

Elevating Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce

Report and Recommendations
of the Nebraska Early Childhood
Workforce Commission

JANUARY 2020



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute
at the University of Nebraska



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the hard work of many people. Special thanks to:

Nebraska early childhood professionals. By candidly sharing the joys and challenges of their work, members of the early childhood workforce significantly influenced the voice and vision of this report. Their commitment to providing quality early care and education fueled our efforts and motivated us to do our very best to ensure that the important work they do is visible, respected, and valued. All of the photos and quotes in this document showcase early childhood professionals and settings in Nebraska.

Members of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission. Serving on a voluntary basis over a three-year period, commission members encouraged us at every turn by participating in multiple meetings and conversations and sharing their knowledge, expertise, and good judgment. Their willingness to explore new ideas and venture into uncharted territory inspired us all to be bold and set ambitious goals in the report.

Marjorie Kostelnik and Sam Meisels, co-chairs of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission. Fully involved with every aspect of the commission's work from the planning of quarterly meetings to critical examination of every detail in the report's drafting, Drs. Kostelnik and Meisels provided leadership from a vantage point of unparalleled experience and expertise.

Dick Holland and the Holland Foundation. Supporting initial activities in the Workforce Planning and Development unit of the Institute and funding the execution of the largest and most comprehensive survey of the Nebraska early childhood workforce, Mr. Holland's generosity, and that of the Holland Foundation, made possible the quarterly meetings of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission and the preparation of this report.

Sarver, S.L., Huddleston-Casas, C., Charlet, C., & Wessels, R. (2020). *Elevating Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce: Report and Recommendations of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission*. Omaha, NE: Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. © 2020 Buffett Early Childhood Institute.

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A Letter From the Co-Chairs of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission

Dear Colleagues and Friends:

This document is an invitation from the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission to all Nebraskans. We ask you to join us in a collective and continuing effort to ensure that our state has access to a highly qualified early childhood workforce—one that can support the development and learning of all young children from birth through age 8.

As co-chairs of the commission, we have been privileged to work alongside leaders representing the many sectors that impact early care and education in Nebraska—including those involved in professional preparation and learning, early care and education delivery and policymaking, as well as local business, community, and philanthropy. Over the past three years, more than 40 of these leaders have volunteered their time and talents as commission members—building relationships, asking questions, reviewing early childhood research and Nebraska-specific data, and sharing their insights, suggestions, and professional expertise to help develop the vision, goals, and recommendations presented in this report. Their commitment has been inspiring.

This work was also informed and greatly enriched by countless conversations between members of the commission and you—our colleagues and friends across Nebraska who share a passion for ensuring that all children and families have access to high-quality early care and education. Time and again, these conversations highlighted the urgent need to prioritize the early childhood workforce and address the factors that jeopardize the future of high-quality early care and education in the state.

Through this collaborative approach, we have developed a comprehensive plan that is based on an analysis of Nebraska's strengths and challenges across all sectors affecting early care and education. This plan for elevating and strengthening the state's early childhood workforce seeks to align efforts across sectors through four interdependent goals focused on ensuring:

1. A highly qualified early childhood workforce
2. Full funding of early care and education in Nebraska
3. An informed, engaged, and committed public
4. An implementation and accountability infrastructure for effective coordination, collaboration, and communication across the state

For each focus area, the plan presents an overarching goal and specific recommendations, with the understanding that more detailed strategies and tasks will be defined as the work evolves. This evolution will be predicated on the collective input and action of stakeholders across Nebraska. In addition, progress toward each goal will be tracked, and results will be used to inform implementation efforts.

This plan is intended to describe a clear path forward. In so doing, we are calling on Nebraskans to join a statewide coalition that will coordinate efforts to implement the commission's recommendations across the state. In order to achieve its potential, this coalition must rely upon the input and energy of people representing diverse communities across Nebraska. The coalition needs you—your insight, skills, and voice—to help inform fellow Nebraskans and urge them to take action to elevate the early childhood workforce to benefit the profession, children, families, communities, and Nebraska's future. This invitation to join the coalition is for:

- Parents who are concerned about the quality of early care and education they can access for their child when they are working
- Policymakers who plan Nebraska's future
- Taxpayers who expect to know if public funds are used effectively
- Employers who depend on a reliable workforce that is free from child care worries and interruptions
- Early childhood professionals who take pride in serving children and families
- Teachers and educators in classrooms from preschool through graduate school who understand that all students must have a strong foundation in order to excel
- Higher education faculty who prepare early childhood professionals to deliver high-quality care and education
- Philanthropists who want more information about the investments that are needed in Nebraska

This is your invitation to help Nebraska's early childhood workforce thrive. Together, we can build on our strengths and make Nebraska the national leader in early care and education.

