

ESU Standards

Educational Service Unit Standards of Performance and Practice

Context

Educational service units (ESU) were established in 1965 by the Nebraska legislature to “provide for economy, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness in the cooperative delivery of educational services.” Nebraska State Statute (79-1204) particularly tasks service units with

- Provision of core services in the following service areas in order of priority:
 - Staff development
 - Technology, including distance education services
 - Instructional materials services
- Provision of other services as requested by member school districts
- Provision of educational services through leadership, research, and development in elementary and secondary education
- Take action in cooperation with and support of the State Department of Education

Rule 84 (79-318; 79-1204) further requires that each ESU be evaluated and accredited to assure a level of quality in the educational programs and services provided to school districts by the educational service units.

Purpose

The purpose of the Educational Service Unit Standards of Performance and Practice is to define the knowledge, skills, practices and dispositions necessary for ESUs to provide quality programs and services to Nebraska schools (see Rule 84). The standards promote a common language that fosters an understanding of what it means to be a member of the ESU statewide network and can be used to inform the improvement efforts of individual agencies. The document contains four essential domains: purpose and leadership, programs and services, stakeholder relationships and communication, and resource capacity. A rubric was developed for the standards.

Process

In February, 2018 the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council (ESUCC) comprised of administrators from each of the 17 ESUs along with representatives from the Staff Development Affiliate, Teaching and Learning with Technology Affiliate, Network Operations Affiliate, ESU Special Education Directors Affiliate and the Nebraska Department of Education engaged in an ESUCC organizational redesign process facilitated by Dr. Susan Leddick. The redesign group identified Five Bold Action Steps necessary to enable ESUs to work together effectively, efficiently and equitably to accomplish common goals and deliver high value to the state's education system.

Five Bold Steps: ESUCC

1. Develop ESU Standards
2. Develop joint decision-making parameters
3. Complete SIMPL inventory
4. Develop value-add metric
5. Develop ESUCC Value Proposition

The Coordinating Council appointed a Bold Step 1 ESU Standards committee of representative ESU administrators and affiliate membership to develop a draft set of standards of performance and practice specific to Nebraska's ESUs. The process included input from the entirety of the ESUCC, the ESU Affiliate leadership as well as the ESU Affiliate membership. During 2020-21, several ESUs piloted the newly created ESU Standards as part of the Continuous Improvement Process. The final draft of the standards was approved by the ESUCC Board on July 28, 2021.

Guiding Framework

The Educational Service Unit Standards of Performance and Practice are intended to fill a void. There are no state or national standards of performance for educational service units. They are provided as one definition of effective practice for Nebraska's service units. Use of these standards to guide the continuous improvement efforts of individual ESUs is voluntary. The ESUCC recognizes that while there are common components to providing regional programs and services, the implementation of those components will be specific to the needs of the member districts of each service unit.

Domain 1: Purpose and Leadership

1A: The ESU commits to a vision, purpose, and a core set of beliefs about providing programs and services that meet the expectations of the ESU and its member districts.

1B: The ESU engages in a continuous improvement process that improves professional practice, effectiveness, and results.

1C: ESU leadership establishes a strategic plan, as well as processes, procedures and conditions to support agency effectiveness.

1D: The ESU establishes conditions to support the development of individual and collective knowledge, skills and professionalism.

1E: The ESU provides professional growth opportunities for internal and district staff in leadership positions.

1F: The ESU uses a comprehensive process for staff evaluation.

1G: The ESU demonstrates actions that ensure the achievement of the ESUCC's purpose.

1H: The ESU Board, through board policies, understands and practices its defined roles and responsibilities to maintain an effective agency.

1I: ESU programming and services fulfill the requirements of Rule 84.

Domain 2: Programs and Services

2A: ESUs use a data-driven process to systematically identify the needs of districts to develop an agency service plan.

2B: The ESU ensures its services are developed and delivered, have clear and measurable outcomes, and are aligned with evidence-based practices.

2C: The ESU has established a process to assess implementation of targeted programs and services.

2D: Learning opportunities are provided to ESU staff in order to develop and enhance the skills necessary for delivering the agency service plan.

2E: The ESU fosters an innovative and collaborative culture to optimize program and service delivery.

Domain 3: Stakeholder Relationships and Communication

3A: ESU staff provide internal and external stakeholders with opportunities to collaborate and inform the development of the agency's purpose, programs, and services.

3B: ESU staff communicate efficiently and effectively with internal and external stakeholders.

3C: The ESU provides an induction process to their service agency for new district leadership.

3D: The ESU is an active partner in activities and initiatives of the ESUCC, and formally engages with and collaborates with the Nebraska Department of Education.

Domain 4: Resource Capacity

4A: The ESU utilizes strategic planning to align human, material, and fiscal resources to meet the short and long term goals of the agency.

4B: The ESU allocates human, material, and fiscal resources to optimize agency efficiency and effectiveness.

4C: The ESU recruits, employs and retains highly qualified staff.

4D: The ESU provides induction, mentoring, professional learning opportunities for staff to grow and improve.

