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Winter 2024 Newsletter



Nine's Lines Newsletter

From the Administrator

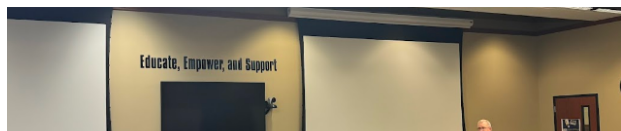
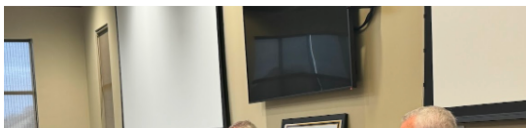
Drew Harris

Another year has flown by, and we now welcome 2024. I wish you a Happy New Year!

Here's a little update on what's been happening at ESU 9 lately.

Accreditation: ESU 9 is in the process of preparing for its accreditation visit in mid-March. As we wrap up our continuous improvement cycle, we are finalizing data that demonstrates the progress and growth we have made in the past 5 years toward our goal, which was to *Establish and maintain effective systems to demonstrate credibility and build relationships with school communities and staff*. Throughout the past 5 years, we have worked to improve our relationship with our school community partners—including school staff, administrators, member district school board members—as well as build trust and credibility with our ESU 9 staff. "Establishing and maintaining systems" refers to putting documented processes in place that will assure these good things continue to happen on a regular basis, even if there are staffing changes. We are excited about the progress we have made and look forward to sharing it with our External Visit Accreditation Team on March 18–19. I'll share a recap of the visit in our May Nine's Lines edition.

Legislative Forum: On December 14, ESU 9 hosted a legislative forum for school administrators and board members. Guests included Senator Murman, who represents District 38 (which includes many of our districts) and chairs the education committee, as well as Senator Halloran (District 33–Hastings area) and State Board of Education members Sherry Johnson and Kirk Penner. Participants shared their thoughts on the highlights of the previous year and opinions on what's in store for 2024. Other topics included local control, unfunded mandates, parental involvement, curriculum, and the commission on education.





Retirees' Coffee: On December 13, individuals who have retired from ESU 9 were invited to come celebrate the holidays, catch up with former colleagues, and meet current staff. This was our second endeavor with the retirees' event. We had 15 retirees attend, which was down slightly from last year. The goal was to recognize the contribution these individuals made to ESU 9 over the years and to help current staff understand the value we place on the employees of ESU 9, past and present.



Serving Our Community: ESU 9 staff participated in a trio of community service projects for the holidays. During the month, staff donate items and funds to provide Christmas presents to 10 families in need of support. The generosity of our staff is simply amazing and seems to grow each year. The students in our 18+ program help deliver those gifts. On December 7, several staff members helped "Ring the Bell" for the Salvation Army Red Hat Drive. From 11:00 to 4:00, staff were at both the north and south entrances of Walmart. Donations during that time period exceeded \$900. While this was the first time our staff had participated in this activity, many indicated what an uplifting experience it had been. To finish out the year, on December 21 all staff were invited to participate in our annual service project at Hearts and Hands Against Hunger.



Special Services Update

Joe Haney

Securing Grants to Enhance Sign Language Proficiency and Interpreter Recruitment.

We are thrilled to share some exciting news that directly impacts our commitment to fostering a more inclusive and communicative environment. Recently, ESU 9 was awarded two significant grants from the Nebraska Department of Education. The first grant will provide essential funding for a weekend dedicated to advancing our staff's sign language skills. This initiative aims to enhance the overall proficiency of our team, ensuring that we continue to provide top-notch services to our community.

In addition, the second grant opens new avenues for us to address the growing demand for qualified sign language interpreters. By partnering with local community colleges and high schools, we plan to offer online sign language classes. These classes not only serve as a resource for our existing staff but also present an opportunity to recruit and nurture future interpreters. We are particularly excited about establishing a pathway program that guides interested students through the journey of becoming a certified sign language interpreter. This strategic approach not only addresses the current shortage of interpreters but also empowers individuals to pursue a fulfilling career in bridging communication.

