



EDUCATIONAL SERVICE UNIT 5

2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

MISSION:

EDUCATIONAL
INNOVATION
FOR TEACHING
AND LEARNING

VISION:

Collaborative innovation
to empower learners,
educators, leaders and
communities for lasting
growth and success.

FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR



*"Together, we
turn innovation
into impact."*

Looking back on the 2025–2026 school year, I am proud of the **dedication, creativity, and teamwork** that brought ESU 5's mission—**Educational Innovation for Teaching and Learning**—to life. Across our ten member districts, our staff partnered with educators to meet changing needs, strengthen services, and create opportunities for students. We also welcomed six new team members whose expertise and enthusiasm added to an already remarkable team. While no two days at ESU 5 seem to look alike, one thing remains constant: **our people are always ready to roll up their sleeves and help.**

This year's accomplishments demonstrate the many ways that **partnership makes a difference**. Literacy coaching brought professional learning directly into classrooms through modeling, collaborative planning, and support grounded in the Science of Reading. Our new Data Steward helped districts turn complex information into practical decisions to support students. Behind the scenes, our technology team strengthened school networks, improved security, and kept classrooms connected—because "the internet is down" is nobody's favorite phrase! Alongside these efforts, our staff continued supporting students' individual needs, mental health, and opportunities to build confidence and independence.

The work highlighted in this report reflects the care and commitment of our staff, the collaboration of our district partners, and the support of our Board. I am grateful to each of them for keeping **students at the center of our work**. Some successes are easy to photograph; others happen in a quiet conversation, a classroom breakthrough, or a problem solved before the school day begins. Together, these moments tell the story of ESU 5: **people working together to help learners, educators, and communities thrive.**

Dr. Brenda McNiff
Administrator, Educational Service Unit 5

BETTY MEYER

District 1

VICKI HINZ-ENSZ

Vice President, District 2

TIM MCALLISTER

District 3

ROGER SMIDT

President, District 4

CARLA LOEMKER

District 5

JEANNINE MURPHY

District 6

DUANE SMITH

Secretary, District 7

5,108

Total Students
Served

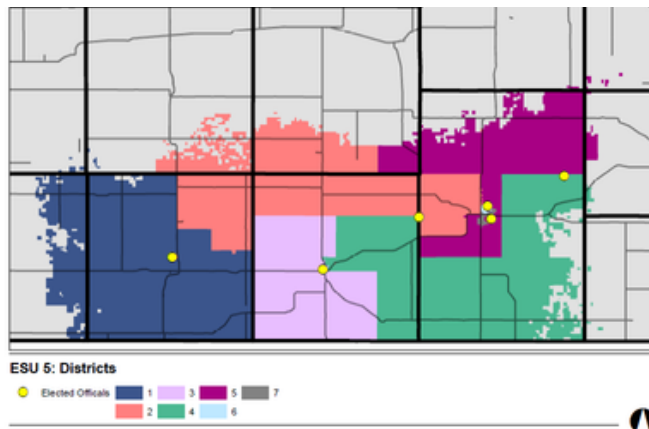


453

Total Teachers
Served

3,011

Total Square
Miles
Covered



MEET OUR BOARD MEMBERS

Growing Our Team, Growing Our Impact

AMY COUFAL

Data Steward and Professional Development Consultant, helping ensure that a district's data is accurate, secure, organized, and used appropriately.

TRICIA HINTZ

Literacy Coach, supporting educators in strengthening literacy instruction through coaching, professional learning, data-informed practices, and evidence-based strategies while working collaboratively with teachers and districts.



DAISY LANGSTON

SPED Administrative Assistant, provide essential administrative support that helps keep special education operations organized, efficient, and running smoothly.

LANI CLINE

SPED Administrative Assistant, provide essential administrative support that helps keep special education operations organized, efficient, and running smoothly.

AMBER SCHWISOW

Skills Trainer, empowering young adults in The 5 Academy to build confidence, independence, and workplace readiness.

KIRSTEN MCGILL

Licensed Clinical Social Worker, dedicated to supporting the mental health and well-being of students.

This year, ESU 5 welcomed 6 new team members, bringing fresh expertise, perspectives, and energy to our organization. Their contributions strengthen our ability to collaborate with member districts and provide quality programs and opportunities that support teaching and learning. Together, we continue to serve, educate, empower, and innovate for the learners, educators, leaders, and communities we serve.

