NEBRASKA esu13
serving the panhandle

2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT



ESU 13 AT A GLANCE

14,181 Square Miles

11 Counties

21 School Districts

1,500 School Staff

+14,000 Students

In accordance with Nebraska School Law, Section 79-1228, the ESU 13 Board of Education proudly presents its 2025–2026 Annual Report, highlighting a year of service, collaboration, and educational opportunities across the Nebraska Panhandle.

With our main office in Scottsbluff, satellite offices in Sidney and Chadron, and additional programs housed at the Harms Advanced Technology Center, ESU 13 is committed to serving, supporting, and empowering students, educators, and communities throughout Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux counties. Guided by our SHINE values, we work together to advance educational excellence for all learners.

ESU 13 BOARD OF EDUCATION

- **Mark Sinner, President**
- **Kim Marx, Vice President**
- **Tom Millette, Secretary**
- **Mandy Plog**
- **Patricia Jones**
- **Dr. Caroline Winchester**
- **Ray Richards**
- **Dr. Ronda Kinsey**
- **Scott Marsh**
- **Diane Coon**
- **Eric Packer**
- **Christine Wamsley**

The ESU 13 Board of Education provides leadership, guidance, and oversight to ensure that services remain effective, equitable, and aligned with the needs of Panhandle schools.

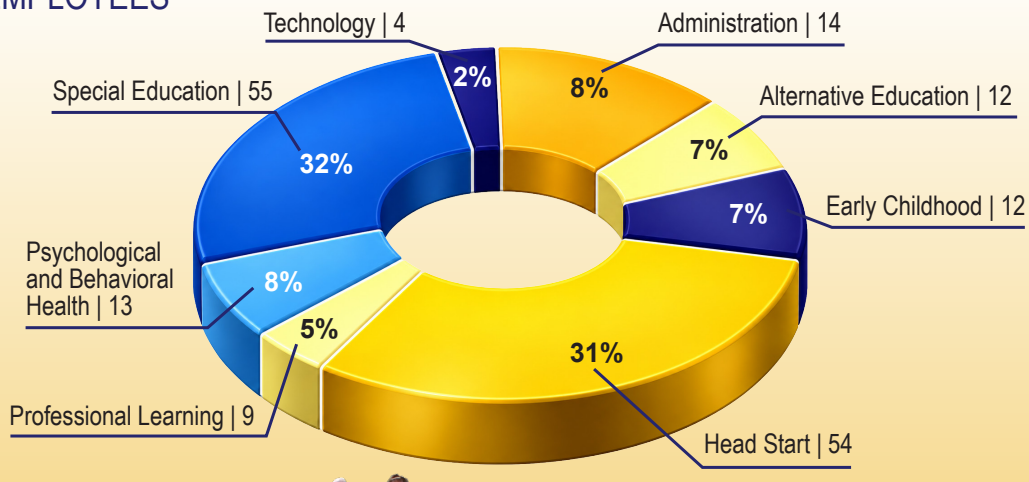
Through thoughtful decision-making, responsible stewardship of resources, and a commitment to collaboration, board members help strengthen educational opportunities for students and educators.

Together, these community representatives help shape the vision and direction of ESU 13, supporting educational excellence across the region.

8 DEPARTMENTS - 173 EMPLOYEES

Quick Summary

- Head Start and Special Education represent approximately 63% of ESU 13's workforce.
- The remaining 37% spans six departments, with Administration and Psychological & Behavioral Health accounting for the largest shares.





A MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

On behalf of ESU 13, I am excited to present this report highlighting the services, partnerships, and accomplishments of the 2025-26 school year. We focused on tapping into the Big Potential of the team at ESU 13 to expand our impact as we pursue educational excellence for all learners.



> ***We focused on tapping into the Big Potential of the team at ESU 13 to expand our impact.***

Our work is guided by our strategic priorities and anchored in our core values: Service & Hospitality, Healthy Partnerships, Innovation, Nurturing Communication, and Empowering Leadership (SHINE). Through intentional financial stewardship and collaboration with our member districts, community agencies, and partners, we have multiplied resources and leveraged external funding to expand impact across the region. The dedicated staff at ESU 13 continue to work to foster a culture of connection, empower leaders in all areas, and support schools in meeting the evolving needs of children and families.

