

ESU 15

STEP Program

(**S**uccess **T**hrough **E**ducational **P**artnerships)

Student Handbook 2025-2026

Contact Information: Mrs. Lacey Alig, lalig@esu15.org

(308) 345-7341 305 E 1st St, McCook NE 69001

The STEP program serves the following Eligible Program School Districts: Chase County Public Schools, Dundy County Public Schools, Hayes Center Public Schools, Hitchcock County Public Schools, Maywood Public Schools, McCook Public Schools, Medicine Valley Public Schools, Wauneta-Palisade Public Schools, Southwest Public Schools

STEP is administered by:

Educational Service Unit #15 Under the direction of Mr. Phillip Picquet, Administrator

Instructor: Mrs. Lacey Alig

Table of Contents

- I. Mission, Philosophy, Description, and Goals
- II. Curriculum, Expected Outcomes, and Target Population
- III. Referral and Selection Process
- IV. Screening and Placement Process
- V. Student Bill of Rights
- VI. Conditions for Success
- VII. Policies and Procedures
- VIII. Attendance
- IX. Scholastic Achievement
- X. Support Services
- XI. Drugs, Alcohol, and Tobacco
- XII. Parent and Student Conferences
- XIII. Student Responsibilities
- XIV. Personal Belongings
- XV. Supply List
- XVI. STEP Schedule
- XVII. School Calendar

Section I – Mission, Philosophy, Description, and Goals

Non-Discrimination Statement

ESU #15 does not discriminate on the basis of any protected status in its programs and activities and provides equal access to 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 should be addressed to:

ESU#15 Compliance Coordinator/Human Resources:

305 E 1st St, McCook NE 69001 (308) 345-7341

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

ESU #15 is committed to offering employment and educational opportunities to its employees and students in a climate free of discrimination. Accordingly, unlawful discrimination of any kind by ESU #15 employees, including co-workers, non-employees (such as volunteers), third parties, and others is strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated. All ESU #15 employees are expected to take prompt and appropriate actions to report and prevent discrimination and harassment. Employees who witness or become aware of possible discrimination or harassment must immediately report the conduct to his or her supervisor or the designated Compliance Coordinator.

ESU 15, as an educational institution, fully complies with Title IX and does not permit sex discrimination or harassment in any manner. If any person believes they are the victim of or witness any other person sexually harassed or discriminated against at ESU 15, they should promptly contact ESU 15's Title IX Coordinator at: 305 E 1st St, McCook NE 69001 (308) 345-7341.

Mission Statement:

The mission of the Success Through Educational Partnerships Program is to empower students to meet the challenges of our changing world. Our setting will create engaging and empowering learning opportunities.

Philosophy:

The philosophy is based upon the belief that students have a right to a free, appropriate education; and students, when offered the appropriate environment, can experience educational success. The traditional educational model, effective as it may be for the majority of students, does not always provide the right environment for some students. The Success Through Educational Partnerships Program will be student, rather than department, centered. Its curriculum will be built upon state and district mandated standards.

We believe in the following statements:

★ Students learn best when actively engaged in the learning process.

- ★ Learning must be enhanced by providing life-long learning opportunities.
- ★ Our program requires a basic structure to provide stability for our students, while retaining flexibility to meet their individual needs.
- ★ Our program must continually evolve to meet the changing needs of our students.

Program Description:

Our alternative school is one that offers the same basic curriculum as the "traditional" school but uses alternative delivery methods. Just as some of us learn best visually, and others acoustically or kinesthetically, students' unique characteristics cause them to learn best in situations that support their individual needs. While the structure of the alternative program may vary from site to site, the following common effective characteristics have been identified:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ● Small class sizes | ● Well defined standards and expectations |
| ● Sense of community among staff and students | ● Focus on personal, social, emotional and academic development |
| ● Individual educational planning | ● Accountability and constant evaluation |
| ● Choices for delivery of instruction | ● Support of school districts |
| ● Autonomy and democratic structure | ● School environment which is safe, disciplined, and drug free |
| ● Broad participation of family and community | ● Opportunities for community involvement |

Effective alternative schools serve a segment of the population whose needs differ from others. We are not exclusively a remediation or behavior center.

