

# Urban and Rural Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education

Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on  
Early Childhood Care and Education in Nebraska



Buffett  
Early Childhood  
Institute  
*at the University of Nebraska*

GALLUP®

### **Copyright and Trademark Standards**

This document contains proprietary research, copyrighted, and trademarked materials of Gallup, Inc. Accordingly, international and domestic laws and penalties guaranteeing patent, copyright, trademark, and trade secret protection safeguard the ideas, concepts, and recommendations related within this document.

The materials contained in this document and/or the document itself may be downloaded and/or copied provided that all copies retain the copyright, trademark, and any other proprietary notices contained on the materials and/or document. No changes may be made to this document without the express written permission of Gallup, Inc.

Any reference whatsoever to this document, in whole or in part, on any web page must provide a link back to the original document in its entirety. Except as expressly provided herein, the transmission of this material shall not be construed to grant a license of any type under any patents, copyright, or trademarks owned or controlled by Gallup, Inc.

Gallup® is a trademark of Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks and copyrights are property of their respective owners.

# Introduction

IN MARCH 2016, THE BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AND GALLUP announced the findings of the largest public opinion poll ever conducted about early childhood in Nebraska. More than 7,100 residents shared their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about early childhood. The groundbreaking report, *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, revealed that the vast majority of Nebraskans value and support early care and education and believe more needs to be done to prepare young children for success in school and life. In overwhelming numbers, residents said that high-quality early care and education is not available or affordable for all families in Nebraska.

This report, *Urban and Rural Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, supplements the main report and largely reveals consensus among residents across the state concerning early care and education, despite some notable differences in the survey results. Where a child is raised can have an impact on growth and development. Understanding similarities and differences can help ensure that support and investments are tailored to match communities' needs.

For this analysis, Nebraska residents were divided into three groups based on the size of the counties they live in:

- **Counties with an urban core** (Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy). An urban core is defined as a metropolitan community with a population of 50,000 or more.
- **Counties with a large rural town** (Adams, Buffalo, Dakota, Dawson, Dodge, Gage, Hall, Lincoln, Madison, Platte, Scotts Bluff). A large rural town is defined as a micropolitan community with a population between 10,000 and 49,999.
- **Counties with a small rural town or isolated rural area** (all others). A small rural town is defined as a community with a population between 2,500 and 9,999. An isolated rural area is defined as a region with a population of less than 2,500.

## Research Questions

Research questions guiding this in-depth analysis of regional differences across the state are as follows:

1. Do perspectives on what life is like for young children in Nebraska differ among residents of counties with an urban core, counties with a large rural town, and counties with a small rural town or isolated rural area?
2. Do residents of counties with an urban core, counties with a large rural town, and counties with a small rural town or isolated rural area differ in their views of the value, accessibility, and affordability of high-quality early care and education in Nebraska?
3. Do residents of counties with an urban core, counties with a large rural town, and counties with a small rural town or isolated rural area differ in their views of early care and education as an important state investment?

## Additional Reports

More information about the Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education is available online at <http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/gallup-survey>. Materials include the main report, *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, as well as follow-up reports that delve into additional areas.

# Executive Summary

FINDINGS FROM THE BUFFETT/GALLUP SURVEY on Early Care and Education in Nebraska generally demonstrate a consensus among residents throughout the state. Residents of counties with an urban core, counties with a large rural town, and counties with a small rural town or isolated rural area recognize the importance of early care and education and want more investment in it. Some differences among the groups concern availability and affordability of high-quality early care and education programs.

Results from this survey are based on questionnaires completed by more than 7,100 Nebraska residents. Gallup conducted the survey in English and Spanish via mail in late August through September 2015. Key findings include:

## 1 Nebraskans believe that their state is a great place to be a child, but they have concerns about their children's future.

- More than eight in 10 Nebraskans statewide (83%) believe that Nebraska is one of the best states in which to be a young child. More residents of counties with a small town/isolated rural area (88%) than counties with a large rural town (85%) and urban area (79%) believe this.
- About two-thirds of Nebraskans (68%) say the lives of Nebraska children have gotten worse or stayed the same compared with 10 years ago. This percentage is highest among residents of small towns/isolated rural areas (72%) and lowest among urban residents (66%).
- More urban-area residents (39%) than those from small towns/isolated rural areas (30%) and large towns (33%) are optimistic that the lives of Nebraska children will get better 10 years from now.
- Only 10% of Nebraskans strongly agree that most young children in the state are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten. Just 8% of urban-area residents strongly agree with this statement, compared with 11% of residents from both large rural towns and small towns/isolated rural areas.
- Only 6% of Nebraskans strongly agree that most young children from low-income families in the state are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten; this is consistent for residents from all areas.

