



EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

2025-2026

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Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to communicate organizational procedures and employee expectations at ESU #17. This includes an explanation of employment

benefits, work schedule, travel, and various employee responsibilities related to insurance, leaves and monthly reporting. Please contact the Administrator, Business Manager or Administrative Assistant if you have specific questions.

Vision

- To walk alongside our schools, supporting them on their unique journeys toward growth and success for all students and educators.

Mission

- To provide innovation, leadership and services for each member school district so they are successful in reaching their targeted educational goals

Values

- **Insightful:** We seek to connect with our educators' needs.
 - **Optimistic:** We believe in the collective impact of our educators.
 - **Sincere:** We believe authentic relationships are the foundation of meaningful change.
 - **Determined:** We empower educators and students to unlock their potential.
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Employment

Certificated & At-will Employees

Due to the nature of their work, employees are categorized as either “certificated” or “at-will.” Certificated employees are any teacher, nurse or other employee in a position or assignment which requires a certificate issued by the Commissioner of Education or a license issued by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. At-will employees do not have this requirement.

Due to this distinction and the nature of their contractual terms, protocols for certificated and at-will employees will sometimes vary.

Pay Periods

Employees will be paid in monthly installments. Payments will be received via direct deposit on the 15th of every month. Should the 15th of the month fall on a holiday or non-work day, employees shall be paid the preceding workday. Employees have access to their financial information through [AptaFund](#).

Evaluations

Probationary certificated employees are formally evaluated once a semester for the first three years of employment. Tenured certificated employees and at-will employees are formally evaluated at least once every three years.

Resignations

Certificated employees resigning their position upon completion of their current contract must submit a letter of resignation to the Administrator as early as practicable, before March 15, to be acted on at a regular meeting of the board. Permission to resign before the conclusion of the contract period will be granted to the employee under contract only if a suitable replacement is found. The suitability of the replacement shall be determined by the Administrator. After March 15, requests for release from a contract will be granted only pending board approval.

At-will employees are requested to provide a two-week notice prior to resigning.

Benefits

Employee Benefits

ESU #17 offers its employees a variety of insurance programs. All insurance benefits begin on the first day of the month following the date of employment and end on the last day of the month at termination.

Health Insurance

ESU #17 is part of the Educators Health Alliance through Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Nebraska and, as such, all employees are required to be insured by the Blue Cross Blue Shield EHA plan or under their spouse's group insurance policy.



ESU #17 employees may select either a Blue Cross/Blue Shield \$650 deductible PPO plan or a \$3,800 HSA-eligible plan.

Other benefits and restrictions are outlined in the insurance policy information, which can be found at [Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska](#) or at the ESU #17 Administration Building.

Dental Insurance

Employees insured by the Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Nebraska EHA automatically receive a single dental plan. Employees not insured



through the ESU have access to this plan if desired. Employee plus spouse, employee plus children, or family coverage options are available at an additional cost.

Section 125 Cafeteria Plan

ESU #17 offers a Section 125 Plan for employees to use pretax dollars to purchase health and dental insurance according to their individual needs.

Deduction amounts can only be changed once a year at enrollment time, except when circumstances change status of benefits. Enrollment is conducted during the Fall Staff Meeting.

Aflac Supplemental Insurance

Aflac offers a variety of additional policies including accident, cancer, dental, life, personal short-term disability and hospital indemnity. Employees can submit and monitor claims through the [AFLAC](#) website.



WageWorks

Employees may have pre-tax deductions for one or both of the following categories through [WageWorks](#):

- Unreimbursed Medical Expenses (cannot exceed \$3,300 per year)
- Dependent Care Expenses (cannot exceed \$5,000 per year)



Vision Service Plan (VSP)

ESU #17 offers an affordable eye care plan through [VSP Vision Care](#). Employee only, employee plus spouse, employee plus children, and employee plus family plans may be purchased.



Long-term Disability Insurance

Long-term disability insurance is a condition of employment for all eligible employees and is automatically deducted through the employee's monthly payroll.

Retirement

All employees are covered by the Federal Social Security Act. In addition, all employees working an average of at



least 20 hours per week and hired after July 1, 1978, must belong to the [Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems](#) (NPERS) for School Employees.

Because ESU #17 is a political subdivision involved in education, all employees are eligible to participate in an IRS qualified 403(b) (invested with pre-tax dollars) retirement plan. ESU #17 deducts a specified amount from each employee's paycheck each month and forwards this contribution to the plan administrator. Employees must submit the completed Enrollment Agreement to the Business Manager, and the company selected for investment must meet the IRS requirements. The third-party administrator will be 403(b) Consultants, LLC.