Looking forward, ESU 13 remains committed to our mission to achieve educational excellence for all learners through strong partnerships, service, and leadership. The work outlined in this report reflects the dedication of our staff as they partner with educators and community members throughout our vast region. Together, we continue to serve, support, and empower those who make education possible.

Respectfully,
Dr. Laura Barrett
Administrator, ESU 13

A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

Greetings, Educational Service Unit 13!

After much thought and consideration, I have decided not to seek another term on the ESU 13 Board of Education. Serving alongside my fellow board members for the past 31 years has been both a privilege and an honor.

Throughout those years, I have worked with dedicated administrators whose leadership and vision helped shape ESU 13 into the outstanding organization it is today. I am proud of what we have accomplished together, the relationships built along the way, and ESU 13's reputation as a respected leader at both the state and national levels.

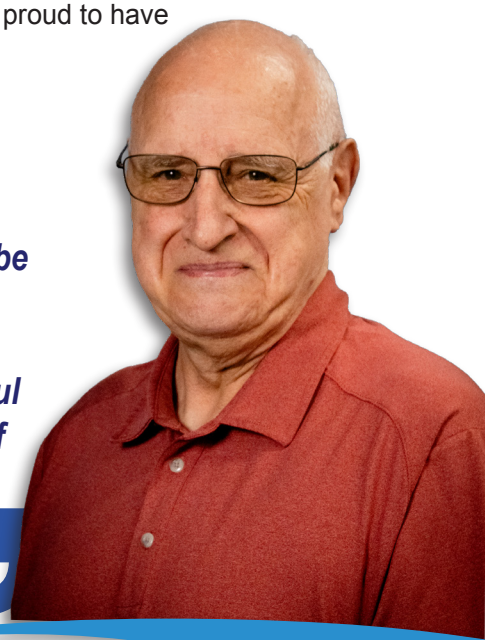
Effective January 1, 2027, the board will welcome four new members. Diane Coon, Ronda Kinsey, and I have chosen not to seek another term, while longtime board member Ray Richards is stepping down for personal reasons, leaving two years remaining in his term.

Laura and I are reaching out to potential candidates to fill two open positions. If you know someone interested in serving, please contact Laura to verify their eligibility to represent Areas 5 or 7.

On behalf of the board, thank you to everyone whose dedication, support, and commitment make ESU 13 a showcase organization. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve and will always be proud to have been part of this journey.

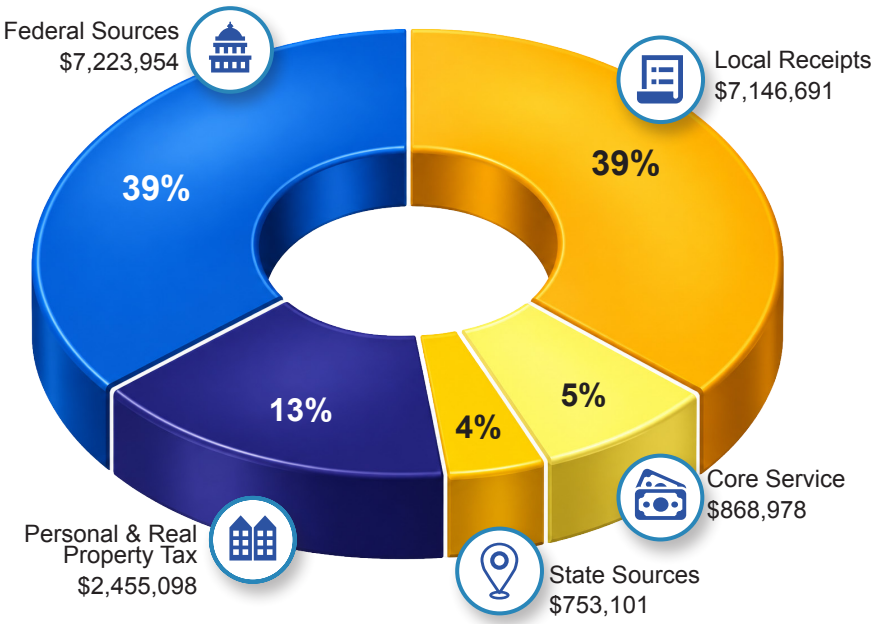
Mark Sinner
Board President

> ***I will always be proud of what we have accomplished together and grateful to have been part of this outstanding organization.***