## 2 Availability of early care and education is a greater challenge in counties with a small town/isolated rural area, while cost is a greater challenge in counties with an urban core.

- There is consensus among residents from all three categories of counties that center-based early childhood settings provide the best option when families are unable to care for their children during all or part of the day. More urban-area residents (52%) say this, followed by residents from counties with a large rural town (49%) and small town/isolated rural area (46%). Slightly more residents from small towns/isolated rural areas (21%) and large rural towns (17%) than residents from urban areas (12%) say home-based programs are a better option.
- More residents from small towns/isolated rural areas (14%) than those from urban areas (9%) and large rural towns (9%) strongly agree that availability of early care and education programs is the biggest challenge families face in getting high-quality care for their young children.
- Urban-area residents (44%) are significantly more likely than residents of small towns/isolated rural areas (23%) or large rural towns (28%) to report that cost is the biggest challenge families face in obtaining high-quality care.

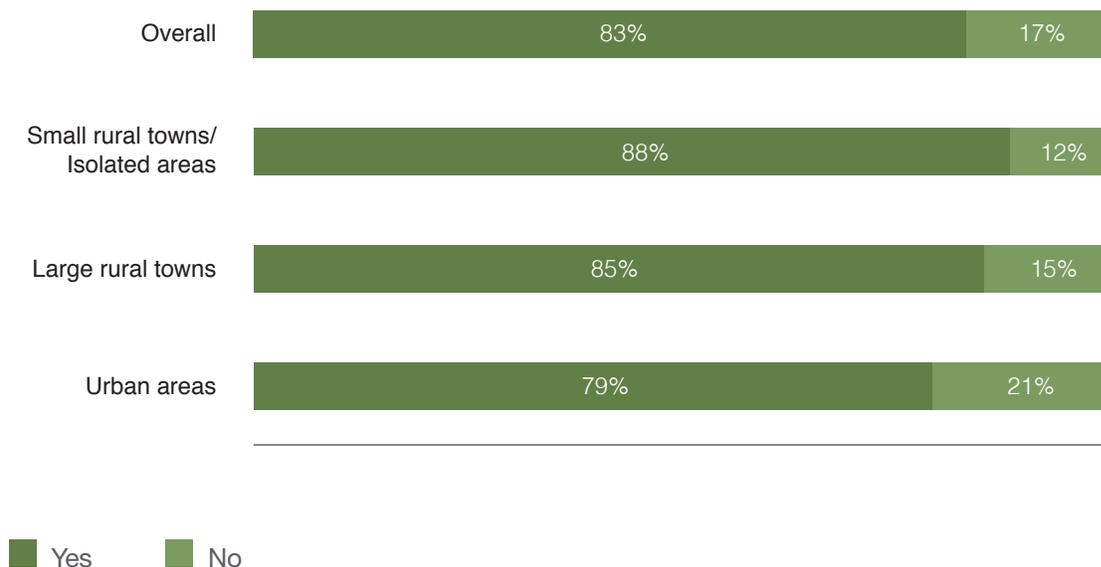
## 3 There is agreement about the need for greater state investment in early care and education among residents of counties with various population sizes.

- Two-thirds of Nebraskans agree or strongly agree that the state should make early care and education a higher priority than it is today. Slightly more residents of counties with an urban core (67%) and a large rural town (67%) than those of counties with a small town/isolated rural area (65%) agree or strongly agree with this statement.
- More urban-area residents (61%) than those from small towns/isolated rural areas (55%) and large rural towns (53%) say Nebraska is investing too little in early care and education programs.
- Large majorities of Nebraskans in counties with a small town/isolated rural area (76%), large rural town (73%), and an urban core (77%) say funds for early care and education programs for children from low-income families should come from public or private sources rather than solely fees paid by those families.