We look forward to continued collaboration with you in support of Nebraska's early childhood workforce.

Sincerely,



Dr. Marjorie J. Kostelnik

Professor, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Former Dean, College of Education and Human Sciences, University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Dr. Samuel J. Meisels

Founding Executive Director, Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska

Richard D. Holland Presidential Chair in Early Childhood Development

Join the effort. Visit EarlyYearsMatter.org/workforce to sign up for news and information.

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"Nebraska will elevate the early childhood workforce to a priority profession benefitting all children from birth through Grade 3."

Executive Summary

The science of early childhood development makes clear that the early years, from birth through age 8, are a time of unparalleled human growth and development—and that healthy development during these pivotal early years requires reliable, positive, and consistent interactions between the developing child and familiar, caring adults. Because of today's economy, in which most parents of young children work outside the home, families often rely on early childhood professionals to provide positive interactions and experiences that young children need to thrive. Yet, despite what we know about the critical role of early childhood professionals in young children's development, the early childhood workforce in our nation and in our state is undervalued and underpaid—which makes it difficult to retain the highly qualified professionals currently in the workforce as well as recruit those needed to meet the growing demand for early care and education. In Nebraska, 75 percent of children under the age of 6 live in homes where all adults in their family work outside the home. Increasing the number of highly qualified early childhood professionals is essential if we are to meet the growing demand across the state for learning environments where children can thrive and begin to meet their potential—and where Nebraska's working parents can feel confident placing their children while they work and support their families. Viewed through the prism of the state's alarming shortage of 58,000 workers, the need for high-quality early care and education takes on additional urgency. If we are to meet Nebraska's workforce needs now and in the future, we must ensure all children and families in the state have equitable access to affordable, high-quality early care and education.

In 2017, the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission came together to address how best to strengthen and expand Nebraska's early childhood workforce. The commission was a collaborative group of more than 40 public- and private-sector leaders representing systems that influence the overall quality and delivery of early care and education—including those involved in professional preparation and learning, early care and education delivery, and policymaking, as well as local business, philanthropic, and community leaders. The commission worked for the past three years in collaboration with others from across the state to identify the strengths and challenges of Nebraska's early childhood workforce and examine the potential of early care and education in the state. The commission's key findings include the following:

- **Varied Early Care and Education Settings.** Nebraska's early childhood professionals work in various settings—including homes, child care centers,

and schools—and expectations and requirements for their professional practice vary based on setting and funding. Although there is no shared understanding of what constitutes high-quality early care and education across settings, the needs of children do not differ based on where they receive their care and education.

- **Inconsistent Regulations.** Regulatory inconsistency across early care and education settings has significant implications for the early childhood workforce, affecting such qualification indicators as teacher licensure and credentialing. Members of Nebraska’s early childhood workforce confront contradictory expectations based on where they work rather than consistent professional standards based on what their day-to-day work with children entails.
- **Low Wages.** In 2016, the median wage in our state for early childhood professionals teaching in community-based child care centers was \$18,706 per year—nearly \$1,400 below the federal poverty line for a family of three. Because of this, 27 percent of home-based early childhood professionals and 20 percent of center-based professionals in Nebraska rely on some form of public assistance just to make ends meet.
- **High Turnover.** Low wages and lack of supportive professional environments create significant hardships for many early childhood professionals, resulting in high turnover and high rates of depression. In a statewide survey conducted by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, more than three-quarters of child care centers reported that they experienced turnover of lead teachers or assistant teachers during the prior year.
- **Varied Accessibility.** In Nebraska, a family’s ability to access early care and education varies based on where they live. Statewide, 11 counties have no licensed child care facilities. Furthermore, 84 percent of Nebraska counties that have child care facilities lack sufficient child care slots to meet the needs of families living in the county, with many providers reporting chronic difficulty finding qualified staff to work in early care settings and the primary grades.
- **Shortage of Affordable Options.** A family’s ability to access high-quality early care and education is often dependent on how much they can afford to pay. Many communities do not have the resources to provide families with a variety of early care and education options—particularly high-quality options. Even when high-quality options are available, many families do not have the financial resources they need to pay for the quality of care they want for their child.
- **Implications for Economic Vitality of Our Communities.** Investment in early care and education also plays an important role in the economic vitality of Nebraska communities. A community’s ability to attract business investment is