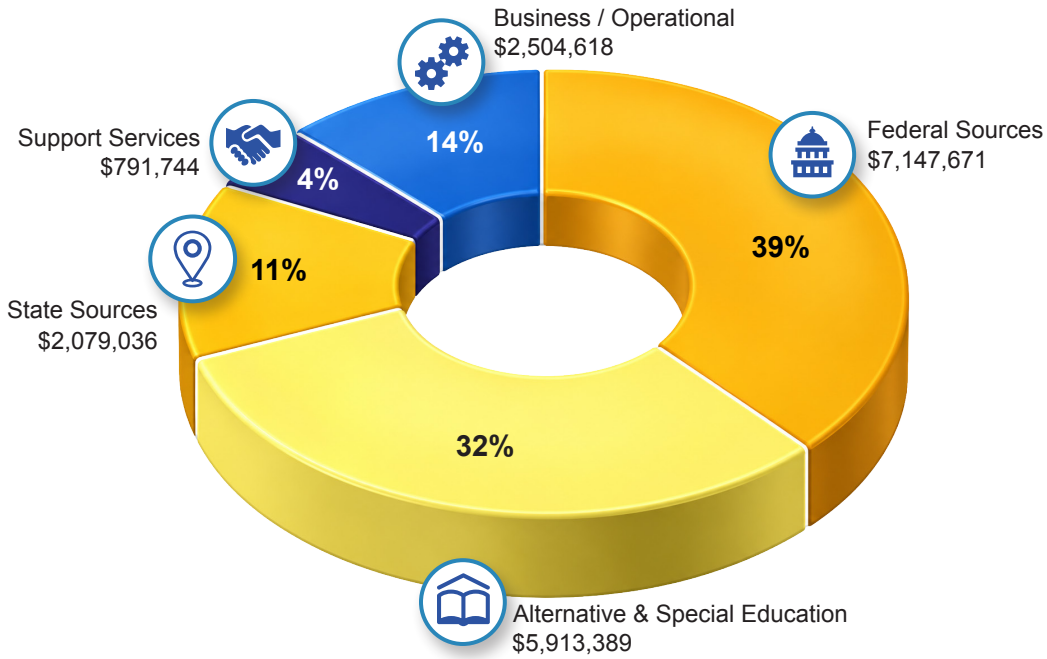
FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

$18,447,822*
In Revenue



"$9.13 MILLION In Total Grants Awarded"

$18,436,458*
In Expenses



Financial Highlights

- ESU 13 demonstrated strong financial stewardship, generating $18.45 million in revenue while maintaining expenditures of $18.44 million.
- Federal funding and local receipts accounted for 78% of total revenue. Major expenditures supported alternative and special education, federally funded programs and essential operational services.
- Additionally, ESU 13 was awarded $9.13 million in grants, strengthening its ability to provide educational programs, resources, and services across the Nebraska Panhandle.

*These figures are pending confirmation by an independent audit. Additional report details are available for public review at the ESU 13 Main Office, 4215 Avenue I, Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

ESU 13 DEPARTMENTS

ADMINISTRATION
Dr. Laura Barrett | Administrator

Administration provides leadership, financial oversight, grant management, and facility operations for ESU 13. The department coordinates regional partnerships and represents ESU 13 at state and regional levels, ensuring effective operations and support for schools and communities throughout the Panhandle.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
Dr. Derek Peil | Director

Alternative Education provides flexible, individualized learning opportunities through VALTS campuses in Scottsbluff and Sidney and the Nebraska Education Virtual Academy (NEVA). The department also oversees Title I, Part C, Migrant Education, providing academic and bilingual support to migratory children and families. Together, these programs help students overcome barriers and succeed in their education.