GROWING LITERACY THROUGH COACHING

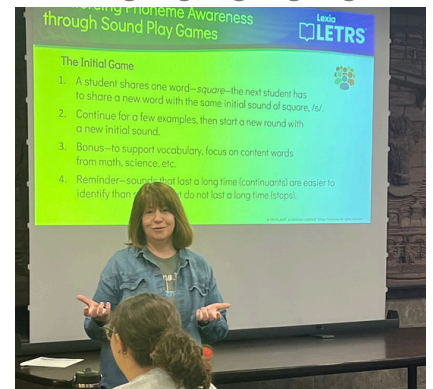
The start of the 2025-26 school year marked a major milestone for our districts with the introduction of dedicated literacy coaching. Established under Nebraska Revised Statute 79-2607, this initiative funded Literacy Coaches across all Educational Service Units (ESU). By uniting coaches statewide, we established a shared language and a collective goal to elevate student reading.

Some of the highlights from this year:

01 ESU 5 hosted a four-part series focused on building sustainable coaching models in our schools called The Fundamentals of Literacy. Seven local districts participated.

02 Coaches delivered Instructional Practice Guide (IPG) training to all districts. This walkthrough tool celebrates classroom successes while identifying targeted professional learning needs. This is part of a statewide grant funded at improving reading achievement.

03 With a goal of improved reading achievement for our students, we focused heavily on the Science of Reading. Coaches supported districts navigating new curricula through specialized sessions on student engagement, questioning, vocabulary, and comprehension.



Beyond workshops, our Literacy Coach provided hands-on classroom modeling, collaborative planning, and instructional coaching. Teachers have been thrilled to see tangible growth in their students' foundational skills. As we transition into the 2026-27 school year, ESU 5 will continue providing ongoing support and will continue to partner with teachers and administrators to achieve literacy for every student.

Summer Infrastructure Upgrade: Keeping Districts Connected while Saving Thousands

While school hallways were quiet over the summer break, the ESU 5 Technology Team was hard at work behind the scenes ensuring our partner districts are prepped for a seamless, high-speed school year. To boost network performance, reliability, and security, our IT staff completed full-scale infrastructure overhauls across member schools. Summer accomplishments included:



Hardware Upgrades:

Upgrading essential network switches and deploying new wireless Access Points (APs) to maintain fast, stable connectivity throughout school buildings.



Network Closet Cleanups: Reorganizing, testing, and tidying up physical network closets to improve equipment airflow and allow for faster maintenance.

Doing the Work In-House Saves Tens of Thousands Instead of outsourcing these labor-intensive installations, wiring projects, and rack overhauls to costly third-party providers, the ESU 5 IT team completed all network upgrades in-house. By utilizing internal expertise, ESU 5 saved partner school districts tens of thousands of dollars in external vendor and contractor fees –keeping crucial funding right where it belongs: in the classroom.

Bolstering Network Security & Redundancy Physical network updates are only half the battle; maintaining top-tier digital security is equally vital. The technology team actively maintains and manages district firewalls, regularly applying the latest security patches to safeguard student data and keep network connections secure against cyber threats. Additionally, ESU 5 has been utilizing grant funding to install Starlink satellite internet systems across every district. This initiative establishes critical secondary backup connections, guaranteeing automatic internet redundancy and minimizing classroom disruptions during provider outages.



Silent Support: Safe, Seamless, and Accessible Technology

Much of our team's work happens behind the scenes so that learning remains uninterrupted when school is in session. Whether we are patching servers in the middle of the night, auditing system permissions, or optimizing network bandwidth, our continuous goal is to maintain a secure, safe, and accessible digital ecosystem. By silently managing the technical heavy lifting, we ensure that teachers can teach and students can learn on devices and networks that "just work" every single day.

FROM INFORMATION TO IMPACT

School districts collect an incredible amount of information. Making that information accessible and meaningful can help educators and leaders better understand their schools, identify needs, and make informed decisions. ESU 5's Data Steward service was created to help districts navigate the many aspects of managing and using data effectively.

Across ESU 5's 10 member districts, Amy Coufal works alongside staff to develop practical solutions that fit each school's needs. For districts implementing eduCLIMBER, this includes setup, implementation, and ongoing support. For districts using other systems, the work may involve creating data collection processes, organizing existing information, or developing visualizations to make data easier to understand and use.

The work spans multiple data sources, including assessment, behavioral, attendance, and perceptual. Customized collection systems and visualizations help educators and leaders see trends that might otherwise be difficult to identify, providing a clearer picture of what is happening in their schools.

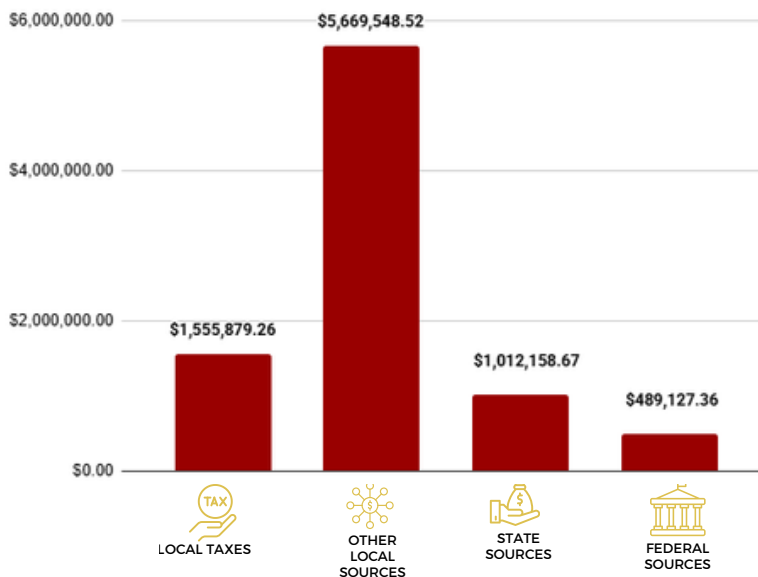
The impact extends beyond individual districts. Within the departments of ESU 5, aggregated assessment, attendance, and other data supports departments and informs the service unit's own continuous improvement work. Bringing these sources of information together helps staff better understand regional needs and identify opportunities to strengthen services.

Data is most powerful when it leads to action. Through collaboration and customized support, ESU 5's Data Steward service is helping districts turn information into growth and improvement



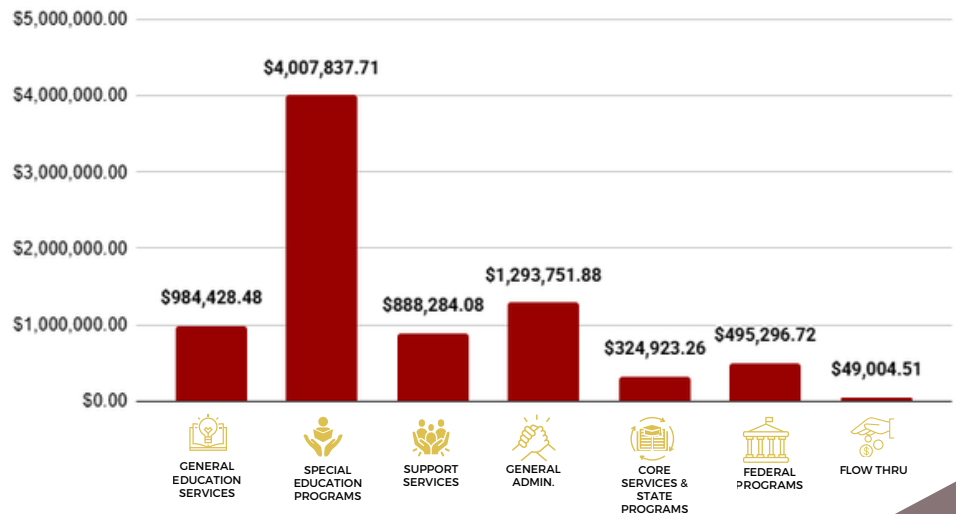
FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Strong financial stewardship allows us to invest in our mission today while building a sustainable future for the districts and communities we serve.



**\$ 8,726,713.81
IN REVENUE**

**\$ 8,043,526.64
IN EXPENSES**



Looking Ahead...

The year ahead promises many new adventures. We are especially excited to strengthen our partnership with Homestead National Historical Park through the Earth to Sky program. This initiative connects NASA's Earth science resources with local places and experiences, bringing science to life in our own communities. With this partnership, our local "science guys" look forward to expanding their knowledge through professional development, connecting with fellow educators, and inspiring curiosity about the world around us. Our collaborative efforts bring national expertise to local learning—and reminds us that even when we work with NASA, some of our most exciting discoveries begin right here on Earth!

As ESU 5's Administrator I have had the privilege of watching ESU 5 grow from 38 staff members when I began 11 years ago, to a team of 60—the largest in our history. At the heart of that growth are dedicated people who make a difference every day. I've witnessed each staff member bring talent, expertise, and care that strengthen our services to schools, students, families and communities. As we look ahead, their commitment to building relationships, responding to local needs, and helping others succeed remains at the heart of who we are. I am grateful to work alongside such a talented group of people and excited for what we will accomplish together in the year ahead.



Contact Us :



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