# Nebraskans believe that their state is a great place to be a child, but they have concerns about their children’s future.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF RESIDENTS (83%) believe that Nebraska is one of the best states in the U.S. in which to be a young child. More residents from counties with a small town/isolated rural area (88%) and large rural town (85%) than residents from counties with an urban core (79%) agree with this.

**Based on what you have seen or heard, do you believe that Nebraska is one of the best states in the U.S. to be a young child?**



About two-thirds of Nebraskans (68%) say the lives of Nebraska children have gotten worse or stayed the same compared with 10 years ago. This percentage is highest among residents of small towns/isolated rural areas (72%) and lowest among urban residents (66%).

More Nebraskans in counties with an urban core than in counties with a small town/isolated rural area say children’s lives have improved (34% vs. 29%, respectively). Residents in counties with a large rural town do not differ significantly from those in counties with a small town/isolated rural area or urban core in their assessment of children’s lives.

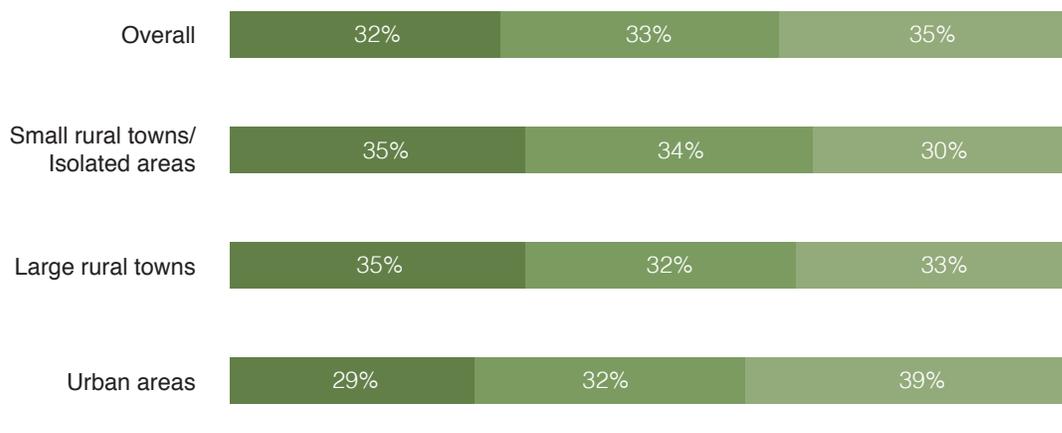
**Compared to 10 years ago, do you think that the lives of Nebraska’s children have:**



■ Gotten worse ■ Stayed the same ■ Gotten better

More urban-area residents (39%) than those from small towns/isolated rural areas (30%) and large rural towns (33%) are optimistic that the lives of Nebraska children will get better 10 years from now.