EARLY CHILDHOOD
Nici Johnson | Director

Early Childhood staff support the child care workforce with grant funded coaching, training and navigation of the state's quality rating and improvement system. In addition our Early Development Network supports families and children birth to three with early intervention planning and ongoing services.





HEAD START
Krystie Hohnstein | Director

Head Start and Early Head Start provide comprehensive education, health, and family support services for children from birth to age five in Scotts Bluff and Morrill Counties. Through individualized learning, parent engagement, and community partnerships, the programs build strong foundations for school and lifelong success.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
Deirdre Amundsen | Director

Professional Learning strengthens teaching and school leadership through coaching, professional development, and continuous improvement support. Services include MTSS, assessment analysis, instructional resources, New Teacher Academy, specialist networks, and student learning events.

PSYCHOLOGICAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
Dr. Katie Carrizales | Director

Psychological and Behavioral Health supports student wellness through psychological assessments, counseling, behavioral consultation, and family services. Programs include the Mobile Youth Intensive Outpatient Program, doctoral internships, and the Title IV-A Consortium.







SPECIAL EDUCATION

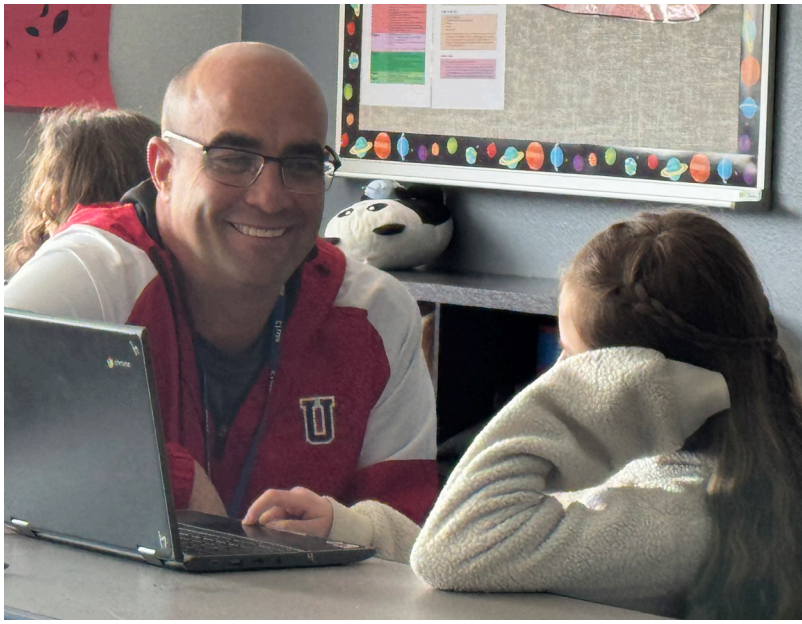
Jessica Broderick | Director

Special Education partners with districts and families to provide specialized instruction and support for students with disabilities. The department includes related services, three Level 3 student programs, four NDE Technical Assistance Partner projects, and two grants focused on young children and early intervention.

TECHNOLOGY

Lori Biesecker | Director

Technology supports instruction and operations through network infrastructure, distance learning, digital citizenship, and E-Rate guidance. The department also provides technology training, professional development, and technical assistance to ESU 13 staff and member districts.



SHINE

SHINE AT ESU 13

Our five core values, Service & Hospitality, Healthy Partnerships, Innovation, Nurturing Communication, and Empowering Leadership guide how we serve students, educators, and communities. Organized around these values, the following pages highlight how ESU 13 departments worked together to turn SHINE into meaningful impact throughout 2025–2026.



"Our values guide our work. Our people bring them to life. Together, we turn our shared commitment into meaningful opportunities and lasting impact for students, schools, and communities."

