

Nebraskans Speak About the Early Care and Education Workforce

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



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute
at the University of Nebraska

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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, *Nebraskans Speak About the Early Care and Education Workforce*, supplements the main report and further examines respondents' views of early care and education professionals who work with young children during their formative years. Extensive research shows that quality adult-child relationships are key to children's healthy growth and development. This places great responsibility on those who care for young children. Given that 75% of adults in Nebraska with young children work outside the home, affordable, high-quality child care is an economic necessity.

Research Questions

Research questions guiding this analysis of the workforce are:

1. What are Nebraskans' perspectives about early care and education professionals?
2. What are Nebraskans' beliefs about appropriate levels of education for early care and education professionals?
3. What do Nebraskans say about the level of salary and support for early care and education professionals?

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 and topics crucial to early care and education.

Executive Summary

THIS REPORT TELLS US THAT the vast majority of Nebraskans value early care and education and those who serve the children and families who participate in those programs. Nebraskans acknowledge that those caring for young children need training and education to do their job. They also recognize the need for more support and resources for the workforce.

Results from this study are based on mail surveys completed by more than 7,100 Nebraska residents. Gallup conducted the surveys in English and Spanish via mail in late August through September 2015. This report focuses specifically on Nebraskans' beliefs about early childhood educators and caregivers. Key findings include:

1 Nebraskans recognize and value the early childhood care and education workforce.

- Sixty-six percent of Nebraskans say an early care and education center or home-based center are best when families cannot care for their children during the day.
- Almost half of Nebraska parents (46%) have turned to schools or teachers, and many (37%) have turned to child care providers for information about child care.
- Fifty-two percent of Nebraska residents would recommend a career in the early care and education field to a friend or family member. This percentage increases to 77% among respondents who are early childhood teachers or caregivers.

2 Nebraskans believe that postsecondary education is needed for those who want to work in the early care and education field.

- At least half of Nebraska residents believe that at least some postsecondary education is needed to be a teacher or caregiver for children from birth through age 5.
- Nebraskans believe that the level of postsecondary education that is needed to care for and teach young children varies. How much is needed depends on the age of the child.

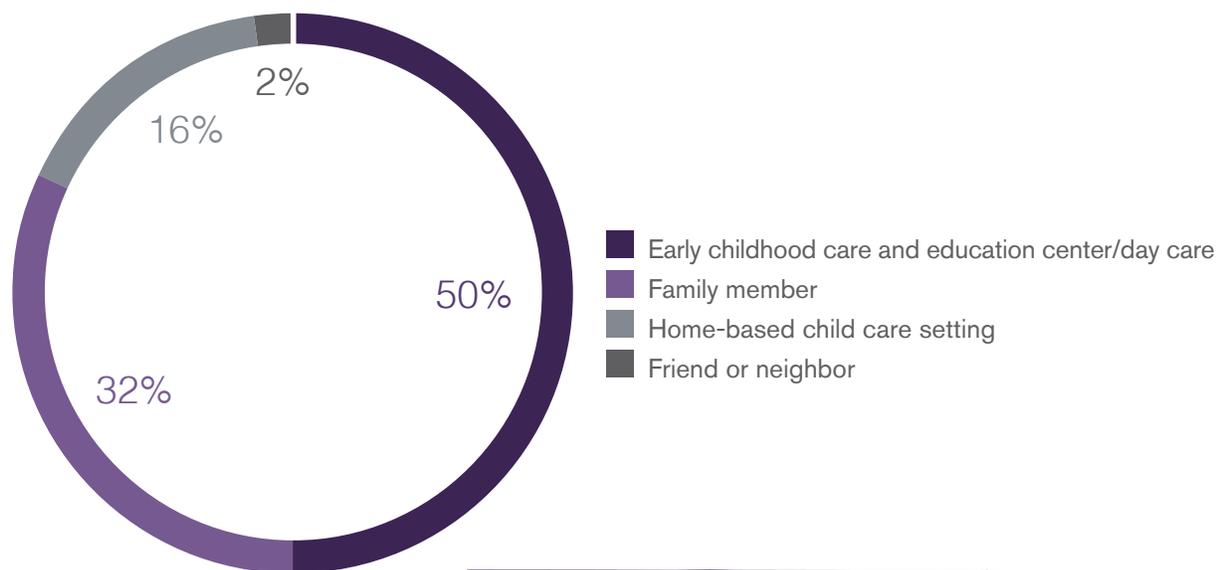
3 Nebraskans want greater support for the early care and education workforce.

- Forty-eight percent of Nebraskans believe that early care and education teachers and caregivers in the state are paid too little. Only 15% say they are paid the right amount.
- More than half of parents with children in early care and education centers (55%) say early care and education teachers and caregivers are paid too little.

Nebraskans recognize and value the early childhood care and education workforce.