dependent upon the size and qualifications of the labor supply available, and labor supply is dependent in part upon access to affordable early care and education opportunities for the children of potential employees. Employees who are unable to meet the daily care and education needs of their children are forced to abandon their jobs and communities. Employers across the country, including those in Nebraska, are keenly affected by the high costs associated with employee turnover and are coming to recognize the economic value of addressing early care and education as a critical means of stabilizing their workforce and their communities.

- **Importance to Prosperity of the State.** Ensuring all families and children have equitable access to affordable high-quality care is key not only to the healthy growth and development of Nebraska’s children but to the economic vitality and prosperity of the state. A dollar spent for high-quality early care and education yields an average return of \$4; in circumstances where children are extremely vulnerable, the return can be as high as \$13. This return includes money saved on special education, health care, social services, and the criminal justice system, as well as money earned from greater educational attainment, increased earnings, and improved productivity.

Based on these findings and discussions with colleagues, community members, and early childhood professionals across Nebraska, commission members came to the following conclusions:

- A highly qualified early childhood workforce is the cornerstone of high-quality early care and education.
- Adequate compensation and a supportive professional environment are critical to ensuring that the early childhood workforce is diverse and highly qualified.
- Supporting a highly qualified early childhood workforce requires long-term investment.
- Elevating Nebraska’s early childhood workforce to a priority profession will require deepening the public’s understanding of the issues, engaging them in conversations about how to improve early care and education in their communities, and equipping them to take action.
- Change requires action. Lasting change requires collective action. For sustainable change to occur, stakeholders and partners across Nebraska must work together, on behalf of all children and families, to coordinate the ongoing collaboration, communication, and accountability efforts essential to successful implementation.

Executive Summary

Over the past year, commission members consolidated these key findings and conclusions in a comprehensive plan. This plan is summarized by the following vision, goals, and recommendations that are designed to guide statewide efforts to ensure high-quality early care and education from birth through Grade 3 for all children and families in Nebraska.

Vision: Nebraska will elevate the early childhood workforce to a priority profession benefitting all children from birth through Grade 3.

Goal 1: Nebraska's early childhood workforce will be highly qualified and will reflect the diversity of the children and families they serve.

- 1.1 Define and support high-quality practice across all early care and education settings.
- 1.2 Develop professional pathways that are affordable and accessible in order to recruit and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.

Goal 2: Early care and education in Nebraska will be fully funded by 2030.

- 2.1 Build on Nebraska's current investment in early care and education.
- 2.2 Develop locally informed cost estimates of high-quality early care and education with a highly qualified, adequately compensated workforce.
- 2.3 Close the funding gap between Nebraska's current investments and the total investments needed to fully fund high-quality early care and education.

Goal 3: Nebraska will champion high-quality early care and education and the critical role of the workforce in young children's learning and development.

- 3.1 Inform Nebraskans of the importance of the early childhood workforce to high-quality early care and education and what is at stake for Nebraska's future.
- 3.2 Engage Nebraskans in statewide efforts to support the early childhood workforce and high-quality early care and education.
- 3.3 Seek Nebraskans' commitment to support high-quality early care and education and the early childhood workforce.

Goal 4: Nebraskans will implement the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission's recommendations to achieve a highly qualified and diverse workforce on behalf of all young children and their families.

- 4.1 Develop and implement the infrastructure needed to support continued coordination, collaboration, and communication across sectors.
- 4.2 Authentically engage stakeholders within and across communities in order to broaden coalition participation.

As the commission completes its three-year appointment, its members are poised and ready to transition their focus from the formal life of the commission to an ongoing statewide coalition. This coalition will ensure implementation of the commission's recommendations for the well-being of our children and our families, and for the economic vitality of our communities and our state—now and in the future. Going forward, commission members are committed to working collectively to expand collaboration across the state—honoring ongoing efforts to improve early care and education in Nebraska, building on the trusting relationships commission members have developed, and inviting innovative thought partners to join this collective effort.

