

**Creating Equitable Opportunities  
for an Essential Education  
for all  
Nebraska Public School Students**

**Approved as a Draft**

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A quotation graces the bulletin board in the office of an educator: "Children are the messages we send to a time we shall not see." The author is unknown, yet the message speaks volumes; it is a message of hope and commitment to the present and the future! This we know to be true: both family and society find in children promises for brighter tomorrows. Because of these promises, the education of all youngsters is a paramount responsibility of the society into which they were born.

Source:

*"Quality Middle Grades Education, A Nebraska Perspective,"* Nebraska Department of Education

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## I. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

**Purpose:** This document identifies the educational opportunities and experiences that are necessary to create an essential education for students in all Nebraska public schools. Other state and local documents describe expectations for student performance. However, to achieve these expectations, students must have access to quality staff, curriculum, support services, and facilities and environment. It is the responsibility of state and local partnerships of policy leaders, patrons, and educators to assure that those opportunities are available in all Nebraska public schools.

**Definition:** An essential education is one that enables students to become:

- Proficient in meeting the State’s academic content standards and essential learnings
- Prepared to be successful at each level and to make a successful transition from early childhood education through postsecondary education and/or career entry
- Prepared to contribute to our culturally diverse democratic society

Follow-up documents will assist in implementation of equitable educational opportunities in all Nebraska public schools.

## II. MISSION OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

### From Nebraska Statute 79-701

#### 79-701

#### **Mission of public school system.**

The Legislature hereby finds and declares that the mission of the State of Nebraska, through its public school system, is to:

(1) Offer each individual the opportunity to develop competence in the basic skills of communications, computations, and knowledge of basic facts concerning the environment, history, and society;

(2) Offer each individual the opportunity to develop higher order thinking and problem-solving skills by means of adequate preparation in mathematics, science, the social sciences, and foreign languages and by means of appropriate and progressive use of technology;

(3) Instill in each individual the ability and desire to continue learning throughout his or her life;

(4) Encourage knowledge and understanding of political society and democracy in order to foster active participation;

(5) Encourage the creative potential of each individual through exposure to the fine arts and humanities;

(6) Encourage a basic understanding of and aid the development of good health habits; and

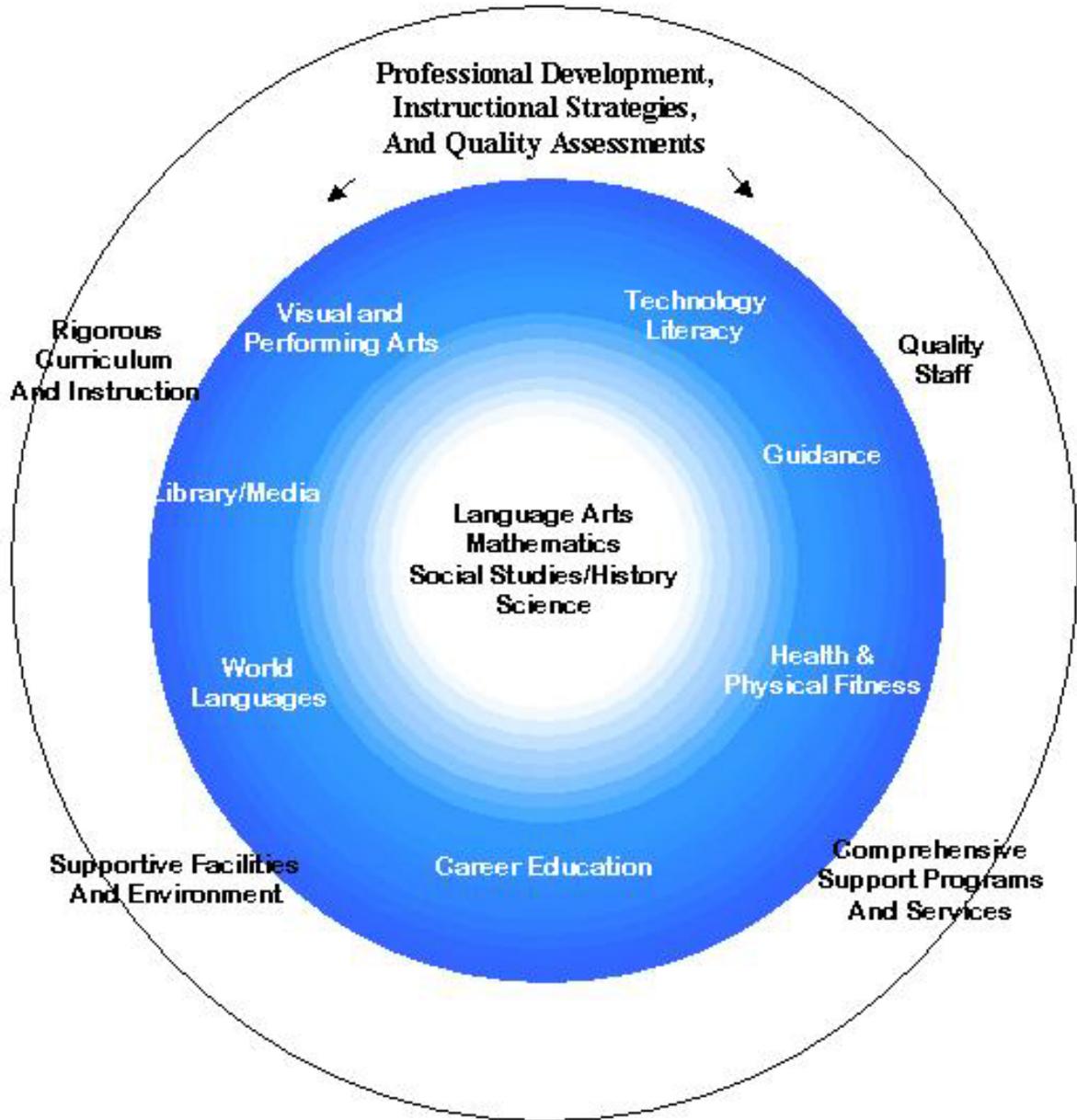
(7) Offer each individual the opportunity for career exploration and awareness.

#### **Source:**

Laws 1984, LB 994, § 1; R.S.1943, (1994), § 79-4,140.01;

Laws 1996, LB 900, § 375.

### III. A MODEL FOR EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL NEBRASKA STUDENTS



## IV. COMPONENTS OF EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

It is imperative that all Nebraska students have equitable opportunities to acquire an essential education. These opportunities include access to competent and qualified staff, rigorous curriculum and instruction, comprehensive support services, and supportive facilities and environment. The following sections provide descriptions for each of these components.

### A. QUALITY STAFF

A competent and qualified staff meets state qualification requirements and provides all students with educational opportunities and effective instructional programs that guide students in achieving challenging standards and sustaining high achievement over time.

#### ***Administrative Staff***

**Hold Nebraska Administrative and Supervisory Certificates with appropriate endorsements and:**

- Provide effective leadership to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and technology focusing on the instructional needs of all students
- Motivate staff and students to achieve at high levels
- Organize and manage resources to optimize student learning
- Lead school improvement efforts to increase student learning
- Assure staff participation in appropriate staff development opportunities
- Improve the quality of instruction through teacher evaluation procedures that are clear, equitable, and systematic
- Participate in professional development opportunities addressing district and building goals and initiatives
- Structure a caring, safe, supportive, and enriching learning environment for staff and students
- Engage families of students and other community members in local educational initiatives and communicate effectively with the school community

***Instructional Staff*****Hold Nebraska Teaching Certificates with endorsements or other licensure appropriate for the level and content and:**

- Use effective instructional strategies that are appropriate to meet the diverse needs of all students and that provide multiple opportunities to demonstrate success
- Provide quality and varied learning experiences that support, nurture, and engage all students
- Have high expectations for all students and guide students in achieving at high levels
- Integrate topics from other subject areas
- Demonstrate and continually update competencies in technology
- Apply appropriate assessment strategies to inform and modify instruction and to measure and report student learning
- Participate in on-going professional development to continuously improve skills, increase content knowledge, and address instructional needs of diverse learners
- Structure a caring, safe, supportive, and enriching learning environment that encourages students to reach for high levels of achievement
- Demonstrate enthusiasm for teaching, learning, students, and the profession as a whole
- Have time to plan, prepare, and conduct instruction and to evaluate the results

***Paraprofessional and Operational Staff*****Have qualifications for job duties and:**

- Contribute positively to the overall learning climate
- Support the overall educational program
- Communicate effectively

## B. RIGOROUS CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

The curriculum serves as the foundation of student learning. It guides the content of instruction and leads to acquisition of an essential education. Curriculum content is based on the recognition that knowledge represents the culture's past and that today's learners will contribute to a changing future. The State Board of Education, in a policy adopted March 3, 2000, indicated that "The Essential Curriculum combines the standards and the essential learnings into an educational experience that integrates content and skill mastery as well as analytical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. It is important to show how disciplines relate to one another as well as to everyday life. All public schools in Nebraska should offer their students access to the Essential Curriculum."

### Curriculum and Instruction in each area:

#### *Elementary - Middle - Secondary*

- Are based on state standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, mathematics, science and social studies/history and essential learnings in visual and performing arts, world languages, career education, health and physical education, and technology
- Are appropriate for the developmental level of the students
- Address diverse learning needs
- Instill a passion for learning and the importance of life-long learning
- Develop problem solving and critical thinking skills, decision making skills, data gathering, and critical use of information
- Develop expected work ethics, as well as group participation and leadership skills
- Incorporate character education and multicultural education, including respect for diversity
- Provide for application of technology in all learning areas
- Provide access to advanced courses
- Are organized in a schedule that is functional and meets student needs in all curriculum areas

**Curriculum and Instruction include:*****Language Arts  
Reading/ Writing/  
Speaking/ Listening***

- Skills and knowledge development in all language arts areas (reading, writing, speaking, listening, literature, creativity, and expression) as a part of a balanced and comprehensive literacy program
- Meaningful practice and experience in reading, writing, speaking, and listening throughout the school day in all curriculum areas
- Recognition of the creative interaction and adaptation of ideas associated with quality reading and writing
- Encouraging students to interact with and comprehend a variety of texts

***Mathematics***

- Arithmetic, extending beyond basic computation to estimation, number sense, measurement, geometry/spatial concepts, algebraic concepts, and data analysis/statistical concepts
- Development, practice, and application of mathematics skills including the integration of technology
- The skills and knowledge to communicate mathematically, both orally and in writing, and solve mathematical problems
- Development of reasoning skills for flexible and resourceful problem solving

**Curriculum and Instruction include:*****Science***

- Knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts and processes required for science literacy
- Content in:
  - Unifying concepts and processes
  - Scientific inquiry
  - Facts, concepts, principles, and theories in:
    - Physical science
    - Life science
    - Earth and space science
  - Relationships between science and technology
  - Impact of science on personal and societal decisions
  - History and nature of science

***Social Studies/  
History***

- Experiences to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective participation in the community, the state, the nation, and the world
- The understandings of democratic belief, practice of patriotic exercises, opportunities to practice citizenship in school and community, and instruction in history, government, and the constitutions of the United States and Nebraska
- The impact of ideas and experiences found in the history of the world
- The study of geography
- The study of economic systems
- The understanding of the perspectives of the geographer, economist, historian, and social scientist in relation to the global complexities of contemporary life.

**Curriculum and Instruction include:*****Visual and  
Performing Arts******Art,  
Music,  
Theater,  
Dance***

- Content in music and the visual arts, and may include dance and theater
- Performing, creating, interpreting, and evaluating the arts
- Developing and presenting analyses of works of visual and performing arts
- Studying exemplary works from a variety of cultures and historical periods
- Using various types of arts knowledge and skills within and across the disciplines.
- Reinforcing creativity through each student's unique capacities

***Technology Literacy***

- The basic operations and concepts of technology systems using a variety of media and formats
- Using technology to collect information, process data, solve problems, and report results
- Ethical and societal issues related to technology

***Health and Physical  
Fitness***

- Active involvement in health related activities that develop physical, mental, and emotional wellness
- Physical exercise in individual and team activities
- Knowledge, experiences, and decision-making skills that focus on life-long health, nutrition, physical activity, and wholesome leisure activities

**Curriculum and Instruction include:*****World Languages***

- Opportunities to develop communication skills in languages other than English beginning with introductory experiences in the elementary grades
- Gaining knowledge and understanding of cultures
- Developing insight into the nature of language and culture
- Applying language skills and cultural knowledge

***Career Education  
(Including  
Technical  
Education)***

- Career exploration and awareness
- Applied learning integrating academic knowledge and occupational skills
- Understanding and applying the principles of personal economic decision-making and entrepreneurship
- Knowledge of individual aptitudes and interest areas
- Workplace readiness, foundation knowledge, and the technical skills necessary to gain employment in career cluster areas such as:
  - Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources
  - Architecture and Construction
  - Arts, Audio Visual Technology, and Communications
  - Business, Management, and Administrative Services
  - Health Science
  - Hospitality and Tourism
  - Information Technology
  - Manufacturing
  - Marketing, Sales, and Services
  - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

## C. COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The programs and services listed below support and enrich learning experiences to meet the needs of all students. They include guidance and counseling, library/media, technology support, special education, high ability learning, English language learning, and early childhood education.

### **The Program and/or Service:**

#### ***Guidance and Counseling***

- Provides a comprehensive K-12 program to assist all students in achieving academic, personal, social, and career development

#### ***Library/Media***

- Makes available a wide range of print and electronic resources to complement instruction and support learners and learning

#### ***Technology Support***

- Makes available the technology tools and infrastructure necessary to support teaching and learning
- Provides for use of technological tools to enhance learning, increase productivity, and promote creativity

#### ***Special Education***

- Provides appropriate educational and related services for students with disabilities

***High Ability Learning***

- Provides educational services and learning experiences for high ability learners and develops unique talents and skills of all students

***English Language Learning***

- Assists students for whom English is not the primary language to become proficient in the use of English

***Early Childhood Education***

- Provides programs and services for young children with disabilities and their families, beginning at the time a child's disability is verified, from birth through entrance to school
- Encourages community and parent partnerships to provide and/or support access to high quality prekindergarten programs for all children

***Health Services***

- Provides on-site availability to basic health services

***Nutrition Services***

- Makes available food and nutrition services

## D. SUPPORTIVE FACILITIES AND ENVIRONMENT

The facilities and environment have an influence on student learning. Physical aspects, as well as the climate and culture of the school, impact student motivation, interpersonal interactions, discipline, and academic performance. Therefore, they should be designed, organized, and used to assure equity and support quality learning.

### **The facilities are:**

#### ***Facilities***

- Safe – Buildings, equipment, and grounds are physically safe
- Healthy – Schools follow practices that are physically healthful (i.e., asbestos-controlled, smoke-free, lead-free, etc.)
- Clean – Schools are clean and tidy
- Physically accessible to all – School facilities allow equal access for all by eliminating physical and environmental barriers
- Updated to support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning – Physical facilities accommodate technology, distance learning, and varied instructional arrangements
- Climate controlled – Schools provide or work toward comfortable learning conditions through climate controlled buildings

## *Learning Environment*

### **The environment is:**

- Welcoming – The school environment provides a welcoming and inviting atmosphere that is emotionally safe, supportive, and disciplined and that honors diversity
- Supportive of learning – School settings provide a nurturing, non-threatening environment
- Engaging – Learners are engaged in meaningful, relevant, and productive learning experiences
- Orderly – Policies and practices result in an orderly environment with emphasis on consistent school-wide positive support for student management
- Respectful – Schools have positive environments that promote respect, trust, integrity, and regard for self and others
- Focused – The school environment establishes learning as the central purpose and focus of the school

Appendix A

**REQUIRED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

The following chart shows current requirements in state statutes and rules.

<sup>1</sup> Elementary Gr K-5 or K-6	<sup>1</sup> Middle/Jr High Gr 6-8 or 7-9	<sup>1</sup> High School Gr 9-12
<sup>2</sup> (At least 1032 clock hours in the school year)(400 for Kindergarten)	<sup>2</sup> (At least 1032 clock hours up to Gr 8: at least 1080 clock hours for Gr 9 in the school year)	<sup>2</sup> (At least 1080 clock hours provided in the school year)
Reading Language Arts Mathematics Science Social Studies Visual Arts Music Physical Education Health Technology	Reading Language Arts Mathematics Science Social Studies Visual & Performing Arts (art and music) Physical Education Health Career Education Technology	<sup>3</sup> <b>Provided in Gr 9-12 (Student requirements are set locally):</b> Language Arts – 60 instructional units Mathematics – 40 instr units Social Science – 40 instr units Science – 40 instr units Foreign Language – 20 instr units Health & Physical Fitness – 20 instr units Visual & Performing Arts – 40 instr units including vocal music, instrumental music, and art Career & Technical Education – 80 instr units Technology (included in instruction)
←————— <sup>1</sup> Comprehensive Guidance —————→		
←————— <sup>1</sup> Library Media Technology —————→		
←————— <sup>4</sup> Special Education, <sup>5</sup> High Ability Learners —————→		
←————— Qualified Staff – <sup>2</sup> Certificated, <sup>1</sup> endorsed staff, <sup>1</sup> staff development —————→		
←————— <sup>1</sup> Safe, healthy, environment —————→		

<sup>1</sup>Required by Rule 10 (*Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools*)

<sup>2</sup>State Statue 79-211

<sup>3</sup>This chart shows the instructional units required by Rule 10 (accreditation). One instructional unit equals 15 clock hours of instruction. (As an example, a 50-minute class conducted for 180 days equals 10 instructional units – which would typically be one year of instruction).

<sup>4</sup>Rule 51 (Special Education)

<sup>5</sup>Rule 3 (High Ability Learner)

## Appendix B

# REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

### State Statutes:

79-211 (Length of School Year)  
79-703 (Accreditation of Schools)  
79-705 (State Fire Recognition Day)  
79-706 (Fire Prevention Instruction)  
79-712, 713 (Health Education)  
79-720 (Multicultural Education)  
79-724 (American citizenship education, American history, patriotism)  
79-725 (Character education)  
79-801-802 (Teacher and Administrator Certification)

### Rules and Regulations:

Rule 10 (*Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools*), including State Standards for Mathematics, Reading/Writing/Speaking/Listening, and Science (Social Studies/History pending)  
Rule 51 (*Special Education Programs Standards*)  
Rule 3 (*Identification of High Ability Learners*)  
Rule 11 (*Early Childhood Education Programs*)

### Guides and Resource Materials:

Agricultural Education Frameworks  
Business Education Framework for Nebraska Schools K-12  
Health Education Frameworks  
Marketing Education Framework for Nebraska Schools  
Mathematics and Science Frameworks for Nebraska Schools  
Nebraska Character Education Guidelines  
Nebraska Family & Consumer Sciences Essential Learnings and Curriculum Framework  
Nebraska K-12 Foreign Language Frameworks  
Nebraska K-12 Industrial Technology Education Framework  
Nebraska K-12 Social Studies Framework  
Nebraska Mathematics Articulation: Pre-Kindergarten through Postsecondary (P-16)  
Nebraska School Counseling Guide for Planning and Program Improvement  
Planning the Weekly Schedule in the Elementary Grades  
Quality Middle Grades Education: A Nebraska Perspective  
Visual and Performing Arts Frameworks for Nebraska Schools