

Nebraska Narrative Report 2018 – 2019

Part 1 – State Leadership Funds (AEFLA Section 223)

Nebraska Adult Education as the SEA for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provided State Leadership activities in accordance with AEFLA Section 223 to nine subrecipients during the 2018-2019 program year. This program year marked the first year of awards under the WIOA compliant competition held early in 2018, which allowed for a thorough review of professional development needs across the State. State Leadership activities were implemented to meet these needs, as well as enhance WIOA partnerships and career pathways as outlined in the State plan. Our focus also included activities that promoted high quality professional development focusing on improving overall instruction and performance. Our technical assistance and monitoring helped better evaluate programs and processes overall.

In order to meet federal reporting requirements, the State's management information system, AIMS, required replacement. The State procured LACES (Literacy, Adult and Community Education System) as our Management Information System (MIS) for data management and annual reporting to the National Reporting System (NRS). Switching to a new system necessitated intensive training, desktop monitoring and ongoing technical assistance throughout the year. The State office is dedicated to providing accurate and complete data.

Another significant challenge was the impending expiration of NRS approved assessments used in Nebraska Adult Education. After thorough research and evaluation, Nebraska Adult Education implemented a pilot, then adopted CASAS® (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems) assessments for students in all Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs). In order to promote digital literacy for our students and to minimize staff errors in testing procedures, computer-based testing is required, with an exception for those in State Corrections. Transitioning to new NRS approved assessments also required intensive training, desktop monitoring and ongoing technical assistance. With the aid of State Leadership funding, we successfully achieved our goals.

(a) Describe how the State has used funds made available under section 223 for each of the following required activities:

- Alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other one-stop required partners to implement strategies in the Combined State Plan as described in section 223(1)(a).
- Establishment or operation of a high quality professional development program as described in section 223(1)(b).
- Provision of technical assistance to funded eligible providers as described in section 223(1)(c).
- Monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as described in section 223(1)(d).

Alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other one-stop required partners to implement strategies in the Combined State Plan as described in section 223(1)(a).

Coordination of services and promoting partnerships has once again been a priority this program year. Regular meetings with WIOA partners at the State and local levels have ensured the delineation of a comprehensive scope of services. Students are served by partners concurrently but without duplication.

Although the State has continued to face challenges under the federal law, Nebraska Adult Education has remained focused on excelling at our primary focus which is student education and successful transition. Since WIOA has transformed our Adult Education program to one with a Career Pathways

focus supported by College and Career Readiness Standards, our Career Pathways intake is paramount to the success of the students. Introducing the concept of career pathways not only prepares the students for transitional opportunities, it prepares students to successfully transition through WIOA partner programs that are employment and career focused. Key terms and language are introduced in Adult Education that will then, be familiar to students as they receive services from employment-based partners. The entire program is framed with the end in sight – which is long-term, sustainable employment.

Career Pathways are supported with referrals to partners both concurrently and as the student transitions. This has been enhanced by adopting the same progress assessment tool, CASAS®, which is used by the Nebraska Department of Labor. CASAS® tests are competency-based assessments with real-world contexts and a career focus. Utilizing the same assessment tool allows for unifying goals, coordinating progress measurement and eliminating duplication.

Establishment or operation of a high quality professional development program as described in section 223 (1)(b).

Throughout the program year, necessity dictated that intensive training be focused on the new NRS MIS, LACES, as well as the new basic skills and progress assessments, CASAS®. These two major changes and the required training served as a catalyst for a more in-depth understanding of performance, assessment, quality instruction, NRS reporting requirements and the need for accurate and timely data entry. Additionally, Career Pathways continues to be a priority topic of professional development.

Multiple methods were used to deliver professional development activities statewide. These methods included utilizing a small cohort with a train-the-trainer approach, online training programs, face-to-face trainings, web-based meetings and conference calls, and attending COABE (Coalition on Adult Basic Education), Nebraska Adult Education Conference as well as other conferences.

Professional development opportunities were conducted primarily by experts in the field. LACES and CASAS® staff came to Nebraska to provide multiple face-to-face training opportunities as well as webinars and online training programs. Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) provided research-based, high-quality educational opportunities with face-to-face trainings at the Nebraska Adult Education Conference and COABE as well as many online courses. National Reporting System, NRS, also provided excellent resources as well as webinars and online courses.