As Nebraskans, we know what it means to work hard, to work together, and to keep working until a job is done well. We appreciate common-sense solutions, innovation, and independent thinking. If there's a better road, we're not afraid to take it. Our task is to use the findings of research and what we've learned from everyday experience to elevate Nebraska's early childhood workforce.

"A priority profession is a profession whose work is essential to the social and economic well-being of communities and, therefore, critical to the state's future."

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE: PRESENT AND FUTURE

The data presented here describe two situations: the present reality for children, families, and the early childhood workforce, and a future reality in which the goals and recommendations of the commission are fully implemented. As we move from the present to the future, our focus on the valuable professional role of the early childhood workforce in the lives of children, families, and communities becomes more prominent. These facts and figures demonstrate the need for recognizing the specialized knowledge and skills of early care and education professionals and the importance of compensating them for the expertise they provide.

PRESENT

Nebraskans depend on the early childhood professionals who care for and educate their young children, but access to high-quality services is inconsistent and limited, depending on where families live and what they can afford.

- In Nebraska, more than 75% of children under age 6 live in homes where all adults work.⁹
- 84% of Nebraska counties do not have enough child care slots to meet the needs of families with young children.²³
- In 2016, more than 4,000 Nebraska parents were forced to leave a job, not accept a job, or change jobs because of child care problems.²¹
- Only 15% of Nebraskans statewide reported being very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs available in the city or area where they live.²³

FUTURE

Every Nebraska family has access to high-quality early care and education.

PRESENT

The qualifications required to be an early childhood professional vary dramatically, depending more on the setting where a child receives care and education than on the developmental needs of the child.

- The qualifications required for early childhood professionals are inconsistent across early care and education settings (see Appendix B).
- Early care and education settings with the least stringent teacher qualification requirements are those that serve the state’s youngest children, despite the knowledge that 90% of brain growth takes place during the first five years of life and success at this stage of development sets children up for success in school and life.¹³
- The specialized knowledge and skills required of early childhood professionals to provide developmentally appropriate care and education is just as great for those caring for and teaching very young children as it is for those teaching children in the elementary school years.¹

FUTURE

The qualifications required to be an early childhood professional will be based on the developmental needs of children and consistent across all early care and education settings.

PRESENT

Early childhood programs must apply for and combine funding from multiple sources, some of which have inconsistent quality standards, in order to cover operating expenses.

- In Nebraska, federal and state funds are distributed through 15 different financing mechanisms, originating from agencies with distinct regulatory standards, compliance monitoring, and qualifications requirements.
- Time and energy that professionals would otherwise make available to children and families is often devoted to the administrative task of braiding funding sources to generate enough revenue to cover the cost of providing early care and education.

FUTURE

Nebraska maximizes public-sector investments in early care and education by reducing the administrative burden of pursuing multiple funding sources, increasing coordination across government agencies, and linking the receipt of funds to high-quality standards.

PRESENT

Wages and benefits of early childhood professionals vary by the setting where children receive early care and education. The same work does not garner the same pay.

- The median annual pay for early childhood professionals is \$25,980 for those providing in-home early care and education, \$18,706 for center-based teachers, \$36,000 for PreKindergarten teachers, and \$41,000 for Kindergarten-Grade 3 teachers.²⁴
- The median annual pay for center-based teachers is half that of school-based PreKindergarten teachers, even though the age and developmental needs of children being served are the same.²⁴
- The median annual pay for center-based teachers falls below the poverty line by almost \$1,400 for a family of three.²⁴
- Only 39% of center-based teachers have health insurance, compared to 91% of school-based PreKindergarten teachers.²⁴

FUTURE

Wages and benefits will reflect the professional expertise required of the early childhood workforce.

PRESENT

Low wages and lack of professional support create severe hardships for the early childhood workforce.

- 27% of home-based and 20% of center-based teachers depend on some type of public assistance.²⁴
- 20% of center-based and school-based teachers hold second jobs.²⁴
- On average, 10% of early childhood educators from rural areas have clinically depressive symptoms, as do 9% from urban areas and 7% from large towns.²⁴
- Teacher turnover is as high as 26% in some early care and education settings.³⁴

FUTURE

Improved wages, benefits, and professional supports will bolster the early childhood workforce, contributing to professional well-being, continuity of care for children, and stability for families and communities.

PRESENT

Nebraska does not provide the level of sustained investment needed to reap the benefits of high-quality early care and education for all Nebraska children and families.