**Ten years from now, do you think that the lives of Nebraska’s children will:**

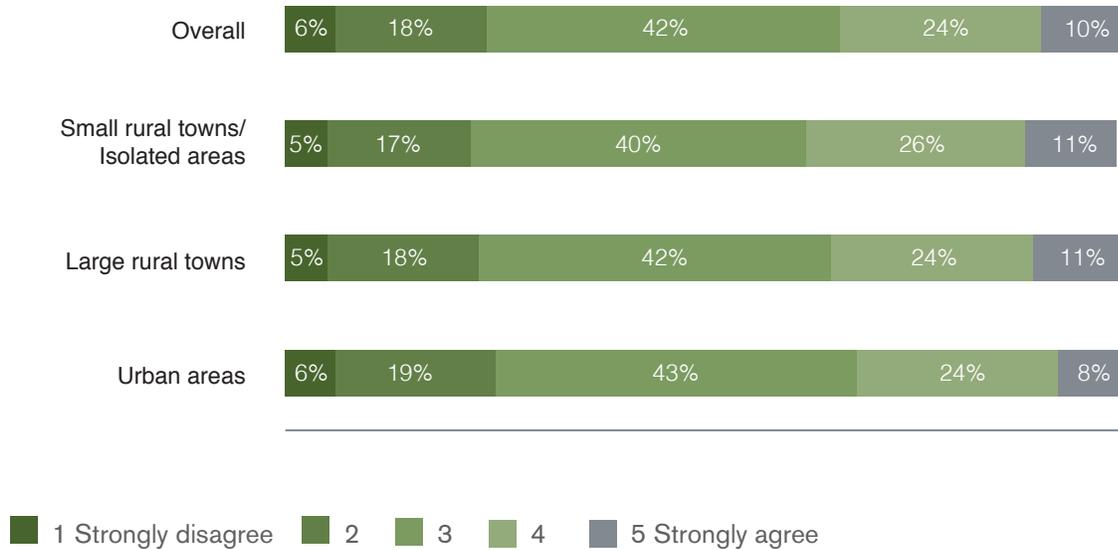


■ Get worse ■ Stay the same ■ Get better

Ten percent of Nebraskans strongly agree that children in the state are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten. Fewer urban-area residents (8%) than residents of large rural towns (11%) and small towns/isolated rural areas (11%) strongly agree.

**On a five-point scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree, please rate your level of agreement with the following item.**

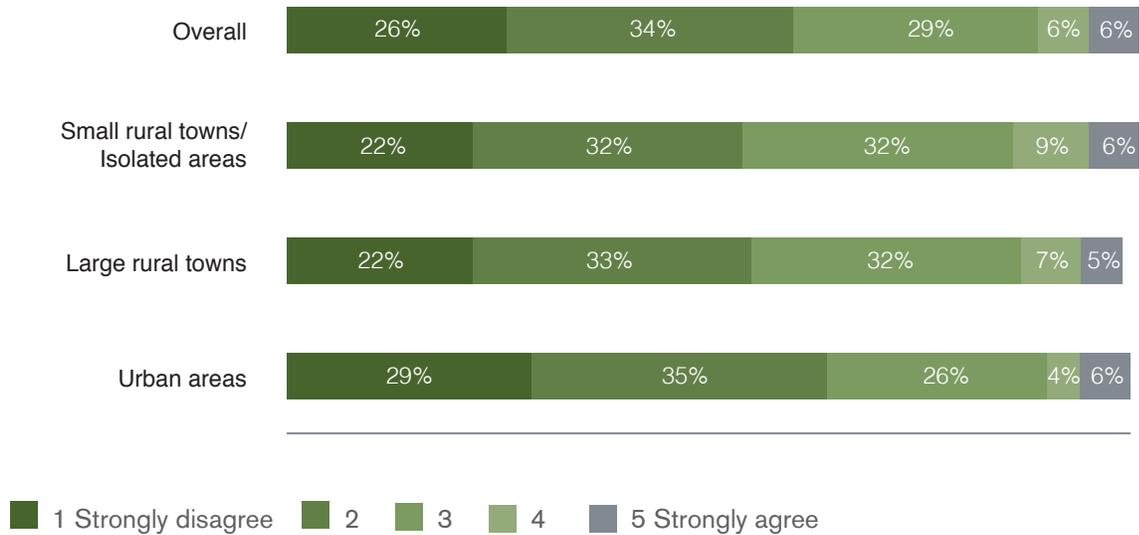
**Most young children in Nebraska are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten.**



Only 6% of Nebraska residents strongly agree that most young children from low-income families in the state are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten; this is consistent across counties of various populations.

**On a five-point scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree, please rate your level of agreement with the following item.**

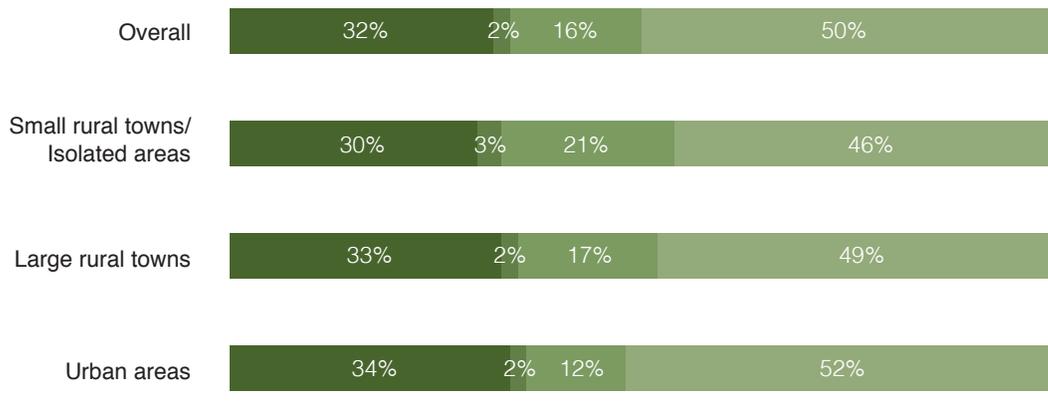
**Most young children from low-income families in Nebraska are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten.**



# Availability of early care and education is a greater challenge in counties with a small town/isolated rural area, while cost is a greater challenge in counties with an urban core.