GIVEN THAT ABOUT 75% OF ADULTS IN NEBRASKA with young children work, families must rely on access to early care and education. When families are unable to be at home with young children during all or part of the day, two-thirds of Nebraskans indicate that either center- or home-based programs are the best option. The remaining one-third of Nebraskans recommended that care be provided by a family member (32%) or a friend or neighbor (2%).

When families cannot 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?

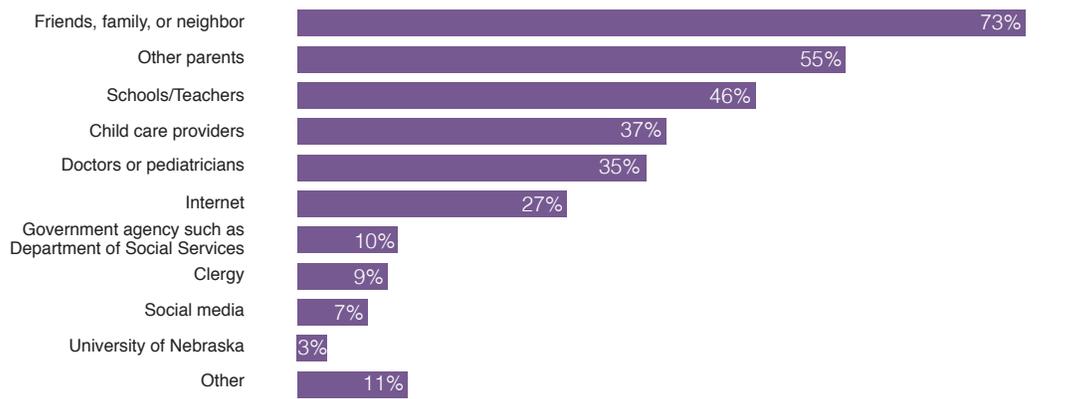


66%

of Nebraskans say an early care and education center or home-based center is best when families cannot care for their children during the day.

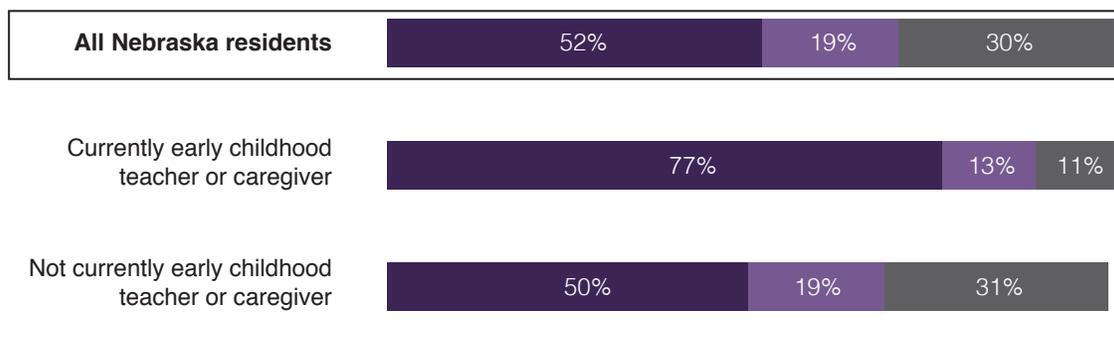
When asked where they have gone for information about early care and education, fewer than half of Nebraska parents say they have turned to professionals in the early care and education field: 46% reported seeking information from schools or teachers, and 37% relied on child care providers. Those turning to doctors or pediatricians (35%) rivaled those reporting that they used child care providers, suggesting that families are almost as likely to seek information from a doctor as a child care provider. Parents more often turn to people they know. Seventy-three percent rely on friends, family members, or neighbors, and 55% turn to other parents.

**Where have you previously turned for information about early childhood care and education?
Please mark all that apply.**



The majority of Nebraska’s early childhood teachers and caregivers (77%) would recommend a career in early childhood care and education to a friend or family member. Among those not employed as an early childhood teacher or caregiver, half indicate that they would recommend a career in the field, and another 31% say they do not know whether they would recommend it. Fewer Nebraskans, both within the field (13%) and not in the field (19%), would not recommend that a friend or family member consider a career in early care and education.

Would you recommend a career in early childhood care and education to a friend or family member?