Program Goals:

The program goals are as follows:

- A. To provide alternative ways for students to achieve high school graduation resulting in an increased graduation rate.
- B. To develop innovative student performance assessments which measure student progress.
- C. To provide a caring, diversified learning environment where students will develop positive self-concepts, increase their self-esteem, and recognize and appreciate the correlation between education and success in the workplace.
- D. To be accountable to the community and the home school district through quality student achievement.
- E. To provide opportunities for community involvement.
- F. To provide a safe and orderly school environment.

G. To provide an alternative diversified environment where students can achieve success.

Section II - Curriculum, Expected Outcomes, and Target Population

Curriculum:

The academic program offers programs in math, social studies, science, reading, English, writing, problem solving, communication, and independent living skills, in addition to other electives. Our curriculum is computer-based to meet the individual needs of each student.

Expected Outcomes:

The expected outcomes of the program are as follows:

- Increased proficiency in basic skills
- Increased career/vocational exploration
- Increased skills in conflict resolution
- Increased appropriate career choices
- Increased student self confidence
- Increased student productive behavior
- Increased student attendance
- Increased student recognition of relevancy between education and employment

Target Population:

Below are characteristics of at-risk students whose needs can usually be met through our alternative program:

- Students at risk of dropping out and/or not meeting cohort graduation date.
- Students who have exhausted the educational opportunities in their resident school.
- Students with a demonstrated need for consistency in instructional staff, curriculum, and/or scheduling.
- Students whose individual instructional pacing needs do not fit the traditional means of instructional delivery.
- Students whose educational success is, in part, dependent on non-academic support, e.g., flex scheduling, intensive counseling, child care, and health counseling.
- Students whose talents significantly exceed their performance.

- Students with deficiencies in basic skills.
- Students wanting to have a better chance to complete their education.

Section III – Referral and Selection Process

Referral for possible entrance into the STEP Program can usually be made through a student's home school district. Additionally, administration from any ESU 15 school district or other person(s) identified by the ESU 15 Administrator may refer a student for the STEP Program.

A referral must be done in writing, using the appropriate forms. These forms are available online from the ESU #15 website or in the following offices of the home school district:

- Building Principals
- School Counselors
- The STEP Facility

The referral form must be filled out completely to be considered for the screening process.

Eligibility:

The STEP Program is generally designed for students in grades 9-12 who:

1. Are struggling to meet their academic goals in a traditional educational setting
2. Are at risk of academic failure
3. Require an alternative approach to learning

Eligibility criteria:

- Students must have completed at least one academic semester in their home school district before being considered for STEP.
- Referrals are typically made after this initial semester.
- In exceptional cases, earlier referrals may be considered with approval from both the STEP Program Coordinator and ESU 15 administration.

Selection Criteria:

The following criteria will typically be used to determine acceptance into STEP.

- Referred by the student's home district or by other source approved by the ESU 15 Administrator.
- Expressed desire to be part of the program (self-referral).
- Expressed desire to achieve graduation.
- Referred by the home high school's counseling team and principal.
- If students have qualified for special education services, an IEP must be held to determine the least restrictive environment and change of placement.
- Agrees to abide by conditions and rules established for the program.
- Completion of a successful intake interview.
- Meets any other criteria or qualifications identified by the STEP Program Coordinator or ESU 15 Administrator.