Program Administrative Team Meetings: Multiple program administrative team meetings were conducted throughout the year both in-person and virtually through Zoom or conference calling. These meetings/trainings focused on NRS reporting, performance, Nebraska Assessment Policy, budget management, transition to LACES, transition to CASAS®, effective utilization of LACES to inform best practices for performance, as well as content standards and quality instruction.

LACES Trainings: LACES trainings were offered in a variety of ways throughout the program year. Initially an intensive face-to-face training was provided for a cohort of program directors and one additional staff person from each program. This was designed as a train-the-trainer approach so that support would be available within each program to aid in the transition process. Manuals were also provided. On-going virtual training through Zoom or conference calls as well as countless emails and phone calls to provide technical assistance were provided throughout the year. During the last half of the year, the focus of the trainings shifted from initial data entry to best practices in utilizing the dashboard alerts and other reports to inform improvements in performance.

Nebraska Assessment Policy training: Early in the program year, a Zoom meeting was conducted with the program administrative team to highlight changes from the previous Assessment Policy and offer more guidance and clarification. Local programs were then required to provide training to their staff accordingly. All Adult Education staff in each program across the state were required to fill out a form and submit to the State acknowledging receipt of the Assessment Policy and agreeing to comply with the terms. Throughout the year, further guidance was provided both individually as well as during meetings and training.

CASAS® Trainings: CASAS® offers online training for free and requires that all staff proctoring an assessment first be adequately trained online. This training is always available and convenient for our staff: primarily part-time and located across the state. Three online trainings were required: Implementation Basics Training, CASAS® eTests Coordinator Training, CASAS® eTests Proctor Training. Upon completion of the trainings, certificates were required to be submitted to the State Office. Staff are not given access to the TOPSpro system to utilize CASAS® Assessments without meeting this requirement. In addition to the online training, a CASAS® trainer also attended our Nebraska Adult Education conference in October and provided face-to-face training to all participants as well as manning an exhibitor's booth to provide additional clarification and guidance. Several additional trainings were offered in the spring through webinars as well as ongoing guidance through emails and phone calls.

A CASAS® pilot was established with Crete Public Schools including specific training in September and October. Testing began in October for the pilot project. During the spring, additional programs began to offer CASAS® assessments to new students. As students post-tested, they were re-tested using the CASAS® assessments so they would be available for carryover to the new program year. TABE 9 & 10 was only used for post-testing by May 1 and completely discontinued as of July 1. Required CASAS® Assessments are Math and Reading GOALS for ABE and Life and Work Reading and Listening assessments for ESL. In order to support digital literacy for our students as well as minimize human error, computer-based eTests are required whenever possible. Paper testing is only allowed in correctional facilities.

Nebraska Adult Education Conference: October 10th and 11th, the Nebraska Adult Education Conference was held in Kearney, Nebraska. This was our 37th annual conference. Given the changes to LACES and CASAS®, the theme was Chapter One: A New Beginning for Nebraska Adult Education. Trainings also focused on NRS performance: Measurable Skill Gain (MSG) and Periods of Participation (PoP), as well as research-based targeted instruction in key subjects, Career Pathways, workforce readiness, distance education, GED® tests among others. There were several presenters from LINC, GED Testing Service®, Burlington English, CASAS®, Department of Corrections, and more.

National Association of State Directors of Adult Education, NASDAE, National Training Institute: NTI was held in Savannah Georgia on October 22 – 25th and was attended by the State Director and Program Specialist. Trainings offered on NRS performance, Integrated Education & Training (IET) and Integrated English Literacy & Civics Education (IELCE), and Funding Models were particularly instrumental in understanding and informing future direction.

2018 New State Director's Training: November 13th – 16th in Washington DC, the New State Director's Training was attended by the State Director and Program Specialist. The focus on program requirements and key components of WIOA as well as resources provided helpful direction and guidance.

Leadership Committee Meetings: An initial Leadership Committee Meeting in July, revealed a need for a revision in process and change in scope of the Leadership Committee. Membership replacement and

expansion was necessitated and a larger Leadership Committee was developed with a cross-section of Adult Education Directors, Instructors, and local program institution administration. In March, the Leadership Committee Meeting was held in Lincoln and focused on budget management issues.