SERVICE & HOSPITALITY

At ESU 13, Service & Hospitality means responding with care, efficiency, and a personal touch. Across the Panhandle, our teams go above and beyond to meet the needs of schools, families, and communities—ensuring that every interaction reflects our commitment to service.

IMPACT IN ACTION

ESU 13 strengthened its commitment to responsive, accessible services this year. By expanding educational opportunities, improving support systems, and reducing barriers for young learners, students, families, and educators, our teams helped schools and communities access the resources they need to succeed.



> ***6,392 participants engaged in 3,248 hours of professional learning opportunities, strengthening educators and schools across all 21 districts in the Nebraska Panhandle.***

> ***All 21 school districts received distance learning technology upgrades through a $1 million federal grant, helping connect rural classrooms and expand educational opportunities.***



HIGHLIGHTS

- Implemented a technology support ticketing system for school districts to streamline service requests and improve support coordination.
- Provided special education-related services to students in all 21 member districts.
- Served 272 migratory students across 18 districts through academic instruction, language support, family resources, and summer learning opportunities.
- Provided psychological and behavioral health services across 18 districts, completing student assessments in an average of 31 days.
- VALTS surpassed 800 graduates in program history, reaching a total of 805.
- Early Childhood's Sixpence Sprouting Success program brought training directly to child care partnership locations, reducing travel barriers and allowing more classroom staff to participate.
- Maintained comprehensive Head Start services during the transition from the Early Learning Center to the Child Development Center.
- Awarded 33 grants supporting ESU 13 programs and services.
- Earned recognition on the ALICAP Safety Honor Roll for another year, reflecting ESU 13's continued commitment to a safe environment.

HEALTHY PARTNERSHIPS

Healthy Partnerships are at the heart of ESU 13's success. Through collaboration with schools, families, and community agencies, we multiply our impact, strengthen relationships, and ensure that every learner benefits from shared resources, expertise, and purpose.

IMPACT IN ACTION

This past year, ESU 13 focused on strengthening partnerships that connect our schools, families, and communities. By sharing our expertise, coordinating resources, and creating opportunities for collaboration, our teams helped expand educational experiences, support families, and respond to the evolving needs of our region.

