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Fall 2023 Newsletter



Nine's Lines Newsletter

From the Administrator

Drew Harris

Welcome to the 2023–24 school year! Nine's Lines is ESU 9's communication tool to provide information about the services, events, and happenings within our organization to our stakeholders. Our target audience includes the staff, administration, and board members of our member school districts, as well as the staff and board members of ESU 9 and other service units. This newsletter will go out three times per school year: to start the year in September, to give a midyear update in January, and for a year-end summary edition in May. Our goal is to keep you informed about the services and activities provided by ESU 9.

This year ESU 9 welcomes 10 new staff members to our organization. Some are replacing employees that have retired, and some join us to meet the need for expanding requests for services from our member schools. Our total staff count for the start of this year is 66 employees, an increase of 50% over our 2019 initial count of 44. At a time when many organizations are struggling to find service providers, we feel very fortunate to be this well staffed. As the certified teacher shortage continues to impact Nebraska school districts, I fear many districts may be forced to turn to their local service agency for additional support in hiring.

While I will not list all the services provided by ESU 9 in this limited space, in our January edition I will share a link to *ESU 9 Annual Report to Patrons*, which does outline all the services we provide. However, in light of the teaching shortage I previously mentioned, one important and relatively new service we provide is instructional coaching. Instructional coaching is a way to help teachers improve their classroom performance and productivity. Research shows that it helps to improve teacher satisfaction, morale, and retention. Now more than ever, it is important that we do all that we can to support our educators, to help them be the best they can be, and thus keep them employed in our school systems. Another service that has seen a sharp increase in demand is our Data Stewardship service. The process of converting raw data into information and graphs that are understandable and meaningful makes the School Improvement Process much easier for all involved.

In March of 2024, ESU 9 will have its accreditation visit. We are using NDE Frameworks, modified for ESUs, for our Continuous Improvement Process model. I am excited about the opportunity to share what we are currently doing as we've grown during this 5-year accreditation cycle.

Every year, I remind our staff about the importance of our mission: **Educate, Empower, and Support**. It's not just at the 66 employees of ESU 9 who are impacted; it's because we are here for the nearly 10,000 students, 800-plus teachers and 14 school communities depending on us. We are here to serve!

I'm looking forward to the 2023–24 campaign, and I wish you all a great school year!

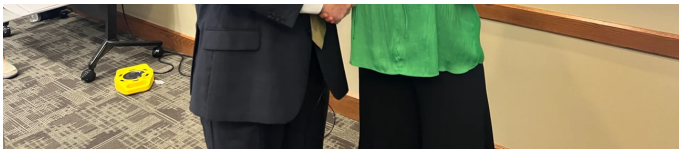


Years of Service Recognition

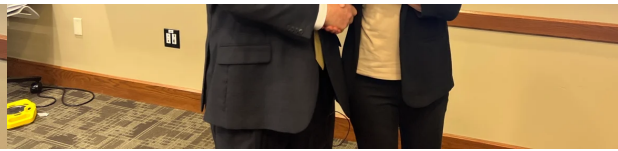
At the start of each year, ESU 9 recognizes employees for their tenure with ESU 9 in 5 year increments. This year the staff members are:

- Dallas McClain - 5 years
- Jordon Messersmith - 5 years
- Cindy Nejezchleb - 15 years
- Jackie Ediger - 20 years
- Janine Uden - 30 years
- Heather Witte - 30 years





Congratulations, Heather!



Congratulations, Janine!

Special Services

Joe Haney



At ESU 9's Special Services program, we specialize in nurturing the incredible potential within every child with special needs. With steadfast dedication and a personalized approach, we create a positive learning environment, cultivating an atmosphere of respect, empathy, and mutual understanding, allowing students to feel secure in expressing themselves and advocating for their needs. Through specialized instruction, profound connections, and a commitment to well-being, we empower these remarkable young minds to flourish, achieve milestones, and shine brightly. Our mission is to provide not only education but also unwavering support, fostering confidence and ensuring that every child's journey is filled with hope, growth, and boundless possibilities.