COABE Conference: COABE was held in New Orleans on March 31 – April 3rd. The State Director, three State staff and three State sponsored local program staff as well as many additional Nebraska local program staff attended the conference and took advantage of the various strands of quality professional development: Administrators, Adult Basic Education, Career and Technical Education, College and Career Pathways, Community-Based, Corrections, Digital Literacy & Technology, ESL/ELL, Family Literacy, Financial Literacy, Health Literacy, High School Equivalency/Post-Secondary, IET, Immigrant Integration, Leadership, Learn with LINCS, Learning Difficulties, Lifelong Learning, Local Program Administrator, Numeracy, Open Door Collective, PIAAC/WIOA, Professional Development, Research, Science, State Innovations, Student Engagement, Transitions, WIOA Implementation, and Workforce Development. Those attending were encouraged to share their knowledge with their peers.

Annual Meeting of State Directors of Adult Education: The State Directors Meeting was held in Washington DC on April 30th – May 2nd. The State Director and two Program Specialists attended the meeting. The theme was Inspire to Innovate in Adult Education and the training as well as the networking were valuable insights into innovative possibilities.

Local Program Site Visits: Throughout the year, State staff intentionally visited local programs with the agenda of offering support. Some visits were coupled with targeted technical assistance regarding IET development or LACES data entry issues etc. Six programs were visited and several received multiple visits.

Provision of technical assistance to funded eligible providers as described in section 223(1)(c).

Mastering a new NRS MIS, as well as new assessments, required extensive technical assistance throughout the program year. This was provided through countless emails, phone calls, written guidance and policy updates, Zoom meetings, site visits as well as formal trainings both virtual and face-to-face.

Desk-top monitoring revealed many issues as data entry began in LACES. Immediate targeted responses allowed for quick correction and minimized errors. Local programs often requested assistance through emails or phone calls as questions arose with the new systems. Resolution of these issues was paramount to having complete and accurate data for NRS reporting.

Monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of adult education activities as described in section 223(1)(d).

Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of Nebraska Adult Education and the improvements in programs and services have been an ongoing priority. Onboarding a new NRS MIS has required near constant monitoring and LACES is equipped with helpful evaluation tools. The LACES Dashboard allows programs and the State Office to track performance, errors in data, post-test rate, outcome measures, student and staff credentials, as well as all NRS tables and much more. Every table has a feature to drill down to the individual students making up each number. This allows for more understanding, oversight, and significantly enhances the overall quality of all data.

Dissemination of information on best practices are key to the continuous improvement of our programs. Through countless webinars, Zoom meetings, conference calls, emails as well as face-to-face trainings, the State Office has continually gathered and shared information about best practices with all programs.

The selection and evaluation of trainings has been focused on the end user: the improvement of services provided for and by the instructor and the impact on the student's performance.

The transition to LACES and CASAS® assessments has informed much of the training this program year. Monitoring of these systems provides continual evaluation of the effectiveness of trainings and reveals the need for adjustments and additional training needs are addressed.

(b) As applicable, describe how the State has used funds for additional permissible activities described in section 223 (a)(2).

Distance education continues to be an integral part of Nebraska Adult Education. Due to the large rural areas, distance education is often the most reasonable and accessible means of service delivery for some students. Allowable distance education providers are vetted and authorized in the Distance Education Policy. Both distance and blended learning (utilizing the distance education curriculum in the classroom) are proving successful in many local programs. One program is also using an eLearning platform to match targeted instruction with an expert subject instructor to students in a classroom at another location maximizing quality instruction in a large geographical area.

There has been much information gathered and shared specifically regarding the implementation of quality Integrated Education and Training, IET, programs. Training has been provided both virtually and in-person. It has also been the impetus for several meetings and site visits. The collaboration and innovation required for implementation along with the training and oversight by the State Office have proven worthwhile with successful outcomes.

Tyson Foods has partnered with two of our local programs in offering Adult Education classes within their plants in three locations. The plant in Dakota City is Tyson's largest beef processing plant in the United States and this partnership has doubled the number of students served by one of our providers.

Part 2 – Performance Data Analysis

Describe how the adult education program performed in the overall assessment of core programs based on the core indicators of performance. Discuss how the assessment was used to improve quality and effectiveness of the funded eligible providers and any plans to further increase performance in future reporting years.

(a) Describe how the adult education program performed in the overall assessment of core programs based on the core indicators of performance.

Improving performance was the focus of policy and training during the program year. The results have proven positive. With the implementation of a new NRS MIS and subsequent targeted and continuous training to providers, overall performance increased for the State. Nebraska was able to achieve an overall 108.7% of the negotiated target for MSG. Considering the challenges of operating under year-one, post-competition, converting to a new MIS and implementing new assessments, this increase is remarkable.

