

**NEWS RELEASE**

Contact: Shannon Sherman, (402) 554-3967 or [srsherman@nebraska.edu](mailto:srsherman@nebraska.edu)

**NEW STATEWIDE COMMISSION TO ADDRESS PRESSING CHALLENGES  
FACING NEBRASKA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE**

*Workforce Shortage, Training Requirements, and Compensation Top List of Key Concerns*

Omaha, Neb. – A new statewide commission has been formed to tackle one of the most complex and pressing challenges facing Nebraska today—expanding and strengthening the state’s early childhood workforce to meet children’s needs throughout the first eight years of life.

The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission includes 39 public- and private-sector leaders brought together by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. The group is charged with developing a statewide plan to ensure a skilled, informed, and diverse workforce is available to all children.

The commission will hold its first official working session on Wednesday, Feb. 15, in Lincoln. The meeting marks the beginning of a three-year collaboration believed to be among the most comprehensive efforts in the nation to focus on those who care for, nurture, and educate young children. Nearly 80 percent of children from birth through age 5 in Nebraska are enrolled in some form of paid child care.

“Early childhood professionals play an enormously important role in helping children achieve their potential and grow into healthy, confident, productive adults,” said Samuel J. Meisels, the Buffett Institute’s founding executive director. “There are not nearly enough qualified adults to serve all young children—especially children placed at risk because of poverty, parental unemployment, or other challenges. These are critical issues that Nebraska must face.”

The early childhood workforce includes home-based and center-based child care providers, preschool and PreK teachers, early elementary teachers, and other professionals who teach and care for children from birth through third grade. Among the most urgent issues that the commission will address are the following:

- Shortage. The Nebraska Department of Education’s Teacher Vacancy Survey lists both Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education as “Teacher Shortage Areas.” Additionally, the Nebraska Department of Labor projects that the number of child care worker positions will increase by more than 13 percent during the next 10 years, which outpaces national projections. Estimates are significantly higher when considering the need for highly qualified early childhood professionals across a variety of early care and education settings.

- **Preparation.** Training requirements for individuals in the early childhood workforce are often inadequate or non-existent, and professional education requirements are uneven. Twenty colleges and universities in Nebraska offer early childhood degree programs but there is little consistency among them regarding curriculum and degree requirements. For example, each program includes at least one practicum experience, but the required supervised classroom hours vary from nine to 150.
- **Compensation.** Salaries are so low that many in the workforce leave the profession for other jobs, contributing to high turnover and a lack of stability for young children. In 2015, the median wage for child care professionals in Nebraska was \$19,620, which is below the poverty line for a family of three. Close to 20 percent of child care center teachers and PreK – Grade 3 teachers reported holding a second job in a survey conducted last year by the Buffett Institute.

These early childhood workforce challenges are found in both urban and rural areas. According to the 2016 *Kids Count in Nebraska Report*, 11 counties statewide had no licensed child care facilities in 2015, and roughly 75 percent of counties in Nebraska with child care facilities did not have enough available slots to meet the estimated current demand. The recent statewide Buffett Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education in Nebraska shows that only 15 percent of Nebraskans believe that all children have access to high-quality programs.

“We are committed to serving Nebraska, and what we hear from business and community leaders is that early childhood is an urgent need,” said Marjorie Kostelnik, dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. “Now is the time to bring people together to take action and make a difference for children, families, and early childhood professionals.”

Members of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission represent government, higher education, public schools, child care, philanthropy, health care, and the business community. The commission is co-chaired by Kostelnik and Meisels.

The commission will meet quarterly over a three-year period (2017 – 2019). Members will work with local leaders to develop targeted implementation plans that address the systems that govern early childhood, including higher education, practitioner needs, and state policy.

For more information about the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, visit [buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu](http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu).

###

*The **Buffett Early Childhood Institute** is dedicated to promoting the development and learning of children from birth through age 8. Our vision is to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby. Visit [buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu](http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu) for more information.*