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ELEMENTARY LEARNING CENTER PLAN

Achievement Subcouncil #5

Background / Overview

One of the principal tools provided to the Learning Community Coordinating Council to enable it to accomplish the ambitious goals of the Learning Community statutes is the Elementary Learning Center.

As described in **Sec. 79-2112** (Nebraska Statutes), the Elementary Learning Center is intended to "...serve as visionary resource centers for enhancing the academic success of elementary students, particularly those students who face challenges in the educational environment due to factors such as poverty, limited English skills, and mobility."

Among the powers granted by statute to the Learning Community Coordinating Council (**Sec. 79-2104(1)**) is to "establish and administer Elementary Learning Centers through Achievement Subcouncils..."

Each Achievement Subcouncil, with regard to its district, is tasked by statute (**Sec. 79-2117(2)**) with the responsibility to "administer Elementary Learning Centers in cooperation with the elementary learning center executive director"; to submit a plan for the elementary learning center and for the services to be provided by it to the Learning Community Coordinating Council (**Sec. 79-2113(2)**); to collaborate with community resources to provide those services (**Sec. 79-2113(2)**); and to recommend to the Learning Community Coordinating Council those services which may be provided by contracts or grants to entities in the community (**Sec. 79-2113(2)**).

In fulfilling its responsibility, the Learning Community Coordinating Council has determined that an elementary learning center should be established in Achievement Subcouncil #5. That area clearly complies with the basic statutory requirement (**Sec. 79-2113**) for the establishment of an elementary learning center. Free and reduced-price lunch data describe this as an area with a large population of elementary school children living at or below poverty levels. Nineteen elementary school buildings in the area have at least thirty-five percent of their students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches, and nine buildings report greater than seventy percent of their students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. To meet the academic needs of these children, an elementary learning center must target its programs to meet the challenges posed for these students and their families by reason of their living at poverty levels; their limited English skills; and their high rates of mobility (reflected by frequent transfers between schools during the school year).

Community Input

Since the Learning Community Coordinating Council has formally determined that an elementary learning center should be established in Achievement Subcouncil #5, the Achievement Subcouncil has complied with its statutory mandate to seek community input (**Sec. 79-2113(2)**) and held six forums within its area during the months of September and October: five in South Omaha (two at St. Agnes Catholic Church Gymnasium, and one each at Gomez Heritage Elementary School, Bancroft Elementary School and Spring Lake Elementary School) and one in Bellevue (BPS Welcome Center).

The combined attendance at these forums easily exceeded more than four hundred residents of Subcouncil #5.

The conclusions that may be drawn from the forums have guided Subcouncil #5 in its development of the Elementary Learning Center plan.

Among those conclusions are the following:

1. **Interest in the community is high.** Attendance increased at each subsequent forum, with the last having the largest attendance (over one hundred and fifty people). Participation never lagged: someone was always ready to come forward with a comment or request.
2. **The population of Subcouncil #5 truly is a community.** Through strong links of family, common language and heritage, as well as mutual interest, there are bonds which bind the residents of this area together. It was clear from the forums that people here considered themselves as members of a group, almost an extended family.
3. **The needs are great, but not necessarily for something new.** Again and again as people rose to comment, the requests were not so much for something new as for improvements or expansions to existing programs (after school, summer school, tutoring, etc.). More often than not, people referred to an existing program and stated that it ended too soon, was too crowded, had a waiting list, or lacked sufficient funding.
4. **The primary problem that needed to be addressed, for both students and their families, is a lack of facility or competency in speaking and writing English.** Again and again this issue was raised, often in different forms. Students couldn't participate in extracurricular programs (including sports) because of a lack of proficiency in English. Students needing help weren't identified as such or helped because of a lack of bilingual teachers or translators. Parents could not help their children because of their own limited English language skills.
5. **The principal limiting factor in addressing many of the concerns was transportation.** People raised the issue time and again of having programs conveniently located near their homes because of the logistics of participation: they aren't home to transport children or a spouse, they have to deal with infants and toddlers

which limits the ability to move around transporting older children to multiple locations, and public transport is inconvenient or non-existent (indeed, nobody even mentioned “buses” as an alternative form of transportation).