Section IV – Screening and Placement Process

Admission Committee:

The Screening Committee for STEP will include the following people:

- Superintendent, Principal, Counselor, and/or Teachers from home school
- Representative from ESU #15
- Teacher from STEP
- Additional people as is deemed necessary by the Admissions Committee

Screening and Placement Steps:

1. Referrals will be reviewed by the ESU #15 Representatives and Instructor(s) of STEP.
2. Students and parents will complete the assessment form.
3. Counselors will complete an academic assessment form, including current test scores of achievement in all academic areas. (The school will be responsible for administering tests so current performance scores can be reviewed.)
4. The screening committee will review the referral and determine eligibility for placement.
5. An interview with the Screening Committee for **BOTH PARENT/GUARDIAN AND STUDENT** is required for a referral to be considered.
6. Completion of student/teacher/parent placement contract and other required form

Section V – Student Bill of Rights

All students of STEP shall be protected by the following rights:

1. The right to impartial access to education, regardless of race, religion, sex ethnicity, age, handicap, or any other protected status.
2. The right to personal dignity shall be recognized and respected in the provision of all care and education.
3. The right to confidentiality and personal privacy.
4. The right of access to student records.
5. The right to refuse participation in any research project without compromising access to services.
6. The right to initiate a complaint or grievance procedure and the appropriate means of requesting a hearing or review of the complaint.
7. The right to a translator in the language the student understands.
8. The right to an emotionally safe environment.

Section VI – Conditions for Success

1. Ability to work independently
2. Attendance
3. Acceptable behavior

Ability to work independently:

In order to accomplish the goals of our school, STEP students need to demonstrate the ability to work independently in the program. This includes being able to set daily, weekly, and long term goals and working to achieve these goals with the guidance of the STEP staff. Reasonable progress toward these goals is expected.

Due to the small staff, all academics will be handled on an individualized basis. It is imperative that STEP students can achieve success on their own.

Attendance:

Students accepted into the STEP program will attend STEP at the ESU 15 office in McCook on the required days.

Acceptable Behavior:

We believe that being able to behave in an acceptable manner at school will increase the likelihood for enjoying and being successful in life also.

Section VII – Policies and Procedures

School Policies:

1. Respect school property.
2. Arrive at school no earlier than 8:30 A.M.
3. Upon arrival at school, enter the school immediately.
4. Do not loiter around other facilities.

Classroom Policies:

1. Be on time and be prepared.
2. If daily goals are not being met, homework assignments will be required.
3. Daily assignments are to be completed to the best of the student's ability, and any grade below 70% will not be acceptable and must be corrected.
4. The student will contribute creatively, appropriately and productively to any independent or group activity.

Dress Code:

Students are expected to dress in a way that promotes a learning atmosphere. (Students should not dress in a manner that is dangerous to the health and safety of anyone or interferes with the learning environment or teaching process in the school.)

Following is a list of examples of attire that will not be considered appropriate:

1. Clothing that shows an inappropriate amount of bare skin or underwear (midriffs, spaghetti straps, sagging pants) or clothing that is too tight, revealing or baggy, or tops and bottoms that do not overlap or any material that is sheer or lightweight enough to be seen through, or otherwise of an appropriate size and fit so as to be revealing or drag on the ground.
2. Shorts, skirts, or skorts that do not reach mid-thigh or longer.
3. Clothing or jewelry that advertises or promotes beer, alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, or other content or messaging inappropriate for a public school setting.
4. Clothing or jewelry that could be used as a weapon (chains, spiked apparel) or that would encourage "horseplay" or that would damage property.

5. Clothing or jewelry which exhibits nudity, makes sexual references or carries lewd, indecent, or vulgar double meaning.
6. Clothing, jewelry, piercings, or tattoos that are gang related.

Cell Phones/Telephone:

There is no phone available for student use except in case of emergency. Cell phones are to be silenced when entering the school building. If parents need to contact students during the school day, they can message the instructor directly or contact the student through their cell phone. Students may use their cell phone during their break time, but must keep the volume off or use headphones.

Tornado Drill Procedures:

During the year, we will conduct tornado drills in accordance with the State Regulations. At the conclusion of the drill, we will quietly return to the classroom and resume our work.