We are truly grateful for the Nebraska Department of Education's support, and we look forward to the positive impact these initiatives will have on our organization and the communities we serve.

Level the Playing Field with Diffit!

Jackie Ediger



Diffit for Teachers will adapt existing materials for any reader, generate "just right" resources for any topic, and still allow teachers the ability to edit and share resources with students. Simply type in a topic or paste a URL or text from what you are reading online. Diffit will change the reading level to anything you want!! AND that is not all! Diffit provides a summary, key vocabulary words, multiple choice questions, short answer, and open ended prompts. You take this and export it to Google Docs or Google Classroom. Check it out!

Get leveled resources for...

 Literally Anything

 An Article or Video (URL)

 Any Text or Excerpt

1. Search for a topic, term, or question here. Be as specific as possible!

Enter topic here (e.g. "Mitosis", "Why didn't the U.S. participate in Treaty of Versailles?")

2. Choose an approximate reading level

5th Grade



and language

English



Nebraska Public Employees Retirement System (NPERS) for Schools

Emily Burr

Link to NPERS School Employee Handbook:

<https://npers.ne.gov/SelfService/public/howto/handbooks/handbookSchool.pdf>

NPERS operates as a defined benefit plan, meaning your retirement benefit is predetermined based on factors like years of service and salary history. It's mandatory to participate if you meet eligibility requirements.

Eligibility involves various criteria, including age, employment type, weekly hours, and immigration status. Given that employment type, weekly hours, and immigration status can change, it's recommended to confirm with your employer if you were once ineligible, your status has not changed.

A quick way to verify your enrollment is to look at your paystub for the required withholding and employer match—regular ongoing employees averaging at least 20 hours a week contribute 9.78% of earnings, matched at 101% by the school. Keep in mind that the withheld amount doesn't directly affect your future benefit amount.

Given the plan's complexity, it's recommended for vested members to understand rules, eligibility, and benefits. Legislative changes have made pre-retirement seminars more accessible, requiring only vesting for attendance. For seminar inquiries, it's recommended to contact NPERS directly.

Lastly, don't forget to update your NPERS beneficiaries. You can use the linked form below. Please note this form must be notarized. ESU 9 has two notaries on staff, please call in advance to ensure their availability before visiting. This simple step ensures your beneficiaries are up-to-date and aligned with your wishes. Link to form:

<https://npers.ne.gov/SelfService/public/forms/membershipForms/beneficiary.pdf>



Instructional Coaching

LaRaesha Kugel & Katie Soto

ESU 9 Instructional Coaches, LaRaesha Kugel and Katie Soto have had a very successful beginning of the 23-24 school year. Both coaches have been collaborating with districts within and outside of the ESU 9 region to provide teachers with suggestions, guidance and modeling for effective instructional practices, behavior management, and individualized support.

LaRaesha has had the opportunity to expand the number of districts that she supports and is now scheduled for coacs in Blue Hill, Hampton, Kenesaw, Superior and Sutton, as well as the non-regional districts of Beatrice Public Schools, Dorchester and Shickley. During her time in these schools, LaRaesha focuses on tiered support, and helps guide teachers in strengthening their instruction to the entire class and enhancing support for students who are needing more. One challenge that has consistently surfaced this year has been the need for sensory support and regulation among students PK-12. LaRaesha has been enjoying having the opportunity to share her knowledge regarding sensory regulation with other educators, helping them learn about simple, yet powerful, ways to meet the needs of their students.

Katie has been actively engaged in delivering instructional coaching support to schools within the ESU 9 area. Her focus has centered on coaching in math classrooms at Sandy Creek, Lawrence Nelson, Kenesaw, and Hampton. During these sessions, her time is dedicated to observing math lessons, modeling effective instructional strategies, engaging in collaborative lesson planning, and offering constructive feedback to math teachers. The overarching aim is to foster a culture of collaboration and support, all with the ultimate goal of enhancing the quality of math instruction across our educational community.