6. **Childcare was always a concern for any program involving families.** At each of the public meetings there were often almost as many children as adults present. The reality is that young parents involved in any support activity need to have their children nearby or under supervision while they are participating.
7. **People needed more support services for children and families:** parenting and marriage classes, counseling services, help with homework in after school programs, expansion of mentoring programs, emergency assistance for parents and children in crisis, services for homeless children and families, clothing assistance for the needy, etc.; more transportation assistance to enable kids to get to programs and activities; and an end to fees and charges for participation in some sports and other activities.
8. **Residents wanted more “supplementary” academic services:** more arts, music and dance programs; better band and orchestra equipment/instruments (or even “any”); more resources for academic field trips; more organized after-school programs, particularly programs that would help children with their homework, and expanded mentoring programs.
9. **There are many untapped resources that could forward the goals of the elementary learning center and assist in the provision of the services needed but we don’t know where these resources and programs are and how to link them with the people who need them.** The role played by local community groups and organizations in organizing the meetings and bringing in people to participate points to significant local support for the type of programs that would be conducted through the elementary learning center. Comments made at the meetings also revealed many untapped resources or little known programs that could be harnessed or expanded to meet our broader goals.

Approach

While it would be optimal to have sufficient financial resources to fund the services that are needed in the area, it is recognized that funds are limited. What can be done is to utilize the existing funding to (a) maximize the effective availability and use of existing programs and resources for Elementary Learning Center purposes and (b) with such funds as are available, support priority services that are most vitally needed to the extent possible. This plan seeks to incorporate community input with the statutory requirement for the establishment of an elementary learning center (**Sec. 79-2113**).

Target Population

Services will be targeted to enhance the academic success of elementary students who face challenges in the educational environment due to factors such as:

- Living at or below poverty level
- Limited English skills
- High rates of mobility (those who transfer frequently between schools during the school year)

Poverty

Sec. 79-2113(3) of state statutes mandates that “each elementary learning center shall have at least one facility that is located within an area with a high concentration of poverty.” Free and Reduced-Lunch data indicates a high level of elementary school children living at or below poverty level within Subcouncil #5. Of 24 elementary school buildings¹, 19 met Statute 79-2113’s stipulation for at least 35% of students residing in the attendance area to qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, and 9 buildings report greater than 70% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. To meet the academic needs of children living in poverty, an Elementary Learning Center is proposed to be located within Subcouncil #5.

School	% F/R Lunch OM 08-09	Meets Statute 79-2113: At least 35%	Greater than 70% of students qualify for F/R Lunch
HIGHLAND ELEM	94%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
CASTELAR ELEMENTARY	88%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
GOMEZ HERITAGE ELEMENTARY	87%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
INDIAN HILL ELEM	85%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
R M MARRS MAGNET ELEM	85%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
SPRING LAKE MAGNET CENTER	81%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
BANCROFT ELEMENTARY	78%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
ASHLAND PARK/ROBBINS ELEM	75%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
JEFFERSON ELEM	73%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
GILDER ELEM	66%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
BETZ ELEMENTARY	62%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
CHANDLER VIEW ELEM	61%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
BELLEAIRE ELEMENTARY	59%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
BIRCHCREST ELEMENTARY	48%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
CENTRAL ELEMENTARY	44%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

¹ Per statute, buildings were determined by those students who attended the building and lived in the attendance area of the school building.

TWIN RIDGE ELEMENTARY	42%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
BERTHA BARBER ELEMENTARY	40%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
AVERY ELEMENTARY	39%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
FORT CROOK ELEMENTARY	36%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
PETER SARPY ELEMENTARY	34%		
LEMAY ELEMENTARY	32%		
WAKE ROBIN ELEMENTARY	26%		
LEONARD LAWRENCE ELEM	19%		
TWO SPRINGS ELEMENTARY	9%		

Table 1. Percent of Students Qualifying for Free-or Reduced-Price Lunches in Subcouncil #5 (Source: Omaha & Bellevue Public Schools, 2009).