- In 2017, an estimated \$460 million was spent on early care and education in Nebraska, of which 17% came from state funds, 29% came from federal funds, 52% from families, and an estimated 2% from business and philanthropy (see Appendix D).
- Based on Nebraska's 2017 economy of \$110.5 billion, approximately \$912 million (0.75 of 1% of State GDP) in funding is needed annually to cover the cost of high-quality early care and education for all Nebraska children and families (see Appendix D).
- To bridge the funding gap, an additional allocation of \$109 million from state funds, \$191 million from federal funds, and \$153 million in private funds from families, businesses, and philanthropy is needed, an estimated increase amounting to roughly \$235 per Nebraskan annually (see Appendix D).
- Money spent on high-quality early care and education is an investment. One dollar spent on high-quality early care and education yields an average return of \$4 over time. In circumstances where children are extremely vulnerable, the return can be as high as \$13.^{17,18}

FUTURE

The total cost of high-quality early care and education is funded by combining public and private investments that ensure every child in Nebraska has access to high-quality care and education regardless of the setting their parents choose for them.

"In all of these efforts, we must acknowledge the strengths of Nebraska's existing early childhood workforce and seek to build on those strengths."



Introduction

Based on experience and evidence, we know that the most important influences on children from birth through age 8 are their parents and others who care for them on a daily basis. As our understanding of the rapid rate of brain development in early childhood has been transformed by research in neuroscience, we have become more aware of the long-term effects of early childhood experiences. This includes the risks posed to healthy development when children experience trauma and chronic stress early in life as well as the protective benefits of high-quality early care. Such research has brought early childhood, and more specifically the importance of early care and education, to the attention of policymakers and the public alike.

In 2015, the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council released a report. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*¹ describes how the science of early childhood development informs the work of professionals who work with children from birth through age 8. The report finds that although our knowledge of early childhood “increasingly informs standards for what should be, it is not fully reflected in what is—the current capacities and practices of the workforce, the settings in which they work, the policies and infrastructure that set qualifications and provide professional learning, and the government and other funders who support and oversee these systems.”² The *Transforming the Workforce* report calls for collaboration across systems, across the country, across disciplines, and across state and local communities to address this gap between what we know is best for young children and what we actually do in early care and education.

The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission was convened to facilitate the collaboration, coordination, and communication necessary to answer this call in Nebraska. The commission was a collaborative group of more than 40 public- and private-sector leaders representing key systems that impact early care and education across Nebraska. (A full list of commission members can be found in Appendix A.)

Over the past three years, the commission has developed a shared understanding of why prioritizing the early childhood workforce is critical to Nebraska's future. Key to this process was establishing a shared definition of the early childhood workforce. The commission has defined Nebraska's early childhood workforce as those who are paid to provide care and education for young children from birth

Introduction

through Grade 3 on a daily or near-daily basis, as well as home visitors who partner with families, and coaches and others who work directly with early childhood educators. With this definition in place, and with a long-term goal of ensuring that Nebraska has a skilled, informed, and diverse early childhood workforce, the commission then established workgroups to consider each of the following questions:

- What do we need to do to ensure that all early childhood professionals in Nebraska are prepared adequately for the work they do?
- How will we cover the costs of ensuring that all early childhood professionals in Nebraska are compensated appropriately for the work they do?
- How will we build public will and commitment to ensure sustained support for Nebraska’s early childhood workforce?

As commission members worked toward developing a plan to address these issues, another overarching question was repeatedly raised:

- Once the commission has outlined a plan, who will do the work to implement the plan and ensure accountability?

In collaboration with colleagues and community members from across the state, commission members explored these questions—identifying strengths and challenges of Nebraska’s early childhood workforce and early care and education policies and practices, raising more questions, and seeking additional information. They asked to hear from early care and education professionals concerning their experiences in the field. They requested an analysis of Nebraska’s investments in early childhood. They inquired about what Nebraskans know, what they value, and what they want regarding early care and education. And they wanted to know who is currently involved in improving early care and education in Nebraska and who should be involved going forward. Based on their findings and discussions, commission members came to the following conclusions:

- **A highly qualified early childhood workforce is the cornerstone of high-quality early care and education.** If we are to ensure that early childhood professionals are adequately prepared for the work they do, we must:
 - Clarify professional roles for those serving children from birth through Grade 3, defining roles based on professional responsibilities rather than on where the work occurs (e.g., homes, centers, schools).
 - Define the skills and knowledge required to do the work—that is, we must define the professional competencies that early childhood professionals need

to fulfill their roles effectively.