Katie and LaRaesha also serve as a great team, as they have been working together to guide and support each other. It has been invaluable to have an instructional coaching unit to allow for growth and collaboration.



Addressing the Teacher Shortage

Drew Harris

ESU 9 and ESU 6 have joined forces to cultivate a groundbreaking initiative aimed at preparing the next generation of educators. Faced with the challenges of a growing teacher shortage, these educational service units have pioneered "Grow Your Own Education and Training Program of Study," a career pathway for future educators, for schools across the region.

The Grow Your Own Team involves the collaboration of the Project Leaders; Dr. Lynne Herr at ESU 6, and ESU 9's Dr. Ediger, Kristen Slechta, and Dr. Katie Soto, as well as lead teachers from 13 school districts, the Nebraska Department of Education, and Wayne State College. This team set out to address the critical need for educators by providing an innovative and comprehensive program of study and career and technical student organization focused on preparing school students for a career in education.

The Program of Study curriculum spans three courses, designed in alignment with the Nebraska Career and Technical Education Standards for the Education and Training Program of Study. This curriculum not only provides essential educational knowledge but also integrates career readiness standards and work-based learning experiences, ensuring that students are well-prepared for the demands of the teaching profession.

To further enrich the program, the Grow Your Own team has established valuable partnerships with the Nebraska Department of Education and Wayne State College. This collaboration opens doors for high school students to earn 19 credit hours in the field of education upon successfully completing the program of study. This not only eases the path to a future in education but also provides students with a head start in their academic journey.

An exciting and vital component of the initiative is the creation of local chapters of Educators Rising, a dynamic career technical student organization. Currently, eight districts in the ESU 9 region and five districts in the ESU 6 region have embraced the program of study, with over 60 students actively participating in Educators Rising chapters.

As the program gains momentum, the students involved will have a unique opportunity to showcase their skills and passion at the upcoming EdRising competitions during the State Conference this spring.

In essence, the Grow Your Own Education and Training Program is not merely addressing the teacher shortage; it's sowing the seeds of a brighter future for education in Nebraska. By empowering high school students to embark on this transformative journey, ESU 6 and ESU 9 are playing a pivotal role in shaping the educators of tomorrow, fostering a community that values and supports the invaluable role of teachers in our society.



A Closer Look at Blue Cross Blue Shield's Mental Health Resources

Emily Burr



Link to Mental Health Hub: (<https://www.nebraskablue.com/mentalhealth>)

Available Resources

Provider Directories: Blue Cross and Blue Shield's mental health website includes directories to help users find mental health professionals within their network. This feature ensures that individuals can access care that aligns with their insurance coverage, making mental health services more accessible and affordable.

Telehealth Resources: Users can explore information on telehealth options, making it easier for them to connect with mental health professionals from the comfort of their homes.

Educational Content: The website houses a wealth of educational content covering a broad spectrum of mental health topics. From understanding common mental health conditions to learning about coping mechanisms and treatment options, the content caters to individuals at different points in their mental health journey.