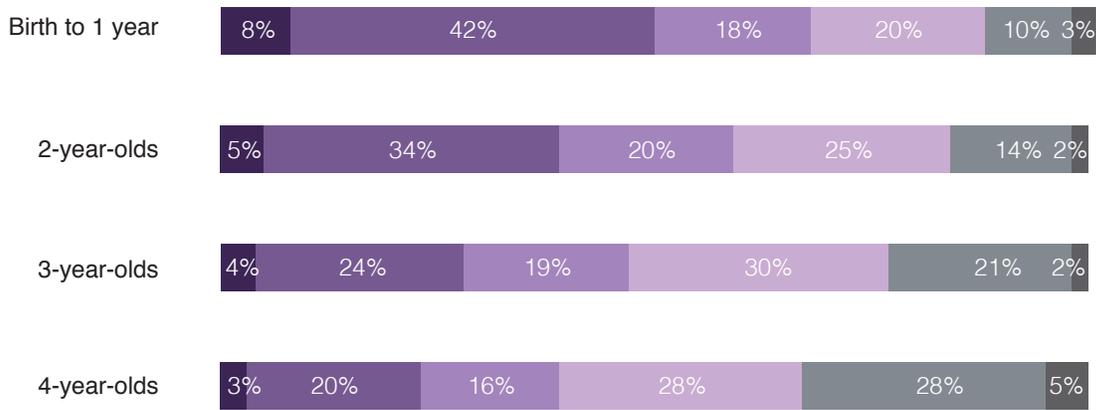


■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

Nebraskans believe that postsecondary education is needed for those who want to work in the early care and education field.

NEBRASKANS BELIEVE THAT SOME POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION is needed to care for and teach young children, but how much is needed depends on the age of the child. The need for postsecondary education is considered lowest for teachers and caregivers of children birth to 1 year (51%), slightly higher for those working with 2-year-olds (61%), still higher for those working with 3-year-olds (72%), and highest for those working with 4-year-olds (77%).

In your opinion, what level of education is needed to be a teacher or caregiver for children in the following age levels in an early childhood care and education setting?



- Less than a high school diploma or equivalent
- High school diploma or equivalent
- Some college, no degree
- Two-year degree
- Four-year degree
- Advanced degree

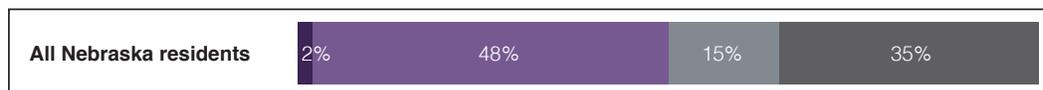
At least half of Nebraskans believe that at least some postsecondary education is needed to be a teacher or caregiver for children from birth through age 5.

Nebraskans want greater support for the early care and education workforce.

FINDINGS FROM THE MAIN REPORT, *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, showed that 58% of Nebraskans believe the state is investing too little in early care and education programs and should make it a higher priority, suggesting strong support for the workforce and the profession. Many Nebraskans also believe compensation should be better for early care and education professionals. Nearly half (48%) of Nebraskans believe that teachers and caregivers are paid too little. Among parents who have at least one child in an early care and education center, 55% believe that early childhood teachers and caregivers should be paid more. Notably, more than one-third (35%) of all Nebraskans say they do not know.

In 2015, the average salary for child care professionals in Nebraska was \$19,620, \$31,840 for preschool teachers, and \$50,600 for elementary school teachers. These numbers are on par with national averages. The pay that Nebraska early care and education professionals receive is far below that of other professions, which may account for the respondents' perceptions that compensation is too low.

Based on what you have seen or heard, are early childhood care and education teachers and caregivers in Nebraska paid too much, too little, or about the right amount?



- Too much
- Too little
- About the right amount
- Don't know

55%

of parents with children in early care and education centers say teachers and caregivers are paid too little.

Implications

RESULTS FROM THIS REPORT of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Childhood Care and Education provide evidence that Nebraskans, especially parents of young children, recognize the value of the early care and education workforce. But there is room for increasing recognition of the individuals working in early care and education settings as professionals with specialized knowledge in early childhood.

Though the majority of Nebraskans identified center- and home-based child care and education settings as the best option for most families, the professionals in these settings were relied on less frequently than friends, family, neighbors, and other parents as a source of information about care and education. Nebraskans appear to trust the early care and education workforce with their children but, perhaps, seem not fully aware of the expertise the workforce may have to offer. Respondents perceive the educational preparation of early care and education professionals to increase as the age of the children under their care and in their classrooms increases, suggesting that they believe more knowledge and experience are needed to provide high-quality care and education for 3- and 4-year-olds than for infants.

Targeted efforts are needed to enhance awareness of the professional expertise of a high-quality early care and education workforce that is prepared to work with children across the entire spectrum of early childhood. Such awareness is likely to increase understanding among Nebraskans of the value of the early care and education workforce as a resource for families when making educational decisions believed to be best for children. And though respondents show support for higher compensation of early care and education professionals in the state, close to a third say they do not know whether teachers and caregivers are paid too little, too much, or about the right amount. In addition to increasing awareness of the professional preparation required to ensure high-quality care, further attention is needed to expand Nebraskans' understanding of the relatively low compensation levels associated with the profession.

This survey suggests that more is needed to ensure that those who care for and teach our youngest children are supported, compensated, and provided with the resources to meet children's learning and developmental needs. This report also highlights the importance of informing Nebraskans about the value of a high-quality and adequately compensated workforce. Additional reports and subsequent strategies will soon be available from the Buffett Institute to provide in-depth information about the qualifications, compensation, and work environment of the early care and education workforce in Nebraska.

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 ± 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 ± 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 ± 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 ± 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.

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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 for more information.

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