ESU 9 New Staff 2022-2023

Summer Bartunek- School Psychologist

Nichole Miller- Teacher of the Deaf

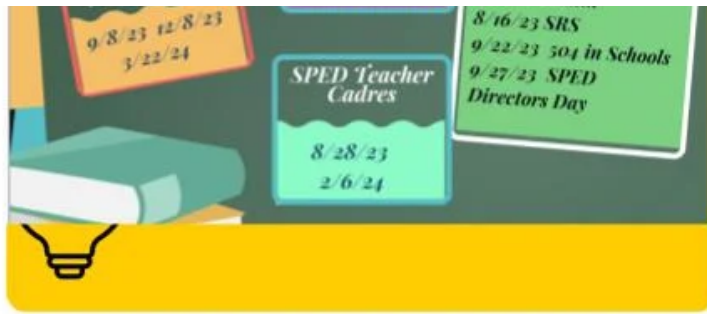
Carrisa Sanchez- Speech Language Pathologist

Taylor Sanchez- Title IC Migrant Education Service Provider

Sara Peterson- State Coordinator Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Melissa Blake- Speech Language Pathologist



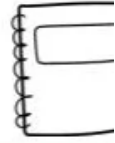


Paratologist

Taylor Schwenk- Sign Language Par

Jon Lotterie- LMHP

Eve Rosno- LMHP



I Keep Hearing About AI?

Jackie Ediger



The Promise of AI for Teachers

Artificial intelligence (AI) systems like [ChatGPT](#), [Bard](#) or [Claude](#)

are automating routine administrative tasks and freeing up teachers to focus on students. AI can respond to teacher questions, help with brainstorming, and develop rubrics. This allows teachers to spend time on higher-value activities

AI also will help teachers write quizzes and develop ideas/suggestions for what they are doing in their classroom.

Teachers still need to use their instructional material with fidelity to how it was meant to be used. AI can help by taking some of the mundane tasks and saving time. I asked Bard (or either of the other AI above) "Write two paragraphs at 6th grade level about pets with 5 grammatical errors and 6 spelling errors, then give me the answers". This was a task that would have taken me 20-ish minutes, and I was able to get it in under 10 seconds.

While AI cannot replace teachers, tools like ChatGPT, Bard, and Claude can take on time-consuming tasks like record keeping, grading, and answering student questions. This enables teachers to concentrate on meaningful interactions with students. As AI grows more advanced, it has the potential to be an invaluable assistant for educators. Always double-check facts you find in AI AND **never** put student names in!

My Favorite Lesson Plan AI:

[Magic School AI](#) has a built-in questioning tool called Raina PLUS it will create lesson plans, IEP suggestions, rubrics, student work feedback, ice breakers, and teacher jokes just to name a few of the incredible tools this site has in it! This is a MUST check out... it will blow you away (AND SAVE YOU TIME)!

Perkins V Update

Kristen Slechta

We warmly welcome your interest in the advancements within the ESU 9 Perkins V Consortium, a collaborative effort encompassing thirteen of our fourteen school districts. Hastings Public manages their own allocation of funds due to size. The Perkins federal grant supports leaders, educators, and career guidance counselors who serve Career and Technical Education (CTE). The mission of CTE in Nebraska is as follows: *To lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living.* We work to live this mission as well. The vision states, "Nebraska Career and Technical Education will deliver coordinated, relevant learning opportunities that engage each student in high-quality, rigorous education. These opportunities will be enhanced by partnerships with business and industry, workforce, and economic development leaders, allowing learners to turn their passion, talents, and strengths into successful careers and fulfilling lives." ESU 9 strives to meet the expectations of both the mission and vision as we make equipment and curriculum purchases and offer professional learning experiences. Our consortium newsletter sent to all members is the way that ESU 9 works to empower, educate, and support CTE education

ESU 9 NEWSLETTER

Career & Technical Education



Updated on: 8/25/23

Communication Goal:
Offering up-to-date information, opportunities for professional growth, and resources.
To join the ESU 9 Perkins V Consortium listserv, please visit: <https://esu9.org/contact-us/learning-communities/>



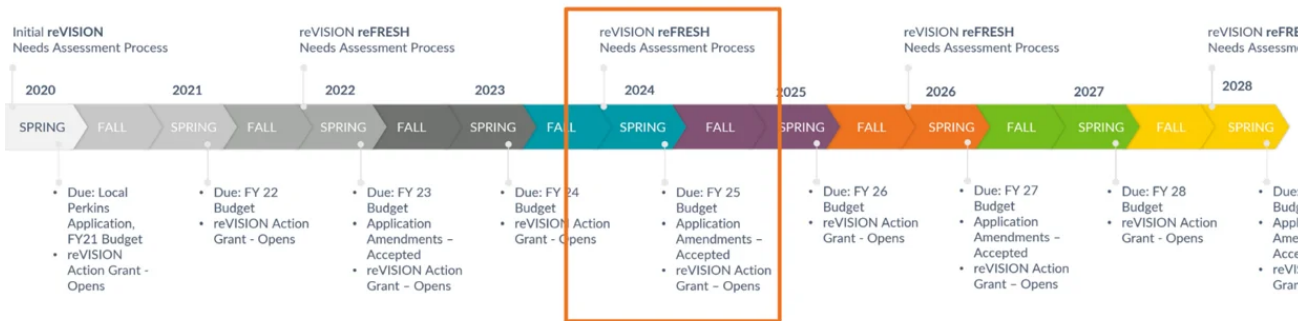
Contact:
Email kristen.slechta@esu9.us with questions, ideas, suggestions, and more!



This year is a particular special one as it encompasses the final year of a four-year plan. That means that change is on the horizon. How the grant is managed and how funds are spent are truly up to the needs assessment of each district individually and then consolidated as a consortium. In addition to district data, each school is invited to attend a regional economic meeting to calibrate the needs of the community. This is referred to as a reVISION reFRESH.

Perkins Application/Budget and reVISION Timeline

**Note, this timeline does not include any reporting requirements or deadlines.*



Finally, this year is also the year of the Perkins Inventory Tour. In order to be in full compliance with the inventory expectations of the Perkins V grant, Kristen Slechta will be visiting each of our thirteen school districts to tag, document the condition of, and take pictures of equipment purchases from the past five years (2019-2024). That adds up to approximately \$150,000. Personal emails will be issued to each school principal for communication and clarity!

- September 8 - Adams Central
- September 21 - Red Cloud
- October 11 - Aurora

October 11 - Aurora
October 12 - Doniphan-Trumbull
October 13 - Kenesaw
October 18 - SCNUSD#5 (Sandy Creek & Lawrence-Nelson)
October 20 - Giltner
November 2 - Silver Lake
November 10 - Hampton
November 17 - Harvard
December 8 - Blue Hill
January 17 - Superior
February 16 - Sutton

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding CTE, please reach out to kristen.slechta@esu9.us.

Cyber Security Priorities for Schools

Gary Needham

Even with a significant emphasis on cyber security over the past few years, it's been difficult to categorize and prioritize the work schools should do in the area. Just as in "real world" school safety, the cyber world has some things to be taken care of by all staff and others that are maintained by smaller teams.

The administration, tech department, and ESU or vendor partners have some specific responsibilities. Best practices indicate that the following things should be on the priority list for the tech department:

- Backups of data, including data stored with cloud providers.
- Malware protection software on all servers and at least on Windows endpoints
- Secure network design which separates staff, student, guest, facility management, and online payment processing.
- Vulnerability scans and tests that indicate open vulnerabilities or issues the school may otherwise not discover
- Set up the email system security settings to adequately warn users about emails that may need extra attention
- For sensitive data, the administration should have systems, policies, and processes that adequately manage access and keep it secure.

Some things, though, are the responsibility of every user. Only a small fraction of the online usage and communication is handled directly by the tech staff. For a secure network, everyone should use best practices in specific areas:

- Phishing and other malicious emails cannot all be caught automatically. Be vigilant when checking email. Remember that it is harder to filter email on your phone—save anything you have a question on for a time when you are on a larger screen.
- Use multi-factor authentication for online accounts.
- Utilize single sign-on and unique passwords to help prevent hacks and compromises in online accounts.
- Consider how and where you are using sensitive / personal data online. Don't paste it into a search engine or social media tool.

Technology Service Highlight: Security Tools for Schools

Shopping for the right technology tools can be overwhelming. ESU 9 has taken time to select several security tools and make them available to accelerate the security work. Some of these can be implemented by districts individually, while others may require participating in a group purchase. Contact ESU 9 tech staff at help@esu9.us for additional product information and pricing.

- **Key device backup** service (such as a bookkeeper or administrator computer) using [CrashPlan](#) enterprise cloud backup service.
- **Server and Google domain backup** with [Synology NAS](#). Also keep a cloud copy using ESU 9's [Backblaze](#) Cloud backup service.

- **Endpoint malware protection** with [Cortex XDR](#) through ESU 9 or [Sophos Endpoint](#) through a multi-ESU purchase agreement.
- **Vulnerability scans** are performed weekly by [CISA](#) and reports are reviewed by ESU 9. The report covers the entire ESU, but schools may request a summary of results affecting them.
- **Secure network design** is an ongoing process for most schools. Contact ESU 9 for a review or to help set your current priorities and next steps.
- **Google Secure Email Settings** documentation is available upon request.
- **Phishing Email assessment / training** through [KnowBe4](#) or [ProofPoint](#) is available to schools participating in the Media/Curriculum Technology contract. For other schools, a state buy on ProofPoint is available.
- **Password Manager support for administrative teams** via [1Password for Teams](#) is recommended. Educational institutions receive a 50% discount. ESU 9 can assist with initial setup and user training.



EHA Update

LaRaesha Kugel

Welcome back to the 2023-2024 school year! I am excited to begin another year of wellness with the ESU 9 employees through the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) Wellness.

EHA Wellness is a voluntary health improvement program that offers a variety of health and wellness challenges throughout the school year in an effort to increase the health and well-being of our educators.

ESU 9 staff have continually gone above the minimum requirements and have benefited tremendously from this. For the past several years, at least 50% of our staff have completed the 3 requirements to qualify for extended funding from Wellness through the ELEVATE grant. Those 3 requirements consist of completing a Personal Health Assessment (PHSA), completing a minimum of 3 challenges (though most staff far exceed this!), and going to an annual health check up with their doctor. With more than 50% of our staff completing this, they not only get 175.00 in VISA gift cards, but an additional reimbursable amount to purchase a health-related purchase of their choosing. This past ELEVATE term we have once again met our 50% minimum of 31 participants and will be reaping the rewards this Fall.

This school year, EHA Wellness is continuing to evolve their work and timelines. In order to best align the change in timelines, the 22-23 school year activities are now concluding at the end of August, so that they can move forward with the 23-24 school year in September.

This year employees will have the opportunity to participate in the following challenges:

- **Well Played - 10/01/23-10/31/23**
Challenge Guidelines October 2023:
 Complete 30 minutes of movement each day.
 Incorporate stretching into your movement activities each day.
 Log at least 20 days to complete the challenge.
- **Positively Inspired - 12/01/23-12/31/23**
Challenge Guidelines December 2023:
 Complete 1 journal entry each day.
 Complete at least 1 positive activity or 1 positive comment to uplift yourself or others each day.

Log at least 20 days to complete the challenge.

- **Happy Brain - 02/01/24-02/29/24**

Challenge Guidelines February 2024:

Eat at least 1 healthy brain food each day.

Each day, complete at least 1 act of gratitude or list 1 thing for which you are thankful.

Log at least 20 days to complete the challenge.

- **Cruising the Caribbean - 03/26/24-05/03/24**

Challenge Guidelines March 26 2024 - May 03 2024:

Exercise: 30 minutes a day.

Nutrition: 2 fruits and 3 vegetables each day.

Hydrate: Drink 48oz of water a day.

Mindfulness: Journal or meditate each day.

Sleep: 7-9 hours of sleep each night.

Log at least 3 behaviors for at least 30 days each to complete the challenge.

- **Outdoor Restore - 06/01/24-06/30/24**

Challenge Guidelines June 2024:

Complete 1 activity that involves plants, nature, or animals each day.

Complete 30 minutes of physical activity or movement each day!

Log at least 20 days to complete the challenge.

- **Press Pause - 08/01/24-08/31/24**

Challenge Guidelines August 2024:

Complete 3 breathing breaks each day.

Practice at least 1 small mindful behavior during each day.

Log at least 20 days to complete the challenge.

Upcoming Events

- HQIM Implementation Series Day 1 - September 7
- IDEA Academy Day - September 8
- Title IX Meeting - September 18
- CIP Support Day - September 20
- 504 in Schools - September 22
- Transition Student Day - September 26
- Future Problem Solvers #1 - September 27
- Change Leadership in Stressful Times - September 27
- Executive Function: Beyond the ABCs & 123s - September 29 & 30
- SLP Cadre - October 3
- Empowering Leaders Zoom Session - October 5
- "Getting Ready" Training for Routines-Based Home Visits - October 5-6
- Library Media Specialist Cadre - October 10
- Counselor's Cadre - October 19
- Teaching & Learning Collaboration (TLC) - October 23
- Title I PLC - October 27
- Hope Champions Network - November 7-8
- Title IX Meeting - November 13
- HQIM Implementation Series Day 2 - November 14
- Future Problem Solvers #2 - November 29
- PE Cadre - December 5
- Social Studies Cadre - December 7

- IDEA Academy Day 2 - December 8

Register online at: <https://connect.esu9.org/>.



Sent to: laura.ochsner@esu9.us

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