

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Education Innovation Fund and Innovation Grant Program 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 provides funding to Local Education Agencies (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;
- Transitions between any successive stages of education; or
- Transitions between education and the work force.

The Nebraska State Board of Education approved five applications on February 3, 2017 after a total of 18 applications were received by the NDE totaling \$17,692,476 in requests. The quality of the proposals and the approaches to innovation was inspirational and set the stage for high expectations in the development of evidence-based practices intended for dissemination and possible replication throughout the state of Nebraska.

The five recipients, with awards totaling \$4.4 million, represent promising practices in improving student success in the state. One requirement of the grant process is a third party evaluator, tasked with capturing processes and outcomes of the Innovation Grant. These evaluations will be used to create a menu of options for schools wishing to achieve improved student achievement. This emphasis on “scaling up” effective practices sets this grant apart from other such investments.

An additional accomplishment in the first year was the hiring of an Innovation Grant Manager within the Department of Education in May 2017. This individual will be tasked with supporting the grant recipients, managing grant financial requests, ensuring strong evaluative practices, and assisting other schools in scaling up and replicating innovative initiatives to improve student achievement. This individual will also report on progress to diverse stakeholders throughout the 30-month time.

Background

The Innovation Grant Program was created by LB519 (2015). This bill initially appropriated \$2.7 million to carry out the provisions established in LB519. Each subsequent year through the 2020-21 fiscal year, the bill appropriates 17 percent of the Nebraska Education Improvement Fund managed by the Nebraska Department of Education to be used for the Innovative Grant Fund.