- Ensure the professional competencies that are defined inform the professional preparation of the early childhood workforce, as well as policies and practices related to licensure and certification of the workforce.
 - Acknowledge the strengths of Nebraska’s existing early childhood workforce and seek to build on those strengths.
- **Adequate compensation and a supportive professional environment are critical to ensuring the early childhood workforce is diverse and highly qualified.** If we are to recruit and retain the early childhood workforce Nebraska needs, we must ensure that early childhood professionals are adequately compensated for their work and have the professional supports they need to provide high-quality care and education to all children and families they serve. In particular, we must provide access to affordable pathways for professional education and development. Current and aspiring early childhood professionals from some communities and groups in Nebraska face significant socioeconomic and/or educational-opportunity barriers that prevent them from pursuing higher education; we must seek to reduce such barriers. In addition, we must develop alternative professional development pathways that acknowledge the competencies of workforce members who have acquired early childhood skills and knowledge on the job. In short, we must ensure that all members of Nebraska’s early childhood workforce have equitable opportunities to demonstrate or develop the professional competencies they need in order to deliver high-quality early care and education to Nebraska’s children and families.
 - **Supporting a highly qualified and diverse early childhood workforce requires long-term investment.** If we are to ensure that members of the early childhood workforce are adequately compensated for the work they do, we must consider the question of workforce compensation in the larger context of how early care and education is funded in Nebraska. With a focus on acknowledging and building upon current investments, we must address the larger question of how to cover all costs associated with ensuring access to affordable, high-quality early care and education for all children from birth through Grade 3.
 - **Elevating Nebraska’s early childhood workforce to a priority profession will require deepening the public’s understanding of the issues, engaging them in conversations about how to improve early care and education in their communities, and equipping them to take action.** If we are to secure sustained support for Nebraska’s early childhood workforce in communities

across the state, we must ensure that all Nebraskans are familiar with the research and evidence surrounding the role of the workforce in early childhood development.

- **Change requires action.** Lasting change requires collective action. For sustainable change to occur, stakeholders and partners across Nebraska must work together, on behalf of all children and families, to coordinate the ongoing collaboration, communication, and accountability efforts essential to successful implementation. If we are to move from planning to action, we must acknowledge and build upon existing collaborative relationships and ongoing initiatives to improve early care and education in Nebraska. In addition, we must broaden our reach to include the expertise of those who are leaders within their own communities but are not yet involved in statewide conversations about how best to support, strengthen, and expand the early childhood workforce. Furthermore, knowing that Nebraska has a strong history of local control, we must ensure that implementation efforts are flexible enough to allow local communities to adapt the recommendations to their context. Together, we must define the infrastructure needed to implement the commission's recommendations, balancing statewide coordination with locally developed improvement initiatives. In addition, we must collaborate with partners across the state to establish a shared system of accountability.

Over the past year, commission members worked to translate these conclusions into the vision, goals, and recommendations presented in this report. Our four interdependent goals and associated recommendations are intended to guide statewide efforts, aligning ongoing work with new initiatives into an integrated and inclusive approach to elevating the early childhood workforce.

In this document, the commission presents information about the following:

- **Why the Early Childhood Workforce Matters**
 - Findings from research: A brief overview of key findings from research on brain development, early learning, and the early childhood workforce.
 - Nebraska context: A summary of the current status of early care and education in Nebraska, including state-specific information and data illustrating our values, strengths, challenges, and needs.

- **A Plan for Elevating Nebraska’s Early Childhood Workforce**

An overview of the commission’s vision, goals, and recommendations, outlining a comprehensive plan to guide ongoing and expanded coordination, collaboration, and communication across Nebraska. This section introduces the commission’s vision and provides detailed justifications for each of the four goals and associated recommendations. Sections include the following:

 - Vision
 - Goal 1: Highly Qualified Workforce
 - Goal 2: Full Funding by 2030
 - Goal 3: Informed, Engaged, and Committed Public
 - Goal 4: Implementation and Accountability Infrastructure
- **Final Thoughts**

Summarizing how achieving the vision will benefit Nebraskans, now and in the future, and calling on all Nebraskans to join together to elevate Nebraska’s early childhood workforce.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"I don't know so much that society on the outside doesn't value what we do, as they truly honestly don't understand all the moving parts."