AMONG FOUR OPTIONS TESTED, half of Nebraskans (50%) view an early childhood center as the best option for most families who are unable to care for their children for at least part of the day. Residents of counties with an urban core are similar to those of counties with a large rural town, but somewhat more likely than residents of counties with a small town/isolated rural area to report that these settings provide the best option for most families. Residents of small towns/isolated rural areas (21%) and large rural towns (17%) are more likely than residents of urban areas (12%) to select home-based child care settings as an option.

**When families are unable to care for their child(ren) in their own home during all or part of the day, which of the following care settings do you think is the best option for most families?  
Please only mark one.**

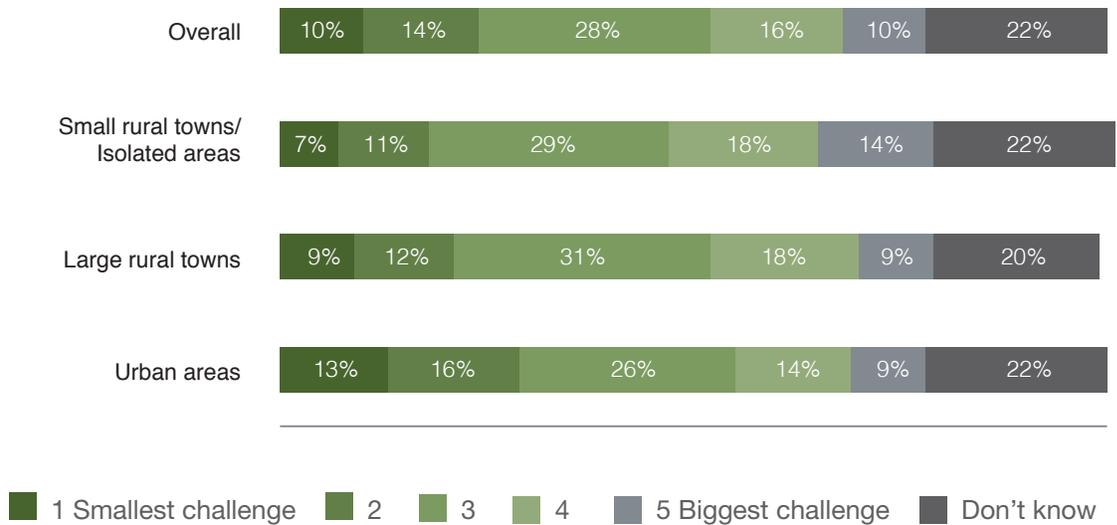


Family member
  Friend or neighbor
  Home-based child care setting
  Early childhood care and education center

Availability of early care and education appears to be a greater challenge for residents of counties with a small town/isolated rural area. While only 10% of all Nebraskans say that availability of early care programs is the biggest challenge families face in getting high-quality early childhood care and education, more residents of small towns/isolated rural areas (14%) than those from large rural towns (9%) or urban areas (9%) say this is the biggest challenge.

**Following are challenges some families face in getting high-quality early childhood care and education for their young child(ren). Please rank the following challenges from 1 to 5 where 1 represents the smallest challenge and 5 represents the biggest challenge.**