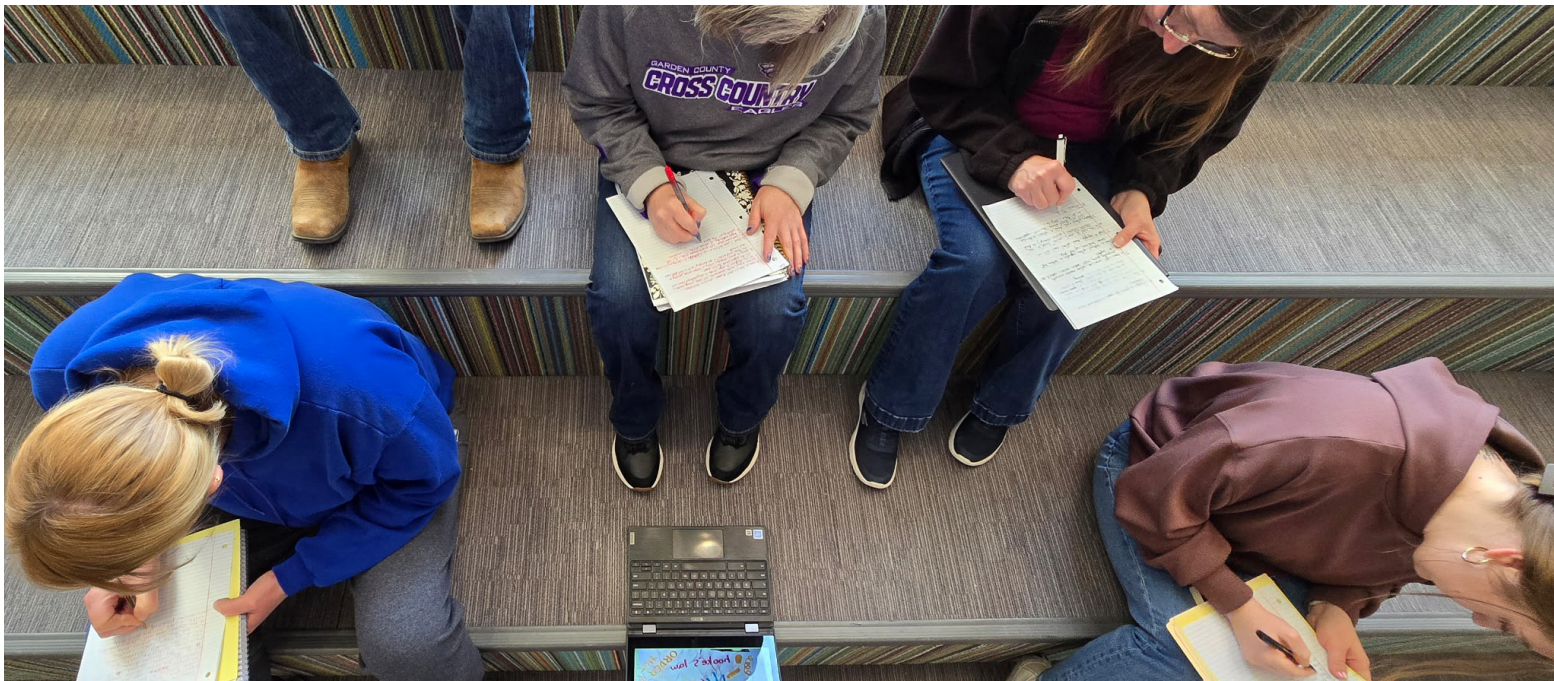
HIGHLIGHTS

- Secured $118,000 in distance learning incentives for school districts, expanding access to educational technology.
- Established a Western Region Technical Assistance Partner team to strengthen special education collaboration and support.
- Partnered with other Early Learning Connection regions to bring national presenters to western Nebraska at reduced costs.

> ***"100% of responding schools agreed ESU 13 improved professional practice, supported student learning, met expectations, and delivered cost-effective services."***



- Psychological & Behavioral Health partnered with schools and community agencies to streamline referrals, provide monthly consultations, and expand family support services.
- Head Start partnered with libraries, health agencies, businesses, and community organizations to expand family services and resources.
- Engaged 3,436 participants in student events through community partnerships and volunteer support.
- VALTS hosted 23 career readiness events connecting students with colleges, employers, and community professionals.



INNOVATION

At ESU 13, Innovation means thinking ahead, using creativity, data, and technology to deliver smarter, more efficient solutions for students and schools. We continually explore new ways to extend access, improve systems, and empower educators.

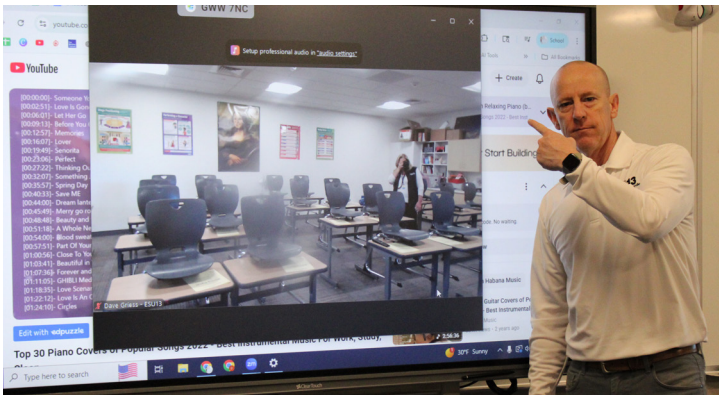
IMPACT IN ACTION

ESU 13 embraced new approaches to meet changing needs throughout the year. From improving technology and streamlining services to reimagining learning experiences, our teams strengthened programs, removed barriers, and expanded opportunities across the Nebraska Panhandle.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Advanced 4 of 6 staff innovation proposals through a new process designed to encourage creative solutions across ESU 13.
- Hosted the second annual Yay Sports! Vision Camp at Fort Robinson, bringing together 23 campers, 23 staff members, and a community role model.
- Introduced new Early Development Network technology tools to improve efficiency and family engagement.





