

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION OVERVIEW

The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission is a collaborative group of 39 public- and private-sector leaders convened by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska to develop a comprehensive plan of action for expanding and strengthening the state's early childhood workforce. The ultimate goal of the commission, which will meet quarterly over a three-year period beginning in 2017, is to ensure a skilled, informed, and diverse workforce for Nebraska's children from birth through Grade 3.

The group will foster consensus for needed improvements in multiple systems that impact early childhood settings and professionals, including key systems representative of professional preparation and learning, policy, and early care and education delivery. It is charged with facilitating and promoting collaboration among the state's two- and four-year universities and colleges, the Nebraska Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, and other key stakeholders throughout the state, and assisting with public education and outreach.

The commission is co-chaired by Dr. Marjorie J. Kostelnik, dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Dr. Samuel J. Meisels, founding executive director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. Commission membership draws from state government agencies, higher education, public schools, child care, advocacy, philanthropy, practitioners, and the business community. Members are leaders with decision-making responsibilities within organizations and institutions that can contribute to achieving the goals of the commission. Task forces, workgroups, and ad hoc subcommittees from around the state will be formed as needed to carry out the work of the commission. A full list of the members can be found on the Buffett Institute website.

The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission is an initiative of the Early Childhood Workforce Development Program, one of two signature programs of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute.

Goals of the Commission

The commission will focus on four specific goals over a three-year span:

1. Create a shared state vision for transforming and sustaining a skilled, informed, and diverse early childhood workforce for all children birth through Grade 3.
2. Adopt a commission-approved version of the proposed Blueprint for Transforming Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce as the guiding framework for the planning and implementation process.
3. Develop implementation plans detailing effective strategies, actions, and responsible parties.
4. Facilitate and promote collaboration among stakeholders throughout the state and assist with public education and outreach.

A Blueprint for Transformation

The commission will focus its activities on a theory of change or “blueprint for transformation” developed by the Buffett Institute as a result of its research, meetings with experts and stakeholders, activities over the past two years, and its knowledge of large-scale systems change.

As depicted in the attached figure, a skilled, informed, and diverse workforce requires a supportive professional environment, investment in the professional role of early childhood educators and caregivers, a set of competencies agreed upon by higher education, regulators, and practitioners, and varied systems aligned across early childhood settings. Success will entail collaboration and engagement among systems of higher education, early care and education, and regulation and policy, as well as the business community and general public.

The blueprint is made up of four key components. Underlying all is a commitment to principles of equity, collaboration, evidence-based practice, responsiveness to local needs, and sustainability.

- 1. Common Definitions and Competencies.** As a state and professional field, we need a common set of definitions and criteria for such terms as high-quality teacher, educator, and caregiver. Specific skill and competency statements tied to these definitions are essential for all professional learning systems, including two- and four-year preparation programs, auxiliary professional development options, and systems of certification and regulation.
- 2. Alignment and Integration.** A review of regulations, certification standards, and professional learning systems that reflects the competencies and higher education course and program requirements is vitally important. Aligned competencies increase efficiency and effectiveness, remove barriers to the current and future workforce, and allow for integration within and across systems of practice and regulation. Once alignment is achieved, systems of care and education can begin using these competencies for hiring, training, and structuring their programs.
- 3. Supportive Professional Environment.** The workforce environment is essential for enabling caregivers and educators to implement best practices for children and families. A supportive professional environment that compensates workers fairly and offers career advancement opportunities is critical for attracting and retaining high-quality practitioners in the field. Moreover, supervisors, principals, and directors need sufficient background in child development and early education to effectively support and understand best practices.
- 4. Development of Workforce Professionals.** Creating the early childhood workforce of the future requires recognizing and expanding these individuals’ expertise so they feel valued by their employers, the communities they serve, and the general public. This calls for induction, mentoring and professional development programs that ensure that those who comprise the early childhood workforce are prepared to see themselves as professionals who fulfill a critical role in the healthy growth and development of Nebraska’s children and have opportunities to continue their own professional learning.

Commission Timeline

The commission’s work will take place over a three-year period and will include the development of a comprehensive statewide plan intended to transform the state’s early childhood workforce. Targeted

implementation plans will be developed by task forces or workgroups consisting of commission members and other stakeholders. Below are key milestones for each phase of the commission's work.

Year 1: January through December, 2017

Creation of a shared vision for Nebraska's early childhood workforce

- Develop common language/terminology for the early childhood workforce and systems in Nebraska
- Gain consensus on the "Blueprint for Transformation"
- Come to agreement around criteria for competency-based qualifications
- Begin discussion of tracking and evaluating implementation activities
- Review recommendations and strategies from National Academy of Medicine Early Childhood Team for potential implementation
- Develop strategies for obtaining support from state and community leaders for adoption and execution of implementation plans

Year 2: January through June, 2018

Implementation plans for alignment and integration

- With state agencies (NDE and DHHS), strengthen collaborations across regulatory systems
- Build interdisciplinary workgroups to assess the match between the aims of high-quality practice and the systems and policies affecting the early childhood workforce at both the regulatory and preparatory levels
- With institutions of higher education (IHEs), align competency-based qualifications across two- and four-year degree-granting curricula
- Develop plans with agencies and IHEs to establish competency fulfillment criteria for current workforce
- Work with agencies to align credentialing systems with competencies
- With the Buffett Institute and other systems, ensure tracking and evaluation of implementation activities

Year 2: July through December, 2018

Implementation plans for creating and sustaining a supportive professional environment

- With community partners, determine how to enhance the professional status of the early childhood workforce
- With state and community leaders, identify innovative funding strategies to ensure adequate compensation for the early childhood workforce
- Collaborate with IHEs and the professional development community to make career development pathways available and accessible to all members of the early childhood workforce
- Encourage and highlight the value of multidisciplinary linkages with allied professionals
- With the Buffett Institute and other systems, ensure tracking and evaluation of implementation activities
- Develop strategies for obtaining support from state and community leaders for adoption and execution of implementation plans

Year 3: January through June, 2019

Implementation plans for development of workforce professionals

- With IHEs and employers, determine how to attract highly qualified, diverse professionals into the field

- With IHEs and the professional development community, address induction and mentoring needs of new professionals
- With the professional development community, IHEs, employers, and community partners, support and retain highly qualified professionals with in-service learning and professional growth opportunities
- With agencies, IHEs, employers, and the professional development community, develop strategies to raise less-qualified professionals to new standards
- With agencies, IHEs, the public schools, and community partners, ensure administrative leadership has early childhood knowledge and experience and is supportive of best practices
- With the Buffett Institute and other systems, ensure tracking and evaluation of implementation activities

Year 3: July through December, 2019

Public education and outreach

- Develop strategies for obtaining support from state and community leaders for adoption and execution of implementation plans
- Assist Buffett Institute with strategies for public education and outreach across varied audiences and stakeholder groups

National Academy of Medicine Early Childhood Team

A second planning group that will inform the work of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission consists of an invited group of leaders, educators, practitioners, and policymakers who serve on the National Academy of Medicine Early Childhood Team.

In cooperation with the National Academy of Medicine's *Innovation to Incubation* program, this team will examine state and national efforts to implement recommendations from a recent Institute of Medicine consensus report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. The 13 recommendations in this seminal report span local, state, and federal levels and can potentially have a significant impact on the field. The National Academy's *Innovation to Incubation* program brings together state teams and national organizations to discuss opportunities and barriers encountered in implementing the recommendations of the report.

Nebraska has joined a cohort of states including Colorado and Minnesota with the intent of compiling and reporting on successful strategies used in other states and their applicability in Nebraska and assembling resources that may be useful to the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission.