



# ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

Educational Service Units (ESUs) of Nebraska were established by the state legislature in 1965 to provide vital support and resources to public school districts. At ESU 13, we are dedicated to serving, supporting, and empowering the students, educators, and communities across the Nebraska Panhandle. Our services span the counties of Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux—ensuring that every district we work with throughout the Nebraska Panhandle has access to the tools and expertise they need to thrive, fulfilling our vision of achieving educational excellence for all learners.



**14,181**  
Square Miles



**11**  
Counties



**21**  
School Districts

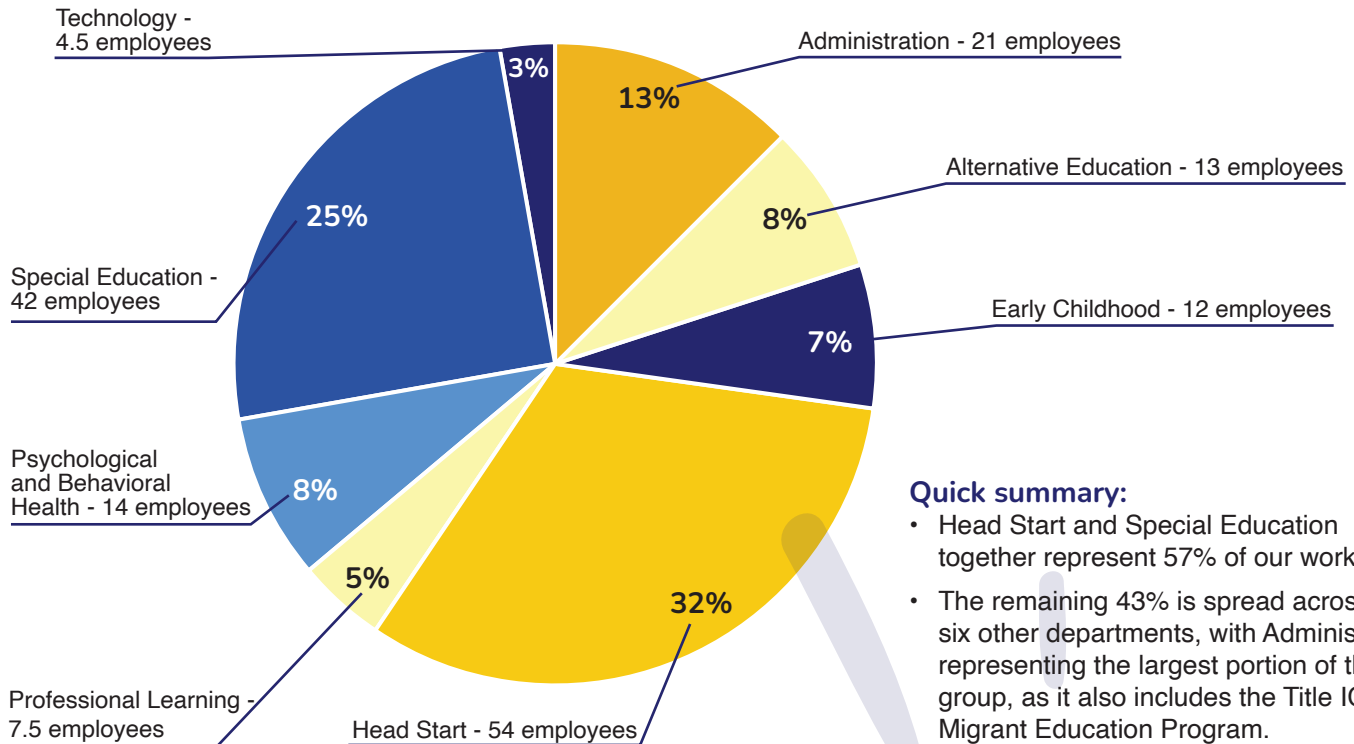


**1,500**  
School Staff



**+14,000**  
Students

## 9 DEPARTMENTS - 168 EMPLOYEES



### Quick summary:

- Head Start and Special Education together represent 57% of our workforce.
- The remaining 43% is spread across the six other departments, with Administration representing the largest portion of this group, as it also includes the Title IC Migrant Education Program.

## ESU 13 BOARD OF EDUCATION

**Mark Sinner**, President • **Kim Marx**, Vice President  
**Tom Millette**, Secretary

**Mandy Plog** • **Patricia Jones** • **Dr. Caroline Winchester**  
**Dr. Ronda Kinsey** • **Ray Richards** • **Scott Marsh**  
**Diane Coon** • **Eric Packer** • **Steve Diemoz**

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

## LEADERSHIP THOUGHTS



### A MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

On behalf of ESU 13, it is my privilege to present this report highlighting the services, partnerships, and accomplishments of the 2024-25 school year. This year has marked an important chapter in our ongoing pursuit of excellence, one defined by innovation, collaboration, and a shared commitment to ensuring that every learner in the Panhandle has access to the highest quality education.

Our efforts have been guided by our strategic priorities and anchored in our core values: Service & Hospitality, Healthy Partnerships, Innovation, Nurturing Communication, and Empowering Leadership (SHINE). We have continued to align our systems, strengthen our partnerships, and measure the return on investment of every service we provide. Through careful financial stewardship and strong collaboration with our districts, community agencies, and state partners, we have multiplied resources and leveraged external funding to expand impact across the region.

We know that our greatest success is realized not by individual effort, but through shared progress. From classrooms to boardrooms, our teams have worked intentionally to foster a culture of connection, empower our staff, and support schools in meeting the evolving needs of children and families.

As we look ahead, ESU 13 remains steadfast in 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, the trust of our districts, and the strength of the partnerships that define this region. Together, we continue to serve, support, and empower those who make education possible.

Respectfully,  
Laura Barrett, EdD  
Administrator, ESU 13

### A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

On behalf of the Board of Education, I want to extend a heartfelt thank-you to our entire staff for their dedication, passion, and hard work throughout the year. The impact of your efforts is seen daily in the lives of those we serve — and while “thank you” never feels like quite enough, the ESU 13 Board deeply appreciates your unwavering commitment to our mission.

This year, we said goodbye to two valued board members and welcomed two new voices. Mandy Plog of Hemingford joined the Board, replacing Tim Horn, and Eric Packer of Sidney succeeded Casper Ningen. We are deeply grateful for the years of service and insight Tim and Casper provided and look forward to the contributions Mandy and Eric will bring through their perspectives and experience.

Under Dr. Barrett’s steady leadership and with the continued guidance of the Board, our unit has navigated challenges with focus, resilience, and unity. We’re proud of all we’ve accomplished together and excited about the progress ahead.

ESU 13 will pay off the Harms Center addition bond a full year ahead of schedule a testament to sound planning and collective effort. In addition, the Meridian Program will undergo a much-needed expansion, adding classrooms, therapy rooms, and restrooms that will enhance our ability to serve students even more effectively.

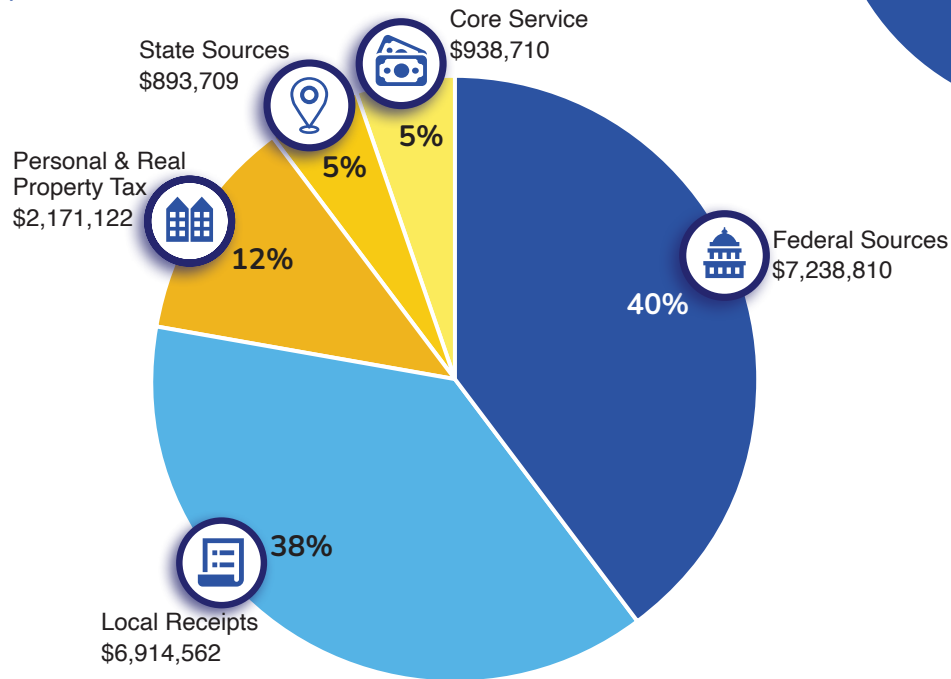
ESU 13 is a remarkable place to work, learn, and grow. Everyone’s contributions matter — and together, we’re making a lasting impact.

Sincerely,  
Mark Sinner  
President, ESU 13 Board of Education



## FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

**\$18,156,913**  
In Revenue

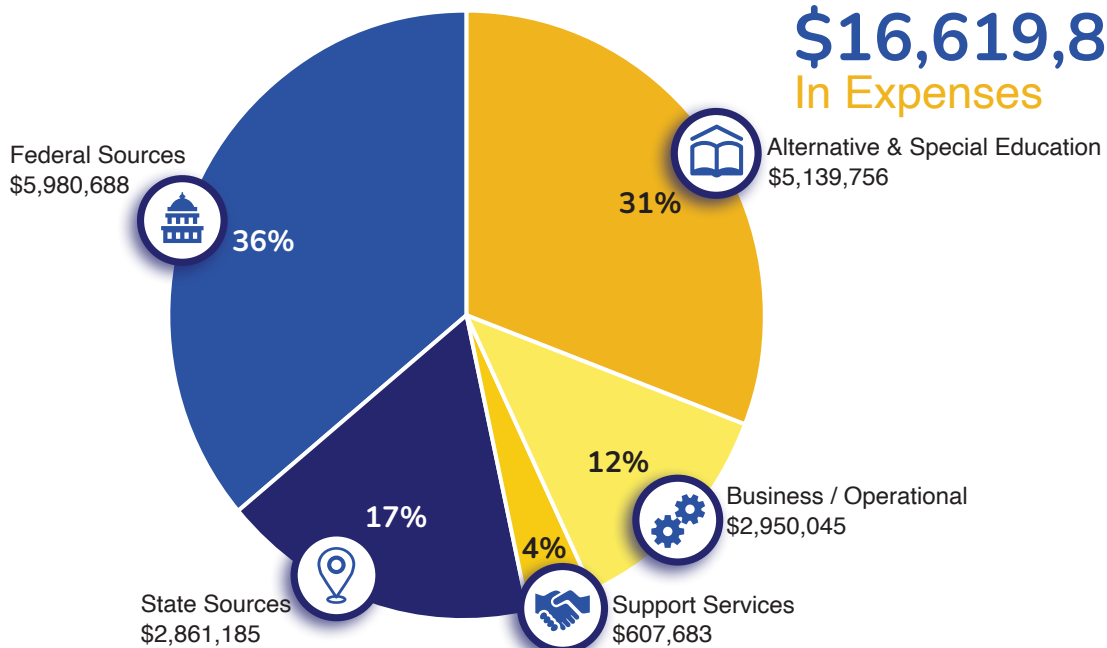


**\$8.83**  
**MILLION**  
In Total Grants Awarded

### Quick Summary:

- ESU 13 continues to demonstrate strong financial stewardship, maintaining a balanced budget and maximizing every dollar to benefit children, families, and educators across the Nebraska Panhandle.
- Total revenue stands at \$18.2 million, while expenditures total \$16.6 million year-to-date. Funding sources reflect a healthy mix of funding.
- In addition to core revenue, ESU 13 was awarded more than \$8.8 million in grants that expand opportunities for children from birth through age 21, strengthen early childhood programs, enhance special education and mental health supports, provide professional learning for teachers and administrators, and offer critical assistance to families.

**\$16,619,812**  
In Expenses



## ESU 13 DEPARTMENTS



### ADMINISTRATION

**Laura Barrett, EdD – Administrator**

The Administration Department provides leadership, direction, and essential support to ESU 13 staff, children, families, and partner educational entities across the Panhandle. The team facilitates the Superintendents' Administrative Advisory Council, serves as a liaison to the Nebraska Department of Education and the ESU Coordinating Council, and represents ESU 13 at regional and statewide levels. Administration also secures and allocates revenue sources, manages grants, oversees the maintenance and safety of all ESU 13 facilities, and includes the Title IC Migrant Education program, which provides bilingual and academic support to migratory children and families—ensuring educational continuity and success across western Nebraska.

### ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

**Tom Peacock – Director**

The Alternative Education Department provides high-quality, flexible learning opportunities for high school students who benefit from alternative pathways. Through the Valley Alternative Learning Transitioning School (VALTS) campuses in Scottsbluff and Sidney and the Nebraska Education Virtual Academy (NEVA), students receive individualized instruction, academic support, and guidance for postsecondary success. The department works closely with districts and families to remove barriers, encourage engagement, and help students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD

**Nici Johnson – Director**

The Early Childhood Department supports children from birth through age eight by partnering with families, educators, and communities to ensure strong foundations for lifelong learning. Programs include the Early Development Network (EDN), Panhandle Early Learning Connections (PELC), Rooted in Relationships, Sixpence Sprouting Success, Early Childhood Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and Early Learning Connections coach consulting. Collectively, these services strengthen early care and education systems across the Panhandle, promoting equity, quality, and continuity for Nebraska's youngest learners.

### HEAD START

**Krystie Hohnstein – Director**

Head Start and Early Head Start serve children from birth to age five and their families in Scotts Bluff, Cheyenne, and Morrill Counties. The program's comprehensive approach addresses education, health, special services, family engagement, and parent involvement, ensuring that each child receives individualized support. Funded primarily through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—with additional community partnerships, volunteerism, and donations—Head Start follows rigorous Performance Standards that emphasize child development, parent education, and holistic family well-being.



## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Deirdre Amundsen – Director

The Professional Learning Department provides collaborative development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and staff that drive school improvement and student success. Services include assessment analysis, support for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Continuous Improvement, instructional material selection, coaching, and leadership development. The team coordinates New Teacher Academy, specialist networks, and student events that foster professional growth and connection across the region.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Dr. Katie Carrizales – Director

The Psychological and Behavioral Health Department provides comprehensive mental-health and behavioral services that help schools meet the diverse needs of students and families. Services include psychological assessment, therapeutic consultation, counseling, and ecological in-home family treatment. The team also oversees the Mobile Youth Intensive Outpatient Program, Panhandle Beginnings Day Treatment School (PBDTX), doctoral internship site, and Title IV-A Consortium—promoting wellness and resilience through strong partnerships.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

Jessica Broderick – Director

The Special Education Department partners with districts to provide specialized instruction and related services that help every learner succeed. Offerings include early childhood special education, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and teachers of the deaf, hard of hearing, and visually impaired. Programs such as LifeLink-Nebraska and Meridian School provide targeted transition and therapeutic supports, while the Nebraska Autism Network and inclusive practices coaching strengthen collaboration and equity across the Panhandle.

## SHINE AT ESU 13

At ESU 13, our work is guided by five core values that reflect who we are and how we serve: Service & Hospitality, Healthy Partnerships, Innovation, Nurturing Communication, and Empowering Leadership — together known as SHINE. These values shape every decision, relationship, and program we offer. The following pages highlight how ESU 13 and its departments put SHINE into action throughout the 2024–2025 year.

## TECHNOLOGY

BJ Peters – Director

The Technology Department delivers technology services and digital resources that enhance instruction and operational efficiency across ESU 13 and member districts. Core services include network and infrastructure support, distance learning, digital citizenship, E-Rate guidance, and technology training. The team facilitates professional development for LAN managers and media specialists and supports staff through responsive help-desk and ticketing systems, ensuring equitable access to modern tools for teaching and learning.



# S 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.

**5,695**  
**SCHOOL STAFF**  
**MEMBERS**  
registered for trainings

- \$321,026 saved through cooperative purchasing initiatives that reduce costs for districts.
- Professional Learning demonstrated excellence in responsiveness, supported by data from the Service Management & Reporting Tool.
- 1,428 coaching, training, and support sessions were delivered and tracked for educators across the region, capturing the scope and impact of services provided to districts.



**HIGH**  
**PERCENTAGE**  
of tech tickets  
**RESOLVED**  
within 24 hours

- Title IC provided academic and family support to 240 students whose families travel for agricultural work, helping them stay connected to learning.
- Over 100 youth received direct therapeutic services through ESU 13.
- Early Childhood teams worked to re-engage families through personalized plans within the Early Development Network (EDN).

**119**  
**SERVICES**  
**PROVIDED**  
**ACROSS THE**  
**PANHANDLE**  
Supporting students,  
staff development,  
technology, and grants



**Nebraska Early**  
**Development Netwo**  
Babies can't wait  
308-635-3427 308-54677

- 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.



- For every \$1 in property tax, ESU 13 leveraged an additional \$2 in no-cost support to schools through more than 20 active grants.
- Collaboration through Professional Learning fostered participation in student-centered events that reached 3,593 students in partnership with 23 community organizations.
- Statewide collaboration was strengthened as the Head Start Director served as Vice President of the Nebraska Head Start Association and on Region VII advisory boards.

**3 REGIONAL  
EARLY LEARNING  
CONFERENCES**  
were hosted in  
partnership with  
**20 ORGANIZATIONS**



**TITLE IC  
SERVICES  
EXPANDED to  
Box Butte  
County**

- Ongoing collaboration between Psychological & Behavioral Health, probation, DHHS, and school districts ensured timely access to behavioral-health supports and student services.
- A new 5-Second District Feedback Survey, created collaboratively by Special Education and Technology, gave educators an easy way to share input and strengthen two-way communication.
- LAN Manager and Media Specialist meetings, led by the Technology Department, promoted shared learning and technical collaboration among districts.



# I INNOVATION

At ESU 13, Innovation means thinking forward—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.



- Secured a \$1 million USDA Rural Development Distance Learning Grant to expand connectivity for schools and educational entities across the Panhandle—enhancing access to high-quality virtual learning and collaboration.
- Developed specialized Digital Canvas courses to offer on-demand, flexible alternatives to traditional in-person workshops—expanding reach and accessibility.

**SECURED  
\$1 MILLION**  
USDA Distance  
Learning **GRANT**

- Digitized Head Start forms to allow internal stakeholders online submission and streamlined record keeping.
- Shared adaptable SPED forms and meeting templates with multiple districts to support consistency and efficiency.

**NEW  
AUTOMATED  
TECH SUPPORT  
SYSTEM** improves  
network efficiency

- Acquired a GlowForge Plus 3D laser cutter and engraver to enhance hands-on learning and creative problem-solving for students.
- Implemented an automated ticketing system across the region to streamline network operations and improve response times.





## NURTURING COMMUNICATION

Nurturing Communication reflects our belief that transparency and connection strengthens every partnership. By focusing on both internal and external communication, every message builds trust and understanding across schools, families, and communities.

- Rolled out the Comprehensive Communication Plan, a strategic framework that enhances visibility, consistency, and two-way communication across all ESU 13 programs and partners.
- Enhanced how ESU 13 identifies district needs and launched a Training & Learning Directory to simplify educator access to professional development and support services.
- Collaborative school visits between Alternative Education Director and District principals to strengthen relationships and support shared educational goals.



- Early Childhood fostered connection within the department with the creation of Meditation Mondays, team meetings, and internal coaching sessions.
- Sixpence Child Care Partnerships produced the "Telling Our Story" video, celebrating early educators and family success.
- Psychological & Behavioral Health introduced feedback and pulse surveys to gather real-time input and improve services.

## NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED

designed for  
accessibility  
and ease of use



Real-time family  
**COMMUNICATION  
TOOLS**  
were introduced for  
**HEAD START** families

# E 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.

- Agency-wide CliftonStrengths integration helps staff identify and apply their unique talents at work.
- Virginia Daly was promoted to Title IC Coordinator, recognizing leadership growth within the department.
- Head Start's Policy Council empowers parents as active liaisons between families and the program.
- Equity-based grading practices were implemented for Alternative Education, promoting fair, student-centered assessment across programs.



**TITLE IC PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL** formed to amplify family voice

**CLIFTONSTRENGTHS** Incorporated  
work for all staff



N E B R A S K A  
**esu13**  
 serving the panhandle



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**(308) 635-3696**  
[www.esu13.org](http://www.esu13.org)



**Sidney Location**  
 361 College Drive  
 Sidney, NE 69162



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



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



**Panhandle Beginnings**  
 Day Treatment  
 116 Terry Blvd  
 Gering, NE 69341



**Early Childhood Offices**  
 4502 Avenue I  
 Scottsbluff, NE 69361



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