Fire Drill Procedures:

In compliance with State Fire Marshal regulations, STEP will hold fire drills. As the fire alarm sounds, students and staff will exit the building in a quiet, orderly fashion according to the building regulations. When given the all-clear signal from an authorized person, we will quietly return to the classroom and resume our work.

Transportation Policy:

Students that drive to the STEP classroom may park in the alley behind the ESU 15 office. They may enter through the back door upon knocking. As well, students may park in the parking lot west of the ESU 15 office and enter through the front of the ESU 15 building.

Cell Phone Usage

Cell phone usage, including voice usage, digital imaging, and text messaging, is strictly prohibited during class. Students are allowed to have cell phones in the building. Electronic devices may be used during class when specifically approved by the teacher or a school administrator. Students may use their cell phones during lunch.

Child Abuse or Neglect Reporting:

Parents and guardians are given notice that, consistent with Nebraska State Law, all STEP staff are mandatory reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect. If a STEP staff member has reasonable cause to believe a student may have been subjected to child abuse or neglect, the STEP staff member will report those concerns to the appropriate law enforcement agency or the Department of Health and Human Services. Any such reports are confidential and STEP staff will not generally disclose the contents of any report, unless legally required to do so.

Section VIII – Attendance

STEP Attendance Policy:

1. An absence is considered excused if the STEP instructor has been notified prior to the absence.
2. In the event of an unexpected absence, a parent/guardian must call STEP, or notify the instructor, prior to 8:30 a.m. on the school day.
3. Three absences (excused or unexcused) may result in suspension from the program.
4. Greater than the equivalent to five days absent from STEP per semester will result in suspension from the program. A meeting with the STEP instructor, a representative from the home school district of the student, and parent/guardian will be held. This meeting will determine if the student will be reinstated to the program.
5. Extended leave such as family leave, bereavement, or maternity/paternity needs to be discussed in advance and determined on an individual basis.
6. Communication is the key to our success with attendance. When in doubt, talk to the staff. All cases will be handled individually.

Tardiness Step:

The STEP Program has a "no excuse" tardy policy. When a student is not physically present after 8:30 and ready to start work, the student will be recorded as tardy. The student should call to let the STEP instructor know they are going to be late and why they are late. Habitual tardiness will result in a suspension and/or removal from the program.

Late Start or Cancellation Due To Weather:

The STEP Program will follow the same schedule as McCook Public Schools when there is no school due to the weather or a late start. If the student's home school makes changes due to the weather in their area, those students living outside of McCook city limits will be handled on an individual basis. The student and the parent will receive a text if there is a schedule change due to weather.

Section IX – Scholastic Achievement

The STEP Program's Purpose:

1. Primary Goal: To assist students who are behind in credits and at risk of not graduating with their class.
2. Not an Acceleration Option: STEP is not designed as a fast-track program for students already on course in traditional education settings.
3. Graduation Authority: Decisions regarding graduation requirements and early graduation remain the responsibility of the student's home school district. STEP does not have authority in these matters and cannot issue any diplomas or certificates of attendance.

Summer Learning Opportunities:

1. STEP Recommendations: When beneficial, STEP may suggest summer coursework for students using our online learning platform.
2. Home School District's Responsibilities:
 - Reviewing student progress

- Monitoring credit accumulation
 - Determining graduation eligibility
3. Credit Recognition: The home school district maintains authority over accepting credits earned through STEP's summer programs.

Grading Scale:

100% - 94% = A

93% - 87% = B

86% - 80% = C

79% - 70% = D

69% - Below = F

The Step Program instructor can require a student to retake an assignment or course.

Credits

The home school district maintains authority over accepting credits earned through STEP

Suspensions and Dismissals:

Grounds for suspensions and dismissals are detailed within the various sections in this handbook. Parental notification in relation to these events is always a priority and will take place as soon as is reasonably possible.