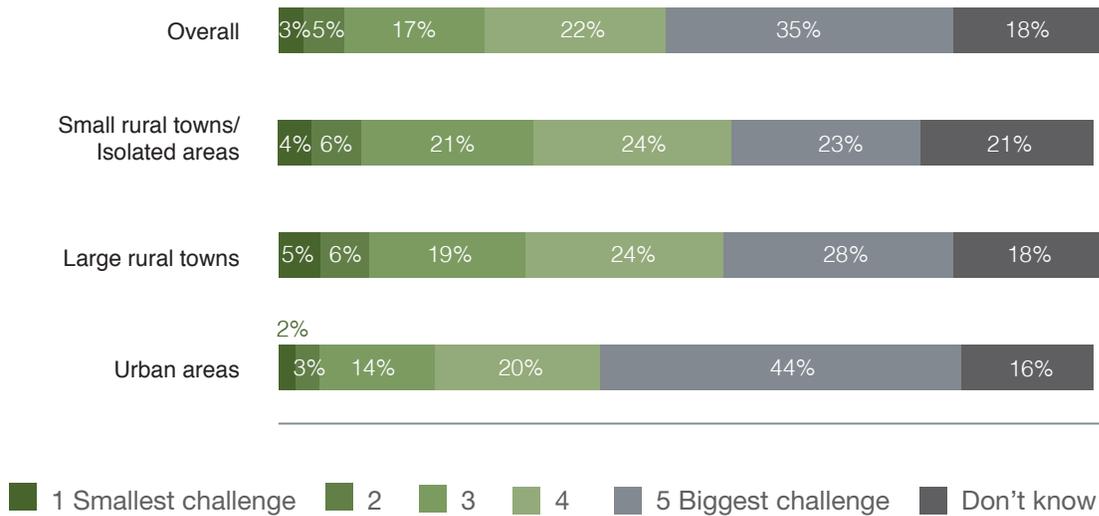
**Too few early childhood care and education programs [are] available.**



The cost of early care and education programs is also viewed as a challenge for families. Thirty-five percent of Nebraska residents report that the cost of early care and education programs is the most significant challenge for families in obtaining high-quality care. This increases to 44% for urban-area residents, compared with 23% for residents of small towns/isolated rural areas and 28% for large rural towns.

**Following are challenges some families face in getting high-quality early childhood care and education for their young child(ren). Please rank the following challenges from 1 to 5 where 1 represents the smallest challenge and 5 represents the biggest challenge.**

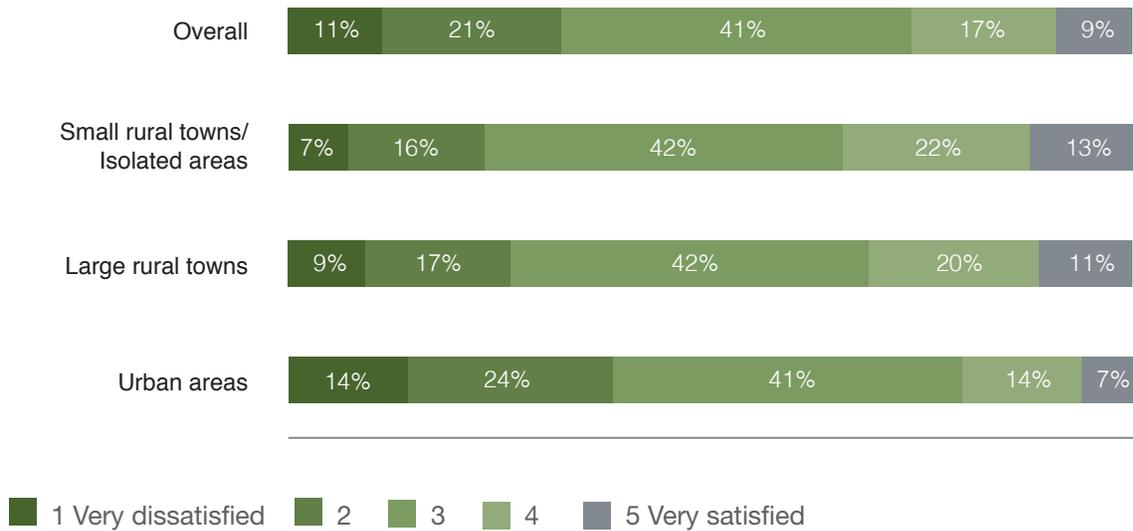
**Early childhood care and education programs are too expensive.**



Since residents of urban areas are more likely to report that early childhood education programs are too expensive, it is not surprising that fewer urban-area residents say they are very satisfied (7%) with the affordability of early care and education programs in their area, compared with residents of large rural towns (11%) and small towns/isolated rural areas (13%).

**On a five-point scale, where 1 means very dissatisfied and 5 means very satisfied, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following items.**

**The affordability of early childhood care and education programs in the city or area where you live.**

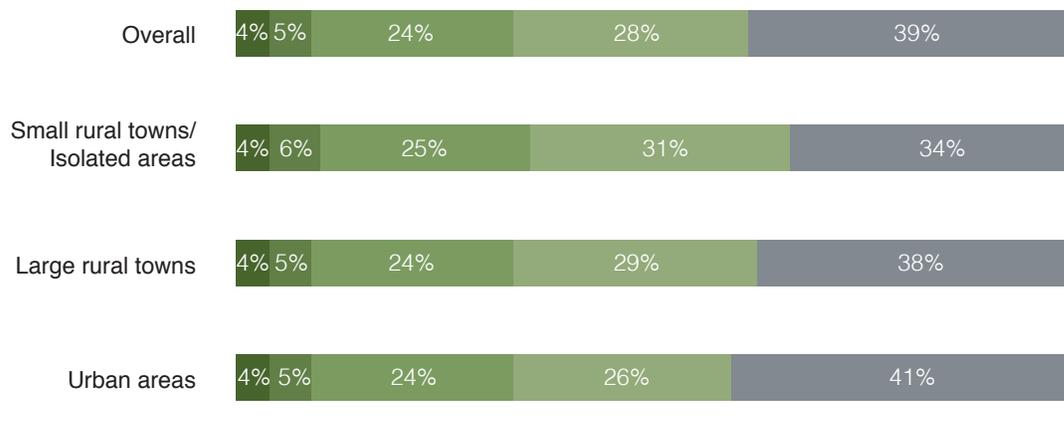


# There is agreement about the need for greater state investment in early care and education among residents of counties with various population sizes.

**TWO-THIRDS OF NEBRASKANS AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE THAT** the state should make early care and education a higher priority than it currently is today. Slightly more residents of counties with an urban core (67%) and a large rural town (67%) than those of counties with a small town/isolated rural area (65%) strongly agree or agree with this statement.

**On a five-point scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree, please rate your level of agreement with the following item.**

**Nebraska should make early childhood care and education a higher priority than it currently is today.**



1 Strongly disagree
  2
  3
  4
  5 Strongly agree

Overall, the majority of Nebraskans (58%) believe that the state is investing too little on early care and education programs. Residents of urban areas (61%) are somewhat more likely than those of small towns/isolated rural areas (55%) or large rural towns (53%) to say the state is investing too little.

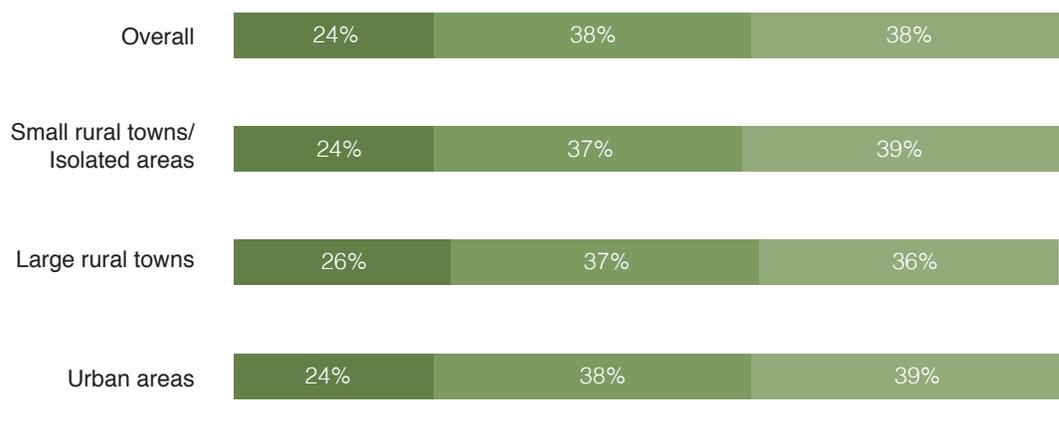
**In your opinion, is Nebraska investing too little, too much, or about the right amount on early childhood care and education programs?**



■ Too little    ■ Too much    ■ Right amount

Large majorities of Nebraskans in counties with a small town/isolated rural area (76%), large rural town (73%), and an urban core (77%) say funds for early care and education programs for children from low-income families should come from public or private sources rather than solely fees paid by those families. Overall, fewer Nebraskans (24%) choose fees paid by the families as the best way to fund early care programs.

**What is the best way to fund early childhood care and education programs for children from low-income families? Please mark all that apply.\***



■ Fees paid by their family    ■ Public funds from state or local taxes  
 ■ Private funds, such as donations from charities

\*For this analysis, the percentages reflect those of all options selected.

# Implications

RESULTS FROM THIS REPORT PROVIDE ample evidence that Nebraskans believe that the state is a good place to be a child, but they have concerns about children's future — namely, regarding their preparation for success in school when they start Kindergarten. Only one in 10 Nebraskans strongly agree that most young children in the state are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten. Additionally, while most residents believe that Nebraska is one of the best states in which to grow up, nearly as many say that life will get worse for children in the next 10 years as say it will get better.

Despite a consensus on many issues raised, some differences by where one lives show up in the survey. Residents of counties with an urban core were somewhat less positive than other respondents about whether Nebraska is a great place for children. But urban-area residents were more optimistic about the future than residents of small towns/isolated rural areas and large rural towns. Results also indicate some differences in perceptions about the affordability and availability of early care and education across counties of various population sizes. Although, overall, Nebraskans say affordability is the greatest challenge families face in getting quality care and education for young children, urban-area residents are more likely to hold this opinion. Nebraskans from small towns/isolated rural areas are more likely than those from urban areas and large rural towns to say the availability of quality early care and education programs for children is the biggest challenge.

Residents from counties of various population sizes agree that early care and education should be a higher priority than it is today. They also agree that the majority of funding for early care and education for low-income families should come from public and other sources, rather than from family-paid fees. More must be done to ensure that high-quality care and education is both affordable and available for all Nebraskans, regardless of the size of the county in which they live. Nebraska has the fundamental tools in place to improve early care and education for its families, but the distribution of these resources needs to become more equitable — regardless of where families live.

# Methodology

RESULTS FOR THE BUFFETT EARLY Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Childhood Care and Education in Nebraska are based on surveys conducted by mail from Aug. 27-Sept. 30, 2015, with a random sample of 7,191 Nebraska residents aged 18 and older. The survey package included an English and a Spanish survey to provide respondents with the flexibility to reply in their preferred language.

Gallup selected the sample of Nebraska residents using address-based sampling (ABS), a sampling technique used to select households from a list of all households on file with the United States Postal Service (USPS). The sampling frame includes approximately 97% of all Nebraska households. Gallup chooses respondents within the household at random based on which household member would have the next birthday. Gallup used a series of postcard reminders to encourage participation in the survey among non-responders.

Gallup stratified the sample of Nebraska residents by area (urban areas, large towns, and small towns) to allow for estimates at the area and state levels. In addition, Gallup weighted the data to match state of Nebraska demographics of gender, age, education, race, and Hispanic ethnicity.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

- For results based on the total sample of 7,191 Nebraska residents, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.6$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the sample of 2,352 Nebraska residents currently residing in urban areas, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 2.9$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the sample of 2,357 Nebraska residents currently residing in large towns, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 2.9$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the sample of 2,482 Nebraska residents currently residing in small towns, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 2.8$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Margins of error may differ for other subgroups of the population. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

# About Gallup

GALLUP DELIVERS ANALYTICS AND ADVICE to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students, and citizens than any other organization in the world. Gallup works with leaders and organizations to achieve breakthroughs in customer engagement, employee engagement, organizational culture and identity, leadership development, talent-based assessments, entrepreneurship, and well-being. Our 2,000 professionals include noted scientists, renowned subject-matter experts, and bestselling authors who work in a range of industries, including banking, finance, healthcare, consumer goods, automotive, real estate, hospitality, education, government, and business-to-business (B2B).

# About Buffett Early Childhood Institute

THE BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE at the University of Nebraska is an innovative research, practice, policy, and outreach institute that draws on the resources of the four University of Nebraska campuses. The Institute is dedicated to promoting the development and learning of children from birth through age 8. Visit [buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu](http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu) for more information.

This survey was supported in part by the Buffett Early Childhood Fund. We acknowledge their help and that of the Buffett Institute/Gallup Survey advisory group for their input during the development of the survey.

**Buffett Early Childhood Institute**

2111 South 67 Street, Suite 350  
Omaha, Nebraska 68106

402.554.2924

[buffettinstitute@nebraska.edu](mailto:buffettinstitute@nebraska.edu)