“The single most important building block of brain architecture and childhood development is reliable, positive, and consistent interactions between the developing infant or child and familiar, caring adults.”

Why the Early Childhood Workforce Matters

FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH

The human brain is not fully developed at birth. It is built over time—and the greatest opportunity for lifelong impact on children's brain development is in the years from birth through age 8.

Decades of research point to the early years as the most critical time for building intellect, strengthening social and emotional skills, and setting a positive trajectory for school and life success. More than 150 scientific studies from all over the world demonstrate that high-quality early care can have major short- and long-term positive effects on cognition and social-emotional development, laying the foundation for school progress, increased earnings, reduction in anti-social behavior, lowered welfare participation, and even less trouble with the law.³

Nearly 90 percent of brain growth takes place during the first five years of life.

In the first few years of life, over 1 million neural connections are formed every second. Neural connections are formed through the interaction of genes and the baby's environment and experiences. These are the connections that build brain architecture—the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior, and health depend. When children experience safe, supportive, and stimulating early care and learning environments, they develop strong neural connections in regions across the brain, establishing a sound foundation for future learning and development.⁴ But when families confront significant challenges or struggle to function in conditions of chronic stress and trauma, the impact on young children can have lasting effects. The experience of trauma or chronic stress in early childhood, without the protective buffer of high-quality care, contributes to fewer, weaker neural connections during brain development.⁵ The resulting structural differences—which include reduced grey matter and a smaller surface area in regions of the brain that control functions such as language development, self-regulation, memory, and social-emotional processing⁶—have short- and long-term impacts on children's learning, behavior, and health.

The single most important building block of brain architecture and childhood development is reliable, positive, and consistent interactions between the developing infant or child and familiar, caring adults.⁷

First among those familiar, caring adults are parents and family members. When all

Why the Early Childhood Workforce Matters

of the adults in a family who are responsible for children work outside the home, the care of young children is often entrusted to individuals who are not identified as family. Today in the United States, 60 percent of children under the age of 6 who are not yet enrolled in Kindergarten are in some type of non-parental care arrangement on a regular basis.⁸ In Nebraska, over 75 percent of children under 6 live in homes where all the adults work.⁹ This means that early childhood professionals play an incredibly important role in supporting families by providing our infants and young children with vital, positive interactions that help children feel secure and also contribute to healthy brain development.

The skills and knowledge of caregivers, teachers, and others who have professional responsibility for young children are essential for realizing the short- and long-term benefits of early care and education.

Although several factors contribute to high-quality early care and education programs, none is more important than the quality of the professionals delivering those programs. Highly qualified early childhood professionals are the cornerstone of high-quality early care and education. Providing developmentally appropriate care and education for children from birth through Grade 3 requires specialized knowledge and skills including, for example, an understanding of early childhood development across cognitive, social-emotional, and physical domains, the ability to facilitate children's learning through nurturing relationships and intentional interactions, and the ability to work effectively with children and families from diverse backgrounds and with diverse learning needs.¹⁰

Early childhood professionals have an important role to play in ensuring equitable learning opportunities for the diverse children and families they serve.

No two children or families are alike, and every early childhood classroom is diverse in terms of the backgrounds and lived experiences of the children in the room. Children's experiences vary based on their family's culture, structure, language, religious beliefs, and economic status as well as on the child's racial identity, gender, and ability.¹¹ Regardless of their backgrounds and experiences, all children deserve responsive care and education. If the early childhood workforce is to provide high-quality care and education to all children, they must develop skills to cultivate positive, intentional, and responsive interactions with the unique children and families they serve.

Furthermore, early childhood settings are often among the first communities that children encounter on a regular basis outside their families—and children and families do well when they see themselves represented in those settings. While this includes

ensuring that classroom materials and activities reflect the diverse experiences of children in the room, research also shows that children benefit from having access to caregivers and teachers who look and sound like them. For example, in research with families from differing racial or ethnic groups, families clearly express the desire for their child(ren) to interact with educators who speak the family's native language

