Cohort members had both positive and negative feelings about virtual learning. The overall impression was that in-person meetings were more beneficial.
- Cohort members said that participating in the IM-PL Network increased their confidence in implementing the Teaching Lab process.
- Cohort members agreed they would implement what they learned from the meetings, but



- the content of the meetings shifted to reflection on, rather than application of, the Teaching Lab process. As a result, the Year 2 content was less focused on the implementation of Phase 3.
- Cohort members highlighted equity as a topic of interest with two subcategories: (1) ensuring HQIM teams included the appropriate members, and (2) striving toward ensuring HQIMs were equitable.

Differences Between Years 1 and 2:

- The IM-PL Network was different from Year 1 to Year 2. This is attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic altering the meeting format from a mix of in-person and virtual meetings to only virtual meetings, as well as to Teaching Lab staff turnover between Years 1 and 2. Additional aspects influenced by these contexts include the following:
 - o The introduction of a learning management system (Moodle).
- A loss of coherence between asynchronous and synchronous work.
- A shift from applying the Teaching Lab process in Year 1 to reflecting on the process in Year 2.
- From Year 1 to Year 2, there was a decrease in cohort membership. Also, no cohort members in Phase 3 participated in the December 2020 or May 2021 focus groups.
- In Year 2, data collection became a cooperative effort between Marzano Research and Teaching Lab. The Teaching Lab collected survey data and provided it to Marzano Research rather than Marzano Research designing surveys for each phase of the process.

3.2.3 Potential next steps for the Education Innovation Networks

- Using the evaluation findings to inform how future Education Innovation Networks function, including the differentiation of meeting content and activities based on where school districts are in each network's area of focus.
- Ensuring alignment of future networks with statewide education initiatives to portray a cohesive vision to school districts and ESUs.
- Applying an in-person or hybrid format for the Education Innovation Networks. This aligns with the emphasis on the collaborative strength of the network and gives members a designated time and place to work away from distraction.
- Integrating content into resources and meetings that is directly applicable to Education Innovation Network implementation. The networks should prioritize application over reflection.
- Infusing equity discussions into future Education Innovation Network cohorts.

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3.3 Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO)

3.3.1 About

Research in Nebraska and across the nation shows that afterschool and summer programs, which are the Expanded Learning Opportunity programs (ELOs), have a significant impact on youth academic performance. When young people regularly participate in high-quality ELO programs, positive outcomes in key determinants of youth success become evident – their attendance in school day programs improves, their behavior improves, and ultimately their achievement improves. In support of the original goals of this grant program, summer programs have also proven to be a critical factor in transitions between school years and grade levels. In short, Nebraska’s ELO programs make a measurable difference in the lives of students who attend these programs during both the traditional school year and during the summer months.

The ELO Innovation Network was developed as a mechanism to help focus public and private partners around the need for these types of high-quality, cost effective, and locally sustainable ELO programs. The vision for the ELO Innovation Network is to facilitate public-private partnerships by leveraging public funds to 1) provide more opportunities for state level partners to work closely with new and established ELO programs to grow high quality, locally sustainable initiatives that can serve thousands of Nebraska youth, including youth from Nebraska’s most challenging urban and rural educational environments, 2) support innovative projects in existing ELO programs to serve as models for replication around the state, and 3) identify and cultivate characteristics of high-quality programming that can be shared with other communities across the state through a variety of in-person (including focused conferences and meetings) and online platforms.

Nebraska’s nationally unique ELO Innovation Network is designed to create opportunities for the Nebraska Department of Education and Beyond School Bells to cultivate new national, state, and local partnerships that can sustain and grow the Network, and Nebraska’s afterschool and summer programs, for years to come.

2021-2024: Budget \$250,000/year x 3 years = \$750,000 over three years.

3.3.2 Progress

During the year 2021-22, the ELO Innovation Network was able to make substantial progress in developing new and enhancing existing ELO programs across the state. This work was supported by both the Innovation funds and additional funds that we were able to leverage through private funders. In addition, the Network was well positioned to help facilitate substantial new, one-time funding made available via DHHS CARES Act funding and NDE’s administration of ESSER III funding to expand and enhance



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afterschool and summer programming in schools hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the challenges communities faced, especially in starting up new initiatives during the pandemic, the work has been expanded to include support for existing ELO programs in areas of the state that were being impacted by COVID-19 – communities with large populations of low income and minority youth.

During the grant period, the development of a new afterschool and summer curriculum was supported via a new resource, the ELO Design Center, that provided direct support to communities across the state. Because of the challenges of implementing this work during the pandemic, a contract extension was granted until December 31, 2022. The State Board also provided an additional \$250,000 in lottery fund proceeds in 2022 to stimulate local public and private funding opportunities to support the expansion of the ELO Innovation Network and serve more Nebraska communities. The ELO Innovation Network is currently partnering with NDE to utilize ESSER III funding to facilitate the development of new ELO programs in 15 communities and expansion of ELO programs in 20 more communities identified by the NDE as high need and disproportionately impacted by COVID. BSB has successfully raised almost \$3 million in public and private resources to facilitate growth in these and other ELO programs across the state. These investments have included targeted funding for Centers of Excellence, organizations that have the potential to support ELO programs, and individual communities offering ELO innovations. All these initiatives are being thoroughly evaluated by a combination of a team of seasoned evaluators at the Munroe Meyer Institute and consultants associated with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF).

In addition to the interim evaluation attached to the last report, there was a continuous development of a refined Toolkit <https://bsbtoolkit.com/>, a free online resource to help Nebraska communities that are involved in starting, growing, and seeking to sustain high-quality afterschool and summer programs. It has been redesigned to support the rollout of the ESSER III grant program. Currently, an ELO Innovation Invitational conference is expected to take place during March 7 – 9th at the UNL Innovation Campus to convene both new and established ELO programs to share best practices. This conference is anticipated to create new opportunities for private sector investment in Nebraska's ELO system.

3.3.3 Potential for Replication and Scalability

Despite challenges related to COVID-19, the launch of the ELO Innovation Network in 2020 provided the state with an important opportunity to test new concepts in programming, staffing, and expanding ELO programs across the state. Importantly, the launch of the Network also created a platform that has allowed us to attract and leverage additional funding. As noted above, through the Innovation Network, there is a partnership with NDE to facilitate an



\$11,000,000, three-year, ESSER III funded grant program to support both afterschool and summer programming in underserved communities across the state that were negatively impacted by COVID-19. The Network will continue to be used to administer \$4.5 million DHHS funding made available via the CARES Act to support school-age care providers. These one-time public investments in the ELO Innovation Network provided us with opportunities to reach out to philanthropic sector partners to facilitate additional public-private partnerships, leading to more investments in ELO programs across the state. Commitments of \$2,850,000, (including Innovation funds) have been raised and secured to leverage the federal investments in ELO system-building efforts and anticipate raising additional funds to support this work over the upcoming three-year period. This growth will allow more services to more Nebraska communities and create models of high quality, cost-effective, and locally sustainable ELO programs that can serve more youth in communities across our state.

3.4 Data Visualization and Use

3.4.1 About

This Education Innovation Network builds upon the work of the Digital Ecosystem and focuses specifically on data visualization and use for continuous school improvement.

2021-2024: Budget: \$750,000/year x 3 years = \$ 2.25 million over three years

3.4.2 Progress

The first and second cohorts of school district and ESU staff have gone through the Data Visualization and Use Network training. This training consisted of sessions wherein staff learned how to use powerful data tools to set strategic goals and improve educational outcomes. Once these sessions concluded, the group continued monthly open-discussion sessions to share lessons learned amongst themselves. This group is also providing feedback to the NDE on suggested updates and enhancements to NDE-supplied visualizations, and the prioritization of these items. Cohort 3 of the network will soon be identified, and their training will begin in the Spring of 2023.

In addition, a Network impact survey was administered to all 51 Cohort 1 and 2 members to gain insight on their Network experience, what skills and techniques they developed while participating in the Network, and how they are applying their learnings to deepen their understanding of student outcomes and success.



3.4.3 Potential for Scalability and Replication

This project is developing a network of district, school, and ESU level staff trained in the use of data visualization to solve problems and achieve strategic education goals. Members of this network can then provide resources to other staff in their local settings. The NDE can also leverage this group when designing and developing data visualizations for the use of district, school, and ESU-level staff.

3.5 Equitable Software Access and Digital Resources Innovation Network (Also Known as Software Innovation Network)

3.5.1 About

This Education Innovation Network includes school districts and Educational Service Units (ESUs) working together and with the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council (ESUCC) as the primary contractor to develop and maintain a portfolio of innovative digital tools and resources. Identifying a core set of prioritized applications was the focus during this phase of work. For each identified need, a steering committee of actively interested members was assembled. These committee members represent diverse perspectives on the project, such as large vs. small districts or an instruction vs. technical vs. administrative role. The steering committee explores the area of need, evaluates possible solutions, and engages others to provide additional insight and information.

The Software Innovation Network focuses on refining the process of determining needs, evaluating software solutions, and implementing, training, sustaining, evaluating, and recognizing the end-of-life of software projects. Through cooperative software development, evaluation, and licensing, we help to address currently unmet needs. The Software Innovation Network will review, revise, and improve current practices to provide high-quality software and features to students, educators and administrators:

- by being highly attentive to meeting Nebraska-specific needs and use cases at a low, sustainable cost;
- by striving for equitable statewide access; and
- by raising the level of data privacy and security protections.

3.5.2 Progress

The Nebraska Department of Education convened a high-powered group of minds to validate the principles of the network and its needs. Despite setbacks brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the work of documenting and refining the process of the Software Innovation Network continues.



Working with the team for the Future Ready Digital Learning Collaborative (FRDLC), the software implementation process was put into practice and is being tested through three implementation stages throughout 2022. Several trainings have been offered, including cyber security, anti-phishing (Proofpoint Security Awareness Training), multi-factor authentication, (Duo Security) and modernization of the Special Education Student Records System (SRS). These projects were identified as needs by and for school districts through survey and interview processes.

The Proofpoint Security Awareness Training platform (PSAT) is available statewide to all public and non-public school staff at no cost during the 2022-2023 school year. Participating schools will pay 1/3 of the cost (\$1.23 per staff user) during the 2023-2024 year and 2/3 of the cost (\$2.46 per staff user) during the 2024-2025 school year. Currently, we expect the renewal cost of the software to remain at the 2/3 level in subsequent years. A similar fast-start program is being designed for the Duo Security platform and licenses was offered to schools wishing to participate in November 2022. Development work is in progress on the SRS software and database.

3.5.3 Potential for Replication and Scalability

The Software Innovation process is needed now more than ever with the accelerated investments in software tools expected over the next few years due to additional one-time relief resources provided during and after the pandemic. The principles apply to software across three emerging areas of investment: digital equity and broadband, data access, analytics and visualization, and digital teaching and learning.

The network plans to continue documenting, refining, and testing the Software Innovation process in coordination with leaders of software projects.

A 3-year, high-level budget includes:

- Staffing (1 FTE, 3 years): \$375,000
- Meeting and office expenses: \$30,000
- 3-year TOTAL: \$405,000



3.6 Looking Ahead

As individual Networks move toward success by meeting their respective project goals, the past three years of innovation have led to new ideas and spurred important learnings. These can now be implemented on a wider scale. Each Network represented statewide collaboration and partnerships within and across agencies. For true scalability to be realized, continued efforts will be made to bring together a range of expertise from the agency's offices, specialists from the field, community members, and past grantees.

Education Innovation Networks will carry ideas and priorities of the original Nebraska Innovation Grant Program forward and continue to foster value at the classroom, school, district, and community levels through different capacity-building efforts. The systemic nature ensures access for all students, and ultimately creates an opportunity to support the legislature's vision to improve educational outcomes for K-12 students across the state of Nebraska.