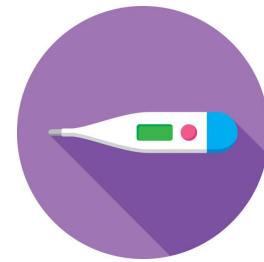
Leaves

Sick Leave

Full-time certificated and at-will employees will receive 9 days of sick leave annually. Part-time employees will receive sick leave on a prorated basis. Sick leave is cumulative to 60 days. Employees can monitor their sick leave balance on the [AptaFund](#) website.

Sick leave shall be granted due to birth, death, or illness of members of the employee's immediate family. The term "immediate family" for sick leave purposes includes

- spouse and spouse's parents
- children (by blood, adoption, or marriage)
- children's spouses
- parents and their spouses
- siblings and their spouses
- grandparents
- grandchildren and their spouses.



Upon hire, employees have a one-time option to enroll in the ESU #17 sick leave bank. Refer to the Sick Leave Bank document and Sick Bank Application on the [ESU website](#). See also "Employee Procedures" regarding [Leave Requests](#).

Bereavement

Employees may use sick leave for the following bereavement conditions:

1. When a death occurs in the immediate family (spouse, children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters), or other persons bearing the same relation to the employee's spouse.

2. To attend funerals of persons not in the employee's immediate family as defined in "1" above, but for whom the employee has a close and significant relationship, up to one day of paid sick leave shall be granted at the discretion of the Administrator.

See also "Employee Procedures" regarding [Leave Requests](#).

Personal Leave

Employees who work under a teaching contract shall be guaranteed three days of personal leave with full pay during the school year. Unused personal leave will be carried over, cumulative to 5 days. Notice of intent to use personal leave shall be given to the employee's immediate supervisor prior to the leave date except in cases of emergencies. Employees can monitor their personal leave balance on the [AptaFund](#) website. See also "Employee Procedures" regarding [Leave Requests](#).

Vacation Leave

Employees who have vacation leave included in their employment contract may request those days with the following conditions:

- Vacation leave is to be taken during regular work days.
- Requests for vacation leave are to be submitted prior to the dates of planned absence and are subject to Administrator approval.
- No more than ten consecutive days of vacation leave may be taken without administrative approval.
- Newly hired employees are not eligible to use vacation leave for the first 90 days of employment.
- Vacation leave may accumulate to double the number of paid vacation days indicated in the employee's contract.
- Upon contractual separation, unused vacation leave will be paid at a rate of \$50 per day up to a maximum payout of \$2,000.00.

Employees can monitor their vacation leave balance on the [AptaFund](#) website. See also "Employee Procedures" regarding [Leave Requests](#).

Professional Leave

The equivalent of at least two days of professional growth is available annually for attendance at local, regional, state or national professional development functions provided the training aligns with employment duties or directly benefits the ESU or schools served by the ESU. See also "Employee Procedures" regarding the [Professional Leave](#) process.

Leave Without Pay

Work time missed in excess of available paid leave will be leave without pay. Salary and fringe benefits (including the cost of premiums for group health insurance) will be subject to reduction for work time missed. Employees who are considering leave without pay should visit with the Administrator.

FMLA

Under the Family and Medical Leave act of 1993, employees may be entitled to a total of up to 12 work weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for the following purposes:

- Birth of a son or daughter of the employee and care of such son or daughter
- The placement of a son or daughter with the employee for adoption or foster care
- The care of spouse, son, daughter, or parent of the employee who has a serious health condition
- A serious health condition of the employee that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of his or her positions
- Any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the spouse, or a son, daughter, or parent of the employee is on covered active duty (or has been notified of an impending call or order to covered active duty) in the armed forces
- To care for a spouse, son, daughter, or next of kin who is a member of the Armed Forces undergoing medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy, is otherwise on outpatient status or is otherwise on a temporary retirement list for seriously injury or illness

Posters regarding FMLA guidelines are posted at all ESU #17 office locations.

FLSA

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), initially passed in 1938, establishes and enforces minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and child labor standards affecting full-time and part-time workers in the private sector and in Federal, State, and local governments. Further, it addresses the following employment conditions:

- **Overtime Pay:** Requires overtime pay at a rate of not less than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for hours worked over 40 in a workweek. Overtime pay must be approved in advance by the administrator.
- **Exempt vs. Nonexempt Employees:** Defines categories of employees who are exempt from overtime pay requirements (e.g., executive, administrative, professional employees).

- **Record Keeping:** Requires employers to maintain accurate records of employee wages, hours worked, and other employment information.
- **Compensatory Time (Comp Time) under FLSA:** Comp time is the practice of providing employees with time off instead of cash payment for overtime hours worked.
- **Mandatory Lunch Period:** Nebraska Revised Statutes § 79-8107 states that "Every school district shall provide each teacher with an uninterrupted lunch period of not less than thirty minutes each school day, and no teacher shall be assigned teaching, supervisory, or other duties during such lunch period, except that school district attendance centers having less than two teachers shall be exempted from the provisions of this section." All employees are guaranteed a thirty-minute duty-free lunch break.

Sick Leave Bank

ESU #17 has a Sick Leave Bank that provides additional sick leave days to members of the bank in the event of critical illness, medically-necessary (non-elective) surgery, or other injury-related temporary disability which renders the member unable to perform their job responsibilities. Days must be requested from the bank only after the member has exhausted all accumulated sick leave and personal/vacation leave. This may be an option to consider prior to taking leave without pay.

Certificated employees may join the Sick Leave Bank by donating two sick leave days during the first five working days of their first contractual year. At-will employees may join by donating two sick leave days during the first five working days of their first year of employment.

If the sick bank member is part-time, the number of days the employee donates will be prorated based on their FTE percentage. If a new employee is working only part-time and does not wish to become part of the sick bank, the offer to join will be re-extended if the employee is later offered a full time position.

For additional information, including how to apply, please refer to the Sick Leave Bank document located on the [ESU website](#).

Calendar

Institutional Calendars

The ESU calendar and all school district calendars are posted on the [ESU website](#).

Employee Calendar

Certificated employees working at only one district will follow the calendar of that district. Certificated employees working at more than one district and at-will employees working at an ESU office location will follow the ESU #17 calendar. See also “Employee Procedures” regarding [monthly reporting](#).

Work Week

Full-time certificated employees shall work a full five-day week. The regular workday shall begin as nearly as possible at 8:00 A.M. in the assigned school and end as nearly as possible to 4:00 P.M. in the assigned school. The employee's regular schedule usually places the employee at home by 5:30 P.M.

At-will employees will follow an 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. schedule.

All employees are guaranteed a thirty-minute duty-free lunch break.

Holidays

2025-2026 Holidays:

July 4	Independence Day
September 1	Labor Day
October 17	Fall Break
November 26-28	Thanksgiving Break
December 22-January 2	Christmas Break
March 13	Spring Break
April 3-6	Easter Break
May 25	Memorial Day



When a holiday occurs on a Saturday, the preceding Friday is usually observed as the holiday. When a holiday occurs on Sunday, the following Monday is usually observed as the holiday.

Trade Days

Employees may, with administrative approval, trade a scheduled ESU holiday for a regular work day in order to provide direct support to students or school districts.

Inclement Weather

During times of inclement weather, the ESU #17 Administration Building and Training Center will follow the Ainsworth Community Schools weather schedule and the Valentine Office will follow the Valentine Community Schools weather schedule.

Employees are expected to follow the weather schedule of their work location. Consideration will be given when an employee's residential school district has a different weather schedule than their work location. When this occurs the employee must notify their appropriate supervisor.

Employees should request to be put on the call lists of the school districts where they work and where they reside in order to receive weather-related notifications.

Staff Meetings

Attendance is expected at all ESU staff meetings unless prior arrangements have been made with the Administrator.



- **Wednesday, August 6** - Fall Staff Meeting
- **Tuesday, January 6** - Winter Staff Meeting
- **Thursday, May 14** - Spring Staff Meeting

Travel

Home Base

Employees have a designated home base that indicates their primary work location. The ESU Board approves employee home bases in order to determine mileage paid for allowable work-related travel.

Mileage

Employees will be paid the IRS government rate for allowable work-related travel. Mileage is not paid for travel between the employee's residence and their home base. See also "Employee Procedures" regarding [mileage](#) reporting.

Professional Travel

Employees may be reimbursed for the following expenses up to the per diem rates when attending conferences, workshops, or business activities that have been approved by the Administrator:



- Conference registration and other fees
- Mileage/Round Trip Transportation Costs: Employees will be paid the IRS government rate for mileage reimbursement. Employees will be notified when rate changes occur.
- Lodging/Parking Reimbursement: Government rates should be requested when making lodging arrangements. Direct bills should be utilized whenever possible.
- Meal Reimbursement: Employees will be reimbursed not to exceed per diem rates for meals when traveling outside the ESU #17 area. For reimbursement purposes itemized receipts must be submitted with the Expense Reimbursement Form. Reimbursed tips are limited to 20% of the receipt.

See also “Employee Procedures” regarding documentation required on professional leave.

Employee Procedures

Change of Insurance Status

Changes to benefit-related documentation must occur within 30 days of the date on which a life-altering event has occurred, e.g., change in employee’s spouse employment benefits. The employee is responsible for notifying the Business Manager within those 30 days.