SPOTLIGHT

"No Small Matter": Film Screening and Discussion

Commission members asked to hear directly from those who work with children from birth through Grade 3 in communities across Nebraska before developing the recommendations in this report. To kick-start the conversation, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska and the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission partnered with the Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children, Nebraska Extension Learning Child Team, and Nebraska Department of Education Early Learning Connection coordinators to host screenings of the film "No Small Matter" in early 2019. The film is a feature-length documentary that explores the "overwhelming evidence for the importance of the first five years and reveals how our failure to act on that evidence has resulted in an everyday crisis for American families and a slow-motion catastrophe for the country." Following the film's screening, local event organizers facilitated discussions with early childhood professionals. Intended to be an entry point to deeper discussions about the issues facing early care and education professionals every day, the screening events have been a tremendous success in Nebraska, and requests for additional screenings continue to grow. At present, 35 events have been held across the state and nearly 2,000 Nebraskans representing more than 200 communities have seen the film. The quotes from early childhood professionals that are included throughout this report are from individuals who participated in these community screening events. Their voices informed the commission's recommendations.

and have commonalities in culture and identity. Research also suggests that children of color thrive when they have access to a teacher who matches their race/ethnicity. Indeed, many families choose early care and education settings, particularly for infants and toddlers, based in part on the race and ethnicity of the early childhood professionals in those settings.¹²

"We must focus on ensuring that the early childhood workforce has the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively meet the needs of children no matter where they are receiving their care and education."

Despite what is known about the important role early childhood professionals play in young children's development, the early childhood workforce is undervalued and underpaid.

Even as we invest more in early care and education, early childhood professionals experience low wages, few benefits, and limited professional support.¹³ The early childhood workforce is composed primarily of women, and women of color are disproportionately represented in the lowest-paying, least-supported roles and settings within the profession. Too often, these inequities are reinforced by perceptions about the early childhood workforce that reflect an outdated understanding of early childhood and the role of caregivers. For example, the primary task of a caregiver was once seen as nothing more than keeping young children clean, fed, and entertained. This is a misconception—one that assumes that caring for children and promoting learning are divergent tasks. Science, however, tells us this is not true—especially when it comes to the youngest members of our society, who learn through interactions with their caregivers.¹⁴

This misconception is reflected in and perpetuated by existing regulatory and data systems, such as those used by the Department of Labor in which “child care

workers” and “preschool teachers” are classified into two different industries— “personal care” and “educational.”¹⁵ This is a false distinction and is inconsistent with the research and actual work performed by individuals within these categories.

Such misconceptions also are reflected in how the early childhood workforce is compensated for its work. Those who are classified as “child care workers” earn less than their counterparts in school-based settings, even when they are equally qualified and fulfill similar roles. This devaluing of the profession results in a disincentive to enter the early childhood workforce and makes it difficult to retain talented professionals and maintain program quality. Given what we know about brain development and early learning, we must update our systems of classification, compensation, and support for the early childhood workforce to reflect our current understanding of the years from birth through age 8 as a period of incredible growth and development.¹⁶

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"One thing I feel very strongly is that we have all this research that tells us how to care for our kids and yet we are not doing that. Our ... policies do not reflect what we know is best for kids."

Investing in high-quality early care and education is the fiscally responsible thing to do.

Research makes it clear that we lose more than we gain when we sacrifice access to high-quality early care and education for affordability. A dollar spent on mediocre- or low-quality care is a lost opportunity to invest in the future. In contrast, a dollar spent for high-quality early care and education yields an average return of \$4,¹⁷ and in circumstances where children are extremely vulnerable, the return can be as high as \$13.¹⁸ This return includes money saved on special education, health care, social services, and the criminal justice system, as well as money earned from greater educational attainment, increased earnings, and increased productivity.

Investment in early care and education is an investment in the economic vitality of our communities.

In addition to long-term investment returns, investment in early care and education also plays a role in the current economic vitality of our communities. Access to early care and education for young children is an essential infrastructure support for local employment and labor force participation.^{19, 20} A community's ability to attract business investment is frequently dependent upon the size and the quality of the labor supply available, and labor supply is dependent upon access to affordable early care and education opportunities for the children of potential employees. Employees who are unable to meet the daily care and education needs of their children leave their jobs. The *2016 National Survey of Children's Health* finds that many parents of children age 5 and younger—2 million nationally and over 4,000 in Nebraska—are forced to make career sacrifices, report quitting, not taking, or changing jobs because of child care problems.²¹ This not only undermines family economic stability, it also affects the employer's bottom line and the community's economic vitality. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce reports that turnover as a result of lack of child care costs businesses 20 percent of an hourly employee's salary and up to 150 percent of a manager's salary.²² Employers across the country, including those in Nebraska, understand the costs associated with employee turnover and are coming to recognize the economic value