"87% of responding districts recognized ESU 13 as innovative and collaborative, reflecting our commitment to finding better ways to provide value to those we serve."



- Expanded Professional Learning opportunities through Building Thinking Classrooms Beyond Math, Para Pep Talks, and other instructional initiatives.
- Redesigned VALTS scheduling and credit recovery processes while developing Virtual VALTS for a 2026–2027 launch.
- Strengthened Title IC Migrant Education services through improved documentation and recruitment processes, while engaging families from four language backgrounds.

NURTURING COMMUNICATION

Nurturing Communication reflects our belief that transparency and connection strengthen every partnership. Through intentional internal and external communication, we build trust and understanding across schools, families, and communities.

IMPACT IN ACTION

ESU 13 improved how information, ideas, and feedback are shared among staff, schools, and families. New communication tools, more consistent outreach, and opportunities for meaningful dialogue helped our teams share resources, respond to needs, and keep everyone better informed and engaged.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Introduced a new ESU 13 branding guide and expanded digital accessibility training to strengthen consistent, inclusive communication.
- Held quarterly LAN manager meetings and introduced monthly technology tips to keep district technology teams informed and connected.
- Streamlined the special education pre-referral questionnaire to improve communication among districts and service providers.
- Early Childhood introduced Facebook Live sessions to connect child care providers and families with timely information and resources.
- Head Start strengthened family communication through Tadpoles, newsletters, meetings, and Policy Council participation.
- Developed Digital District Support Dashboards to align Professional Learning resources with individual district needs.

> ***95% of ESU 13 staff agreed they have clear communication with their direct leadership, reflecting a commitment to transparency and connection.***

- VALTS expanded parent newsletters, reestablished principal and advisory council meetings, and implemented weekly MTSS family contacts.
- Psychological & Behavioral Health used stakeholder surveys, service feedback, and district input to improve communication and respond to the needs of schools and families.





EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

Empowering Leadership embodies our mission to serve, support, and inspire those who make education possible. It's about helping others find their voice, develop their strengths, and lead with purpose. We cultivate leadership at every level, helping staff, students, and partners grow their skills, confidence, and impact.

IMPACT IN ACTION

This year, ESU 13 created opportunities for staff and students to develop their abilities, take initiative, and grow as leaders. Through professional development, mentorship, and hands-on experiences, our teams encouraged individual strengths, supported career advancement, and helped others gain the confidence to lead.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 86% of responding districts agreed ESU 13 provides professional growth opportunities for district leaders.
- Special Education staff represented ESU 13 on 14 regional and state committees, cadres, and teams.
- Early Childhood staff contributed expertise to local, regional, and statewide committees and workgroups.
- Two Early Head Start teachers earned Nebraska Teacher Certification, while seven staff completed their initial Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.
- Professional Learning staff completed more than 50 hours of Cognitive Coaching training to strengthen instructional leadership and support.
- VALTS students took leadership roles in planning and organizing the VALTS for Veterans Golf Ball Drop fundraiser, developing teamwork, communication, and event management skills through community service.
- Title IC Migrant Education provided preschool instruction to 98% of eligible preschool-aged children, exceeding its 60% program goal.





"96% of ESU 13 staff reported that their work allows them to use their strengths, reflecting a workplace that values individual talents and professional growth."



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Sidney Location
361 College Drive
Sidney, NE 69162



Early Childhood Offices
4502 Avenue I
Scottsbluff, NE 69361



Chadron Location
Burkhiser Complex
Chadron State College
1000 Main Street
Chadron, NE 69337



Western Nebraska Child
Development Center (CDC)
3118 17th Avenue
Scottsbluff, NE 69361



VALTS and LifeLink
WNCC Harms Center
2620 College Park
Scottsbluff, NE 69361



Bridgeport Head Start
818 O Street
Bridgeport, NE 69336



Panhandle Beginnings
Day Treatment
116 Terry Boulevard
Gering, NE 69341

HEADQUARTERS

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Scottsbluff, NE 69361

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