Professional Leave

Procedures regarding participation in professional functions that include financial reimbursement from the ESU are outlined below. Other professional events that take place during contract time but do not include financial reimbursement by the ESU, e.g., serving on an external visit team, must be cleared with the administrator and documented on the employee’s calendar.

Prior to the Function

Employees will submit an initial Expense Reimbursement form to the Administrator for approval prior to attending a professional leave function indicating the date, location, name and description of the event. Once approved, the Administrator will return the signed Expense Reimbursement form to the employee. An Expense Reimbursement form is provided on the [ESU website](#).

Following the Function

Upon completion of the function, the employee will update and submit the completed Expense Reimbursement form to the Business Manager in order to receive reimbursement for their travel expenses, e.g., mileage, meals, parking, etc.

All itemized expenses must include a receipt validating the expense in order for those claims to be reimbursed. The employee must also submit a copy of the conference brochure/registration form or the agenda with the Expense Reimbursement form.

Leave Requests

When employees miss work due to illness or personal/vacation leave, a time-sensitive Leave Request must be submitted through the [AptaFund](#) website.



- Sick Leave: submit leave request upon return to work
- Bereavement: if immediate family, submit leave request upon return to work; otherwise, submit leave request to attend funeral prior to date of funeral; refer to Leaves for further details regarding [Bereavement](#)
- Personal/Vacation Leave: submit leave request prior to dates of planned absence
- Increments of Leave: leave requests are submitted based on “quarter days.” A typical workday is 8 hours (8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.), in which one quarter of a day reflects a 2-hour period of time.

Monthly Reporting

Mileage

Employees must submit mileage for work-related travel by the 1st of the following month in order to receive reimbursement on the 15th. A mileage form is provided on the [ESU website](#).

Google Calendar

Employees must complete their Google Calendars by the 1st of the following month. ESU #17 reserves the right to withhold payroll compensation until the calendar is completed.

SIMPL Logging

Employees who facilitate professional development events and other services loggable in SIMPL must complete their reporting by the end of the month in which those events were held.

Requisitions/Purchases

All purchases made by employees must have prior approval by the Administrator. Requisition forms must be filled out and submitted for Administrator consideration. A requisition form is provided on the [ESU website](#).

Checkout Forms

Certificated employees who are returning for a subsequent year of employment will complete an annual Year-end Checkout Form. A separate Checkout form is used for both certificated and at-will employees who are not returning. These forms are provided on the [ESU website](#) and are submitted to the Administrative Assistant.

Smoke-Free Environment

Smoking is prohibited in all ESU #17 facilities.

Addenda

Title IX

ESU #17 does not discriminate on the basis of sex, disability, race, color, religion, veteran status, national or ethnic origin, age, marital status, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical condition, gender identity or sexual orientation, or any other protected status in its programs and activities and provides equal access to All ESU employees are expected to take prompt and appropriate actions to report and prevent discrimination, harassment and retaliation by others. Employees who designated youth groups. Reasonable accommodations will be provided to employees with disabilities and to those who are pregnant, have given birth, or have a related medical condition, as required by law. Complaints or concerns involving discrimination, harassment or retaliation should be addressed to:

Kelli Gibson Title IX Coordinator, Educational Service Unit #17, 207 N Main St, Ainsworth, NE 69210 (402) 387-2520; jmcquistan@esu17.org

For information regarding ESU #17's procedure for complaints of sexual harassment, including the complaint process, how to file a report or a complaint of sexual harassment, and how the ESU will respond to such complaints, please refer to the ESU #17 Board Policy on Equity and Legal Compliance and the ESU #17 Complaint Form.

For further information about anti-discrimination laws and regulations, or to file a complaint of discrimination with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education, please contact the OCR at One Petticoat Lane, 1010 Walnut Street, 3rd Floor, Suite 320, Kansas City, MO 64106, (816) 268-0550 (voice), (816) 268-0599 (Fax), (800) 877-8339 (telecommunications device for the deaf), or ocr.kansascity@ocr.gov.

Grievance Procedure

All ESU employees are expected to take prompt and appropriate actions to report and prevent discrimination, harassment and retaliation by others. Employees who witness or become aware of possible discrimination, including harassment and retaliation, must immediately report the conduct to his or her supervisor or the compliance coordinator designated to handle complaints of discrimination (Kelli Gibson).

A Complaint Form is available for the purpose of reporting incidents of discrimination, harassment and retaliation. Under no circumstances will a person filing a complaint or grievance involving discrimination be retaliated against for filing the complaint or grievance.

Staff Resources

Refer to the [Staff Resources](#) page on the ESU website regarding information and forms referenced in the Employee Handbook.