A suspension from the program occurs when a student is not allowed to be present during regular class hours. The student does not return to the classroom until a meeting has been arranged with the student, parent or guardian, STEP teacher, ESU administrator, and representative from the home school. In the event of a suspension, the parent or guardian and home school are notified immediately. At the meeting, clear guidelines will be outlined that must be met in order for attendance to continue. Please note: The meetings are arranged in the timeliest manner possible, but various schedules do need to be accommodated and there may be unavoidable delays in scheduling a meeting.

A dismissal from the program occurs when the guidelines that are outlined in the above mentioned meeting are not met. Generally a second meeting will not be arranged. The dismissal is effective at the point in time that the guidelines are not met.

Immediate Program Removal and Disciplinary Actions:

1. Grounds for Removal: Students may be immediately removed from the STEP program for violations of:
 - Their home district's Student Conduct Rules
 - The Nebraska Student Discipline Act

- Any other reasonable rules or expectations developed by the STEP program and communicated to the student.
- 2. Reporting Process:
 - STEP will report any violations to the student's home district.
- 3. Disciplinary Authority:
 - The home school district retains full authority to determine and implement appropriate disciplinary actions. Any disciplinary actions implemented by the student's home district must be addressed directly with the home district.

Academic Integrity:

A. *Cheating and Plagiarism:* Cheating and plagiarism violate the standards of academic integrity. Sanctions could be imposed against students who engage in such conduct.

- "Cheating" means intentionally to misrepresent the source, nature, or other conditions of academic work so as to accrue undeserved credit, or to cooperate with someone else in such misrepresentation. Such misrepresentations may, but need not necessarily, involve the work of others. Cheating includes, but is not limited to the following: tests, advanced information, use of unauthorized materials, use of another student's answers, use of another student to take a test, misrepresenting the need to delay a test, and failure to contribute to group projects.
- "Plagiarism" means to take and present as one's own a material portion of the ideas or words of another or to present as one's own an idea or work derived from an existing source without full and proper credit to the source of the ideas, words, or works.

B. Sanctions

- Academic Sanction: The instructor will refuse to accept the student's work in which the cheating or plagiarism took place, and require the student to complete another assignment, test or project in place of the work within such time and under such conditions as the instructor may determine appropriate. In the event the student completes the replacement assignment, test or project at a level meeting minimum performance standards, the instructor will assign a grade which the instructor determines to be appropriate for the work.
- Report to Parents and Administration: The instructor will notify the Principal of the offense, and the instructor or Principal will notify the student's parent or guardian.
- Student Discipline Sanctions: Academic integrity offenses are a violation of school rules. The Principal may recommend sanctions in addition to those assigned by the instructor. Such additional sanctions will be given strong consideration if a student has engaged in a serious or repeated academic integrity offense or other rule violations, and if the academic sanction is otherwise not a sufficient remedy, such as for offenses involving altering assigned grades or contributing to academic violations.

Section X – Support Services

Medication Policy:

Designated school personnel may be allowed to give medication to students. All medication will be housed with the STEP instructor and secured during non working hours. NO medications will be given without a medication permission form or if the STEP staff determine that such medication should not be administered during the school day.

We encourage parents to give medication at home. Three times a day dosage may be given before school, after school and at bedtime. If your child needs to take medication at school, a few rules apply:

****Please help us ensure safety in the administration of medication at school.***

1. All medication will be kept with the STEP instructor.
2. No medication will be given without a signed note from the parent or guardian, indicating the medication to be given, the amount to be given, and the time to be given.
3. The medicine should be sent to school in the original container appropriately labeled by the pharmacy or physician.
4. Before over-the-counter, non-prescription medication can be administered, the permission form MUST BE SIGNED.
5. STEP staff may request a physician's note before administering medication if the STEP staff determine that a physician's note is needed or prudent.

Section XI – Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco

Drugs:

ESU 15 policy prohibits the consumption, possession or sale of controlled substances and/or the presence of controlled substances on ESU 15 property, whether leased or owned (including at the STEP Program), and on the specific premises of ESU 15 sponsored or supervised off-campus functions. Conduct covered by this offense includes but is not limited to:

- a. Manufacture, distribution, sale, offer for sale, possession, or use of any illegal drug or narcotic, including but not limited to barbiturates, hallucinogens, amphetamines, cocaine, opium, heroin, marijuana, or any lookalikes;
- b. Misuse or abuse of legal drugs or narcotics or any lookalikes;
- c. Possession of a device (drug paraphernalia) that has been used to ingest illegal drug or narcotic or any lookalikes.

Alcohol:

ESU 15 policy prohibits the use, possession, or sale of alcoholic beverages on ESU 15 property, whether leased or owned (including at the STEP Program), and on the specific premises of ESU 15 sponsored or unsupervised off-campus functions.

Tobacco:

The use of tobacco products is prohibited in all buildings and all vehicles owned by ESU #15. Smoking is also prohibited in any outdoor areas where others may be affected by smoke, including areas near the entry of buildings.

For purposes of this policy, tobacco means any tobacco product (including but not limited to cigarettes, cigars, and chewing tobacco), vapor products (including electronic nicotine delivery systems), alternative nicotine products, tobacco product look-alikes, and products intended to replicate tobacco products either by appearance or effect. This does not preclude adults from wearing non-visible nicotine patches, or using nicotine gum without displaying the product container, as part of a smoking cessation program.

Section XII – Parent and Student Conferences

Parent/Teacher/Student Conferences:

Parents/guardians are expected, as per agreement, to consult with the teacher about their student's progress. Conferences will be scheduled on a rotating basis every nine weeks. Parents are encouraged to contact STEP staff for an appointment anytime they have a question or concern regarding their student. Grade reports are issued at the end of each quarter.

Family Involvement Expectations:

We believe that students stand a far greater chance of success with a supportive and involved family. We believe it is vital for a student's family to work with the staff as a partner in the change process.

Families should voice any concerns to the director/teacher of STEP. Differences should not be discussed in front of the student, as we believe this creates a division and an opportunity for the student to manipulate all parties. We also expect parents to attend staffing. (A convenient time will be arranged around work schedules.)

Section XIII – Student Responsibilities

- | | |
|---|--|
| ● Attend school every day, unless I am ill or am out of town. | ● Treat faculty, staff, fellow students, and visitors with respect. |
| ● If I am going to be absent or tardy for any reason, I will PERSONALLY call STEP before 8:30 AM to explain my absence. | ● Respect my life space and the privacy of others. |
| ● Behave in an appropriate manner at all times. | ● Do not interrupt others when they are speaking. |
| ● Remember that aggressiveness and inappropriate gesturing are unacceptable. | ● Dress appropriately (refer to dress code). |
| ● Use appropriate language. Profanity and inappropriate innuendos are unacceptable. | ● Do not use, or have in my possession, tobacco, alcohol, or any other illegal substances while on the premises or neighborhood of STEP. |

- Academic Assignments are assigned each day. Students are

responsible to complete them to the best of their abilities.

Section XIV – Personal Belongings

Students are responsible for the safe-keeping of all their personal belongings.

Section XV – Supply List

These supplies are to be brought to STEP with you ON YOUR FIRST DAY.

- 1 Set of earbuds or headphones to listen to the educational videos.

Section XVI – STEP Schedule

Class times

Tuesday

Admittance: 8:30 a.m.

Lunch Break: 12:30-1:00 p.m.

Classes dismiss: 3:30 p.m.

Wednesday:

Admittance: 8:30 a.m. Lunch Break: 12:30 p.m.-1:00 p.m.

Classes dismiss: 2:00 p.m.

On-Line Class Times

Students are expected to work and complete daily courses outside of the described class times.

Section XVII – School Calendar

All STEP students will begin classes on **Tuesday, August 19, 2025**

(School start time is 8:30 AM. School dismissal time is 3:30 PM. 2:00 PM dismissal every Wednesday.)