Due to the time-lag for exit-based indicators, much of that data is still in our former NRS MIS, AIMS. Extracting the required data is challenging using this system. Once reportable data is available in LACES, there will be improvements with data quality, data analysis features, and ease of reporting.

Currently, data is gathered for exit-based indicators primarily using data match. In the future, plans are underway to additionally include survey data to account for performance indicators on our student population without social security numbers. As that is a growing population, this practice should further

improve future performance. Additionally, Nebraska Adult Education is finalizing plans to be a part of the State Wage Interchange System, which should allow for better return on data match.

(b) Discuss how the assessment was used to improve quality and effectiveness of the funded eligible providers and any plans to further increase performance in future reporting years.

During the program year, the State Office implemented a new strategy to place a greater amount of responsibility on subrecipient providers to analyze and report on their performance. Guidance and training from the State Office was routine and consistent, including a thorough review of 34 CFR §462 Subpart D. Providers have spent years avoiding accountability for MSG performance and regulatory compliance. With the new strategy of ongoing training and accountability, providers better understand the requirements under AEFLA and have responded with increased observation, desktop monitoring process at the local level and an increase in overall performance.

Performance data analysis will continue to be a priority and will be used to identify issues and inform best practices in the future. As programs utilize training and become more proficient with the many uses of LACES reports for data analysis, performance should continue to improve. Further monitoring of programs as well as offering trainings targeting performance improvement will ensure continued progress in future reporting years.

Part 3 – Integration with One-stop Partners

Describe how the State eligible agency, as the entity responsible for meeting one-stop requirements under 34 CFR Part 463, subpart J, carries out or delegates its required one-stop roles to eligible providers. Describe the applicable career services that are provided in the one-stop system. Describe how infrastructure costs are supported through State and local options.

For Nebraska Adult Education, as Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, establishing and maintaining our status as a Core Partner under federal law has continued to be an ongoing challenge. As the sole education partner, the importance of basic skills improvement and secondary credentialing are often overlooked in the race to place Nebraskans in jobs. With the continuous remarks statewide that there are not enough workers to fill open positions, employment programs work diligently to expedite the process of meeting employers demands.

In order to ensure Title II carries out one-stop roles, subrecipient providers have played an important role in establishing working relationships that emphasize the importance of English language acquisition and basic skills improvement to the end goal of placing workers in jobs. The State Director spends considerable time reminding all parties that a secondary education is key to long-term and sustainable employment.

The long-awaited common intake system, identified in the Combined State Plan and funded through a grant received by Nebraska Department of Labor did not come to fruition. During this waiting period, progress towards improved process between partners sharing participants stagnated. Despite this setback, Nebraska Adult Education providers work diligently to ensure all Nebraskans have direct access to AEFLA-funded programs across the State. This mission is carried out through local partnerships and meetings, as well as through information provided at State-level functions and meetings.

As with years past, Title II participants routinely do not access services through the American Job Centers (one-stops) and are more often than not, job attached. Career Services are provided at Title II program sites and are rarely, if ever, conducted at the one-stop. Information about AEFLA funded providers is available across the State and most agencies are aware of who the AEFLA providers are;

therefore referrals are direct. Students will receive the majority, if not all, career services at Title II sites. Referrals from one-stops often result in individuals who are not interested in pursuing a high school equivalency credential at that particular moment are in desperate need of employment. Referrals are all followed up on and applicable services are offered.

As the SEA for Title II funding, Nebraska Department of Education chose to retain full negotiating authority for infrastructure funding of the comprehensive one-stops. The process of negotiating was difficult as it was new to all partners. Determining equitable shares proved difficult and the State as a whole chose to use participants served that did not meet the requirement in the law, ensuring that the formula met the requirement of proportionate use and relative benefit received. Through continued consultation and guidance, Nebraska Adult Education continued to address the need to meet the requirement found in 34 CFR §463.715(3) during the program year. Funding through local program administration is provided to pay IFA costs directly to each local area by a designated provider.

Part 4 – Integrated English Literacy and Civics education (IELCE) Program (AEFLA Section 243)

Describe how the State is using funds under Section 243 to support the following activities under the IELCE program:

- Describe when your State held a competition (the latest competition) for IELCE program funds and the number of grants awarded by your State to support IELCE programs.
- Describe your State efforts in meeting the requirement to provide IELCE services in combination with integrated education and training activities.
- Describe how the State is progressing towards program goals of preparing and placing IELCE program participants in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency as described in section 243(c)(1) and discuss any performance results, challenges and lessons learned from implementing those program goals.
- Describe how the State is progressing towards program goals of ensuring that IELCE program activities are integrated with the local workforce development system and its functions described in section 243(c)(2) and discuss any performance results, challenges and lessons learned from implementing those program goals.

Describe when your State held a competition (the latest competition) for IELCE program funds and the number of grants awarded by your State to support IELCE programs.

Nebraska Adult Education hosted a request for proposal competition for AEFLA funding in 2018 for the 2018-2019 program year, which began on July 1, 2018. A total of six grants were awarded to subrecipients.

Describe your State efforts in meeting the requirement to provide IELCE services in combination with integrated education and training activities.

To help support programs in the establishment of integrated education and training activities for IELCE students, Nebraska Adult Education hired an additional program specialist position during the second part of the program year, to focus on Section 243 activities. This additional staff person has been instrumental in helping the State Office facilitate the technical assistance, support and monitoring necessary to ensure compliance with the regulations.

Nebraska provided increased technical assistance on the topic of IELCE and IET requirements, which resulted in significant growth in the area of integrated education and training. Through targeted site

visits, webinars, conference calls and emails, programs were equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to develop and design quality IET programs.

A continued obstacle is the difficulty subrecipient providers have in understanding their requirements under Section 243. Despite having applied for Section 243 funding, a few providers are still struggling with implementation. Our State Office staff is continuously working with these programs to provide ongoing guidance and technical assistance.

Describe how the State is progressing towards program goals of preparing and placing IELCE program participants in unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency as described in section 243(c)(1) and discuss any performance results, challenges and lessons learned from implementing those program goals.

In Nebraska, the development of IET programs for IELCE students starts with identifying each local area's in-demand occupations. Programs must demonstrate this demand for employment in local labor markets and are encouraged to focus efforts on existing and emerging occupations that meet certain high wage, high skill and high demand criteria.

Then, to foster placement in employment, local programs must focus on the end result and work backwards, ensuring all stages of IET implementation are met and activities are delivered concurrently and contextually. By identifying and building the connection with local employers and community partners, Nebraska IELCE programs are strengthening the support for their participants.

Nebraska's AEFLA providers are faced with two persistent challenges: a low unemployment rate statewide and a high, high school graduation rate. Many English language learners come to our Adult Education programs job attached, therefore are not initially looking for employment, or even job training opportunities. We are working together as a State to overcome the presented challenges to provide opportunities that lead to economic self-sufficiency for our IELCE participants.

Describe how the State is progressing towards program goals of ensuring that IELCE program activities are integrated with the local workforce development system and its functions described in section 243(c)(2) and discuss any performance results, challenges and lessons learned from implementing those program goals.

Several local programs have established partnerships with their local workforce development system to support their IELCE program activities. Tyson Foods partners with two of our local programs to offer Adult Education classes at three of their locations. Another local program partners with two feedlots to provide classes onsite for their workers. Many of our local program staff also attend their local workforce board meetings. These partnerships have been beneficial in supporting IELCE program activities.

In the development of IET programs for IELCE participants, local programs are encouraged to seek out local workforce partners for the workforce training component, in order to collaborate and not duplicate training efforts. As the establishment of IET programs grows across Nebraska, this will hopefully facilitate and expand awareness and collaboration with local workforce partners.

Part 5 – Adult Education Standards

If your state has adopted new challenging K-12 standards under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, describe how your Adult Education content standards are aligned with those K-12 standards.

Nebraska Adult Education has officially adopted the following standards:

College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education

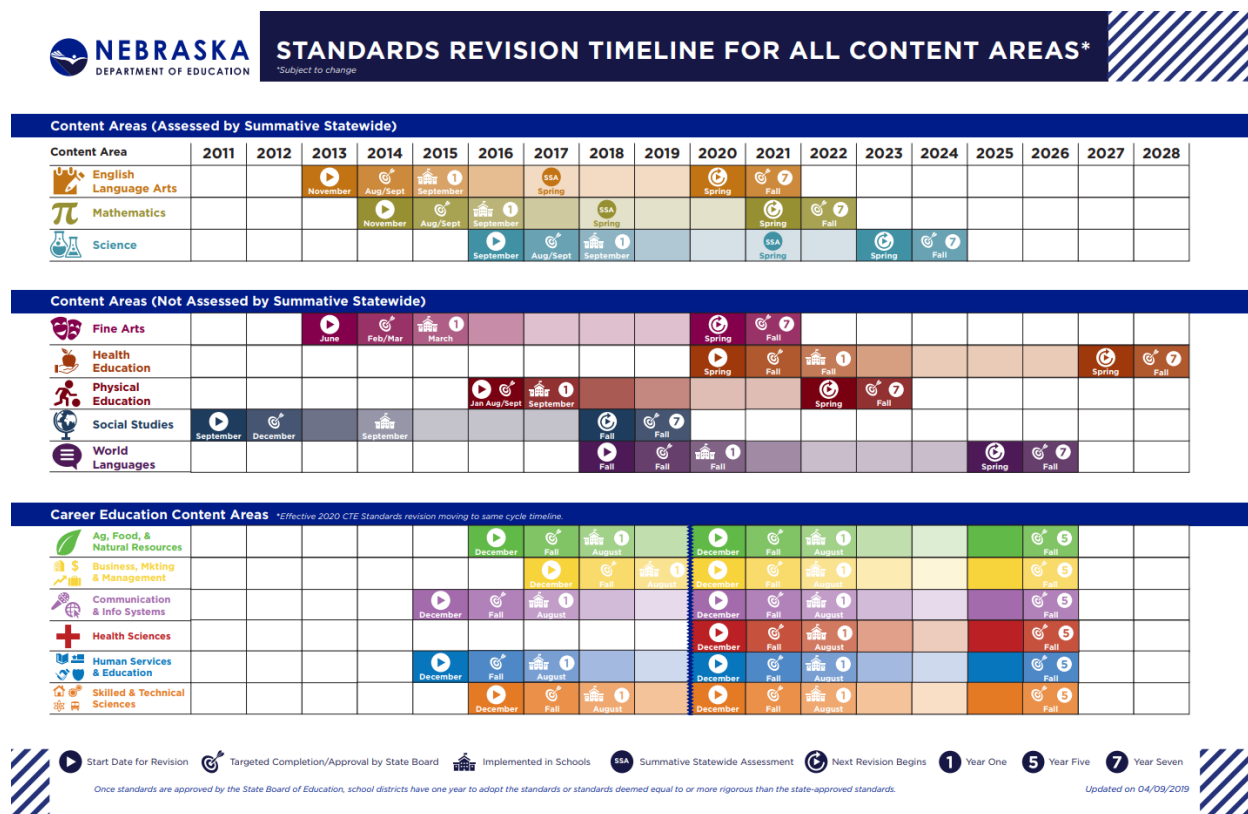
<https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf>

English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education

<https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/elp-standards-adult-ed.pdf>

Nebraska Revised Statute 79-760.01 requires the Nebraska State Board of Education to “adopt measurable academic content standards for at least the grade levels required for statewide assessment.” Those standards shall cover the subject areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, and the State Board of Education shall develop a plan to review and update standards for those subject areas every seven years.

A Content Area Standards Revision Timeline has been developed and includes a tentative timeline for the review and revision of all content area standards:



Nebraska English Language Arts Standards

https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2014_Updated_ELA_Standards_Vertical_Version_k_12.pdf

Nebraska Mathematics Standards

https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2015_Nebraska_College_and_Career_Standards_for_Mathematics_Vertical.pdf

Nebraska College and Career Ready Standards for Science

https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Nebraska_Science_Standards_Final_10_23.pdf

Nebraska Social Studies Standards

https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Nebraska-Social-Studies-Standards_Final-Draft-11.5.2019.pdf

Nebraska English Language Proficiency Standards

<https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Nebr-English-Langauge-Proficiency-Standards-April-2014.pdf>

Optional – Describe implementation efforts, challenges and any lessons learned.

Implementation efforts of College and Career Readiness Standards were met with mixed responses. Providers had not been previously held to an instructional standard now required under WIOA, therefore there was resistance and hesitation. Regardless, adopting and implementing standards have proven effective in helping providers better understand the immense responsibility that comes with the delivery of high quality and performance-driven education.

Part 6 – Programs for Corrections Education and the Education of Other Institutionalized Individuals (AEFLA Section 225)

What was the relative rate of recidivism for criminal offenders served? Please describe the methods and factors used in calculating the rate for this reporting period.

A request for information regarding relative rate of recidivism for criminal offenders was sent to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS). The program director advised that recidivism rates for Adult Education are not tracked.