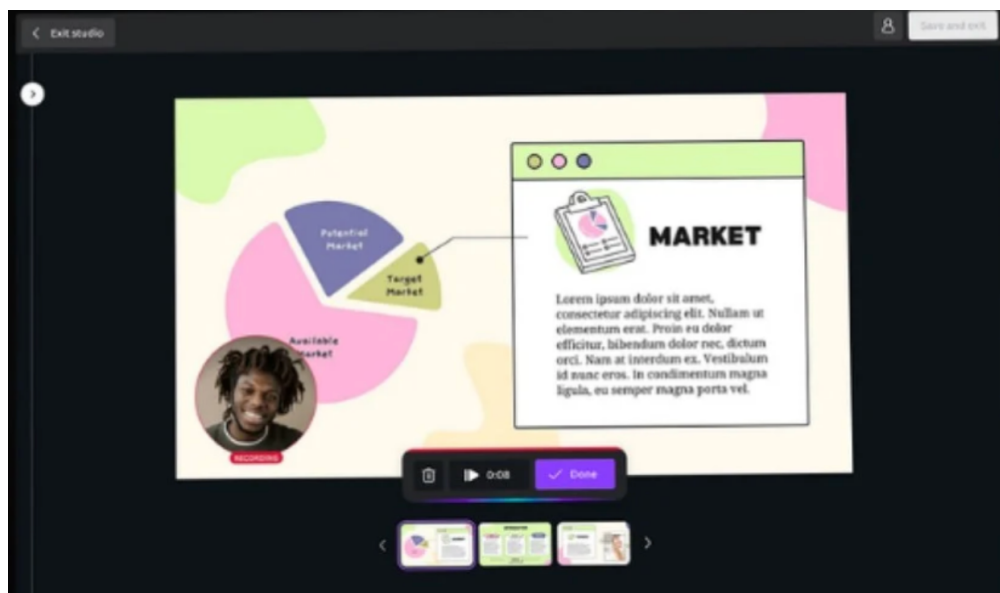
Presenter Overlay

Gary Needham

Computer processing power, combined with video capabilities, continue to develop some incredible features. One nice new feature for those who are so inclined is the ability to overlay the presenter over the slides. Formerly requiring a green screen and video mixer hardware (think TV news, weather, and sports reporting), the feature is now within reach of mortals. It may not hit your "everyday use" feature list if you are teaching in a traditional classroom. But for display of slides in either a recording (e.g., make-up work for students) or video meeting, it can be helpful to also display your image over the slides with the webcam.

This feature is named differently and plays out differently depending on your hardware and software. Apple has baked this feature into macOS 14 Sonoma, so it is named "Live Video" in Keynote (so you can do this without a videoconference in an auditorium) and is also available as "Presenter Overlay" in all video conferencing apps. Microsoft has the feature available in Teams, known as "PowerPoint Live." (Expect it to be more full-featured in Windows.) And for those whose case doesn't match any option above, Canva is web-based, free for educators (check to see if your district is signed in) and has the feature available as part of their "online screen recorder." Canva even allows you to move your video arc on the presentation screen *after* it is recorded so you don't have to distract yourself with what part of the screen is covered as you speak.

So if you've ever wanted to be able to overlay your face onto the presentation you are giving, or have a secret dream of being the next great TV weather anchor, give these features a try!



Technology Service Highlight: FTE Tech Staff

Technology staffing looks a bit different in every district. It's a difficult thing to balance, knowing the amount of time required to do the job and to keep district priorities in line. If your technology staffing needs a bit of a supplement, either expertise or to time, adding a regular technology visit to your district from the ESU 9 tech staff might be the right fit. We offer contracts beginning at 0.1 FTE (either a day every other week or ½ day each week), and working up from there.

Upcoming Events

- Future Problem Solving #3 - January 17, 2024
- Transition Student Day - January 17, 2024
- SLP Cadre - January 23, 2024
- HQIM Implementation Series Day 3 - January 25, 2024
- CPI Training - January 30, 2024
- CTE reVISION Workday - January 30, 2024
- Social Media Teams - January 31, 2024
- Empowering Leaders Zoom Session - February 1, 2024
- SPED Teacher Cadre - February 6, 2024
- Elementary Quiz Bowl - February 6, 2024
- Cybersecurity Self Assessment Workshop - February 7, 2024
- High School Quiz Bowl - February 7, 2024
- Junior High Quiz Bowl - February 8, 2024
- Music Educators Network - February 12, 2024
- Counselor's Cadre - February 20, 2024
- Chess Tournament - March 27, 2024
- Science Support Series - Science Cadre - April 4, 2024
- HAL Consortium Day 2 - April 5, 2024
- Title IX Meetings - April 9, 2024
- Instructional Coaches Cadre - April 12, 2024
- Invention Convention - April 17, 2024
- Empowering Leaders Zoom Session - April 18, 2024
- Art Cadre - April 19, 2024
- State Quiz Bowl - April 24, 2024
- Library Media Specialist Cadre - April 30, 2024

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



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