English Language Learners

Compounding the issues of poverty in Subcouncil #5 is a lack of proficiency in the English language. Among the elementary schools with high F/R Lunch Program participation, nearly one half of students were identified with limited English skills. As *Table 2* illustrates, the percentages of students considered “English Language Learners” (ELL) tops 50% in 3 of the Subcouncil #5 schools. The National Center for Educational Statistics estimates that the nation’s ELL student population now comprises 10% of all students. Ten of Subcouncil #5’s elementary schools largely exceed the national average.

School	% ELL OM 08-09
CASTELAR	55.5
HIGHLAND	51.6
GOMEZ HERITAGE	50.9
SPRING LAKE MAGNET	40.6
JEFFERSON	38.3
INDIAN HILL	37.1
ASHLAND PARK/ROBBINS	35.7
BANCROFT	34.0
CHANDLER VIEW	32.6
GILDER	31.4
AVERY	7.3
BELLEAIRE	6.8
BERTHA BARBER	6.0
BETZ	3.3
BIRCHCREST	2.6
CENTRAL	2.2
FAIRVIEW	1.4
FORT CROOK	1.3
LEMAY	0.9
LEONARD LAWRENCE	0.6
PETER SARPY	0.5
TWIN RIDGE	0.2
TWO SPRINGS	0.2
WAKE ROBIN	0.0

Table 2. Percentage of Students in Subcouncil 5 Elementary Schools Considered English Language Learners. Source: Omaha & Bellevue Public Schools (2009).

Mobility

Students in these schools are also facing academic challenges due to a phenomenon called “High Student Mobility” – students frequently changing schools for reasons other than grade promotion. Mobile students have been proven to be at greater risk for academic and behavioral problems, with cumulative damage to student achievement and higher risk of dropping out. US Census data (2004) showed that between 15-20% of school-aged children had moved the previous year. *Table 3* shows that more than one half of the elementary schools in Subcouncil #5 exceed that national average for students transferring schools.

School	% Mobility 08-09
CASTELAR	32.1
INDIAN HILL	26.8
PETER SARPY	23.1
GILDER	22.1
LEMAY	21.3
JEFFERSON	20.9
BANCROFT	18.8
BELLEAIRE	17.1
CHANDLER VIEW	17.0
HIGHLAND	16.8
BETZ	16.3
GOMEZ HERITAGE	16.3
SPRING LAKE MAGNET	15.8
FORT CROOK	14.4
ASHLAND PARK/ROBBINS	13.8
BIRCHCREST	10.5
TWO SPRINGS	9.6
LEONARD LAWRENCE	9.5
AVERY	9.4
BERTHA BARBER	8.4
CENTRAL	8.0
WAKE ROBIN	7.8
TWIN RIDGE	7.5
FAIRVIEW	4.4

Table 3. Mobility Rates for Subcouncil #5 Elementary Schools (Source: Omaha & Bellevue Public Schools, 2009).

Academic Need

The anecdotal evidence gathered at the public forums is consistent with both local and national research on students' academic needs.

The *SRI International Report* conducted for Building Bright Futures (2007) suggested that while OPS may appear to be performing well in teaching children basic reading and mathematics, these students are not being held to the same expectations as national assessments, and these children may not be prepared to meet national standards.

“Although results on the tests used in Nebraska to measure achievement on core skills show Omaha schools performing well, there is evidence to suggest that Nebraska, like many other states, does not hold students to the same expectations as national assessments. When comparing results for OPS and the state of Nebraska overall on STARS with results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), overall state level and OPS scores are similar. The overwhelming majority of students meet standards (88% of Nebraska students and 78% of OPS students, for example, in reading in 4th grade in 2005). However, results on NAEP for the same year indicated that just 34% of 4th grades in public schools in Nebraska were reading at or above the proficient level. There are similar discrepancies between STARS and NAEP results for 4th grade mathematics. These discrepancies do not mean that students in Nebraska and OPS are failing. In fact, Nebraska students perform well on NAEP relative to students in other states. These data simply suggest that when educators raise the bar for what it means to be “proficient,” fewer students meet the stricter criteria.”²

Analysis of national assessment results for Subcouncil 5's elementary school students in *Table 4* indicates that the majority of students meet the standards for STARS Reading and Math proficiency. Without NAEP data on the school level, it is difficult to make a similar comparison to the *SRI* report. But looking at the number of schools achieving 100% proficiency, the question arises: what lessons can be learned from the schools achieving 100% proficiency in reading and math? What can be done to ensure that each child is equipped with the tools they need to reach at least minimum proficiency standards?

² *SRI International Report* (2007), with credit to sources: Omaha Public Schools; Perie, M., Grigg, W., & Donahus, P. (2005). *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2005* (NCES 2006-451). U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

School	STARS Reading Grade 4 % Proficient	STARS Math Grade 4 % Proficient
HIGHLAND	93.5	100.0
CASTELAR	98.2	100.0
INDIAN HILL	98.0	100.0
GOMEZ HERITAGE	100.0	100.0
SPRING LAKE MAGNET	100.0	100.0
BANCROFT	100.0	100.0
ASHLAND PARK/ROBBINS	96.0	100.0
JEFFERSON	98.0	99.0
GILDER	95.0	99.0
CHANDLER VIEW	97.3	98.6
AVERY	90.0	98.0
BELLEAIRE	98.0	98.0
BERTHA BARBER	93.0	97.0
BETZ	94.0	97.0
BIRCHCREST	92.6	96.3
CENTRAL	93.1	94.9
FAIRVIEW	78.9	94.4
FORT CROOK	92.6	94.3
LEMAY	94.0	94.0
LEONARD LAWRENCE	69.0	94.0
PETER SARPY	86.8	92.4
TWIN RIDGE	81.0	92.0
TWO SPRINGS	79.6	90.9
WAKE ROBIN	88.0	90.0

Table 4. STARS Reading and Math Proficiency Scores for Grade 4, Subcouncil #5 Students (Source: Omaha & Bellevue Public Schools, 2009).

At a glance, it would appear that, with proficiencies mostly in the 80's and 90's, proficiencies are high. However, many are falling behind both Omaha Public Schools District and State proficiency.

The Nebraska Department of Education’s State Report Card showed the state STARS Reading for Grade 4 at 94.85%, Bellevue Public Schools at 93.54% and Omaha Public Schools at 92.2%. *Figure 1* plots the school building proficiencies against these two comparison lines to show that seven Subcouncil 5 schools scored below OPS’s reading proficiency, twelve below Bellevue and fourteen scored below that of Nebraska.

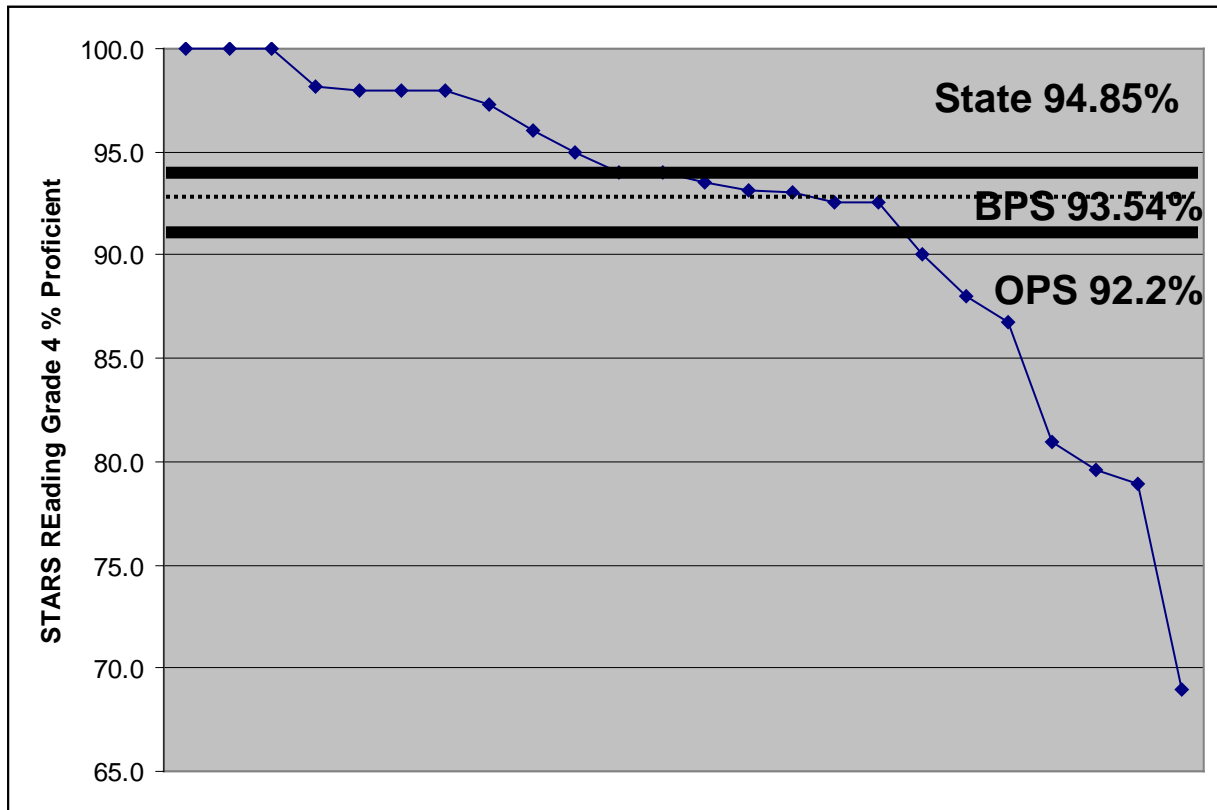


Figure 1. STARS Reading Grade 4 Proficiency Scores by Elementary School in Subcouncil 5, Compared to State, BPS and OPS Proficiencies (2008-09).

Figure 2 shows a similar comparison for the STARS Math Grade 4 proficiency, with nine Subcouncil 5 schools not meeting the OPS and State proficiencies (both at 95.5%) and ten not meeting Bellevue Public Schools' average proficiency of 96.97%.

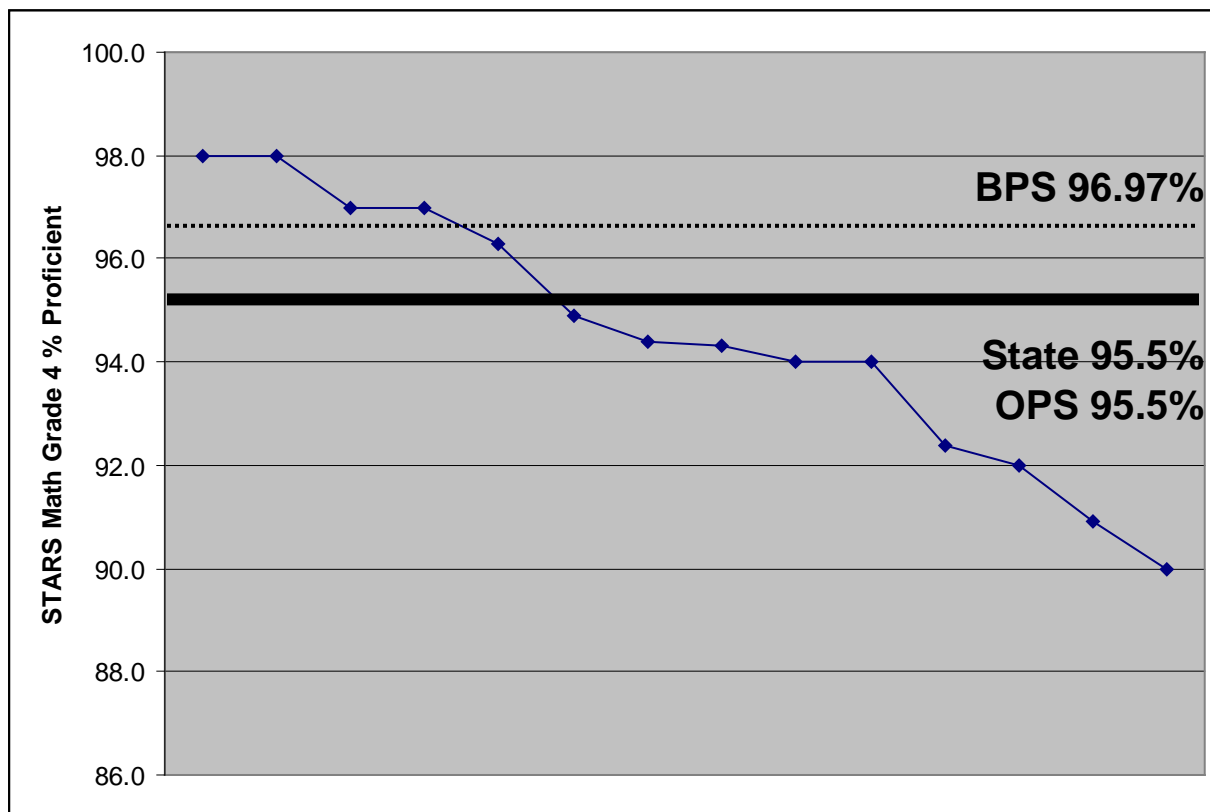


Figure 2. STARS Math Grade 4 Proficiency Scores by Elementary School in Subcouncil 5, Compared to State, BPS and OPS Proficiencies (2008-09).

Key Strategies

Key Strategy A. **Equip adults to fully engage with their children in their learning process.**

The high number of ELL students, along with consistent community forum feedback requesting ELL support, were dominating themes in Subcouncil #5. The language barrier has been shown to impede students' academic success. Parents of ELL students lack English language proficiency and cannot engage in many of the typical parent involvement activities associated with higher reading achievement (1 Hewison and Tizard (1980) and academic success in general (Gillum, 1977; Rich et al., 1979; Comer, 1980).

Key Strategy B. **Identify and obtain a centralized location to serve as an intake and referral center.**

Establishing a local office with limited meeting facilities should enhance opportunities to host service activities, as well as official functions of the Learning Coordinating Council and

Achievement Subcouncil #5. By embedding the Elementary Learning Center in a centrally located part of the local community, services can be linked more closely to the life of the area, building trust among the residents. A convenient location may also facilitate “walk-in” traffic from people interested in learning about the area or seeking academic assistance.

Key Strategy C: **Determine staffing requirements:**

The Elementary Learning Center staff, volunteers, and the Achievement Subcouncil #5 would work together to forge the links and develop a database of basic information. Therefore, staff will need to be proficient in computer database technology. The high concentration of English Language Learners living within Subcouncil #5 points to the need for personnel fluent in both Spanish and English.

Key Strategy D: **Establish identity for Elementary Learning Center within the community:**

To establish an identity as a liaison between the families/elementary students and neighborhood school personnel, the Elementary Learning Center staff will identify individuals to serve as contacts within the school buildings and districts. The liaisons will solicit information from school district and school buildings within Subcouncil #5 to identify (1) programs (educational and otherwise) that exist to support students and their families; and (2) students and their families in need of assistance. In addition, relationships must be established with existing educational groups, public and private, to determine additional needs and supplemental services. These groups include: teachers' groups, PTAs, area private and parochial schools, etc. It is intended that 2-1-1 will serve as a primary referral for families requesting social services, rather than academic services. However, the liaisons will also develop relationships with local public and private groups that are not primarily education-oriented, including cities, counties, neighborhood associations, service organizations, nonprofit organizations, etc.

The Elementary Learning Center will develop and utilize multiple means of communicating information to the members of the community that are seeking support and services to enhance academic success.

Key Strategy E: **Develop concurrent primary roles as an Intake and Referral Center and center that actively offers on-site programs and services**

The Elementary Learning Center's primary function would be to connect elementary students and their families to the services available in the community to assist them in improving their academic success. These functions are specifically cited as appropriate activities of the Elementary Learning Center under **Sec. 79-2113(2)** and **Sec. 79-2114(p)**.

For example, data developed on English-as-a-Second Language programs available in the area can be used to assist families that request such assistance either directly to the Elementary Learning Center or through local schools. Similarly, parents seeking musical

instruments, for example, for children interested in participating in school music programs could be linked to organizations that might be able to finance or provide such assistance.

While this information database serves the direct function of linking needs to services available to meet them, it also enables the Learning Community through the Learning Community Coordinating Council and the Subcouncil to respond prudently and intelligently with the use of public funds to support the most vitally-needed but underfunded activities.

The Subcouncil would use the data collected to develop requests for proposals regarding specific services on a priority basis to the extent that Learning Community resources, with the approval of the Learning Community Coordinating Council, will permit. The database would also capture information regarding local school district poverty and LEP plan activities and expenditures and enable the Subcouncil to more intelligently assess their impact and effectiveness. Ultimately, the database presents possibilities for providing direct services through social workers for local families with particular problems.

In addition, the database could ultimately assist in the open-enrollment process by cataloguing programs from throughout the Learning Community that might be of interest to local students and parents, providing on a continuing day-to-day basis the sort of information now contemplated to be distributed by annual fair events.

Recommendation 1. Adult English Language Learners

Subcouncil #5 recommends close contact with and support of the Community Parent Liaison model being successfully implemented in both Bellevue and Omaha Public Schools. The function of the Community Parent Liaison is to assist parents who are non-English speaking to improve communication between the school district and families. The Elementary Learning Center facility could be made available for conversational English classes and conversational Spanish classes conducted through this model. Such reciprocal learning opportunities allow Subcouncil #5 to draw upon the strength of the community and share the culture of Spanish speaking families with their community, as they learn the English language.

Subcouncil #5 also recommends that the Elementary Learning Center staff work with Metropolitan Community College, UNO, OPS, Bellevue Public Schools, local churches and other organizations running adult ESL classes, to encourage conversion to a common, articulated program, held during nontraditional, alternative times. This would help parents who must change work shifts continue their progress, rather than become frustrated and waste resources because they are forced to switch to a different program in an unfamiliar format.

Recommendation 2. Location

The building that previously served as the South Omaha Library has been identified as a likely possible location, based on location, ease of transportation, and the space available for

public and private meetings and usage. By serving as the center for communications, the Elementary Learning Center can enhance programs at the building level, and existing school buildings can be relied upon to continue to house key services.

Recommendation 3. Staffing Requirements

The Elementary Learning Center in Subcouncil #5 should begin with 2 paid staff. Bilingual communication capabilities are essential, along with computer and website creation and operation skills.

- Will need to determine hours of center's operation.
- Will need to determine additional necessary staff capabilities prior to hire.

Recommendation 4. Community Identity

Subcouncil #5 recommends the formation of an Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from the schools, ELL programs, nonprofit organizations, parents, and other stakeholders. The Advisory Council would provide guidance, along with vital community connections, to ensure better identification of service gaps and avoid duplication of services.

The Elementary Learning Center will work, through the Advisory Committee to develop processes, programming, and measurable, attainable goals to evaluate progress and ensure accountability.

To enhance the Elementary Learning Center's community identity and promote services throughout Subcouncil #5, the Elementary Learning Center should create a Subcouncil #5 resource area within the Learning Community's comprehensive website.

Recommendation 5. Primary Role of the Elementary Learning Center

The Elementary Learning Center in Subcouncil #5 should collaborate with community resources to connect elementary students and their families to services designed to enhance their academic success. To fill gaps in services currently available in the community, the Elementary Learning Center in Subcouncil #5 recommends an RFQ (Request for Qualifications) process to determine cost and space allocations necessary to provide services on-site or to grant funds to current providers to expand current service provision in schools.

Summary

In summary, the plan provides for:

- Support for and enhancement of programs removing barriers that keep adults from fully engaging in their elementary school children's academic success.

- A locally-staffed office of bilingual persons to gather information regarding programs available to assist elementary-school children and their families and the needs of such individuals.
- Creation of an Advisory Committee of stakeholders to guide processes and identify programming opportunities.
- Limited meeting facilities in the office for local service providers, to accommodate Learning Community Coordinating Council and Subcouncil #5 official activities, and to provide for expansion of operation through volunteer assistance,
- The use of the developed database to conduct a Request for Qualifications program by the Subcouncil #5 to finance the most vitally needed and most under-funded services to the extent that resources will allow.
- Future expansion, as budgets and data-sophistication permits, into direct counseling assistance to families with particular needs and assistance in linking individuals with Learning Community school programs under the open-enrollment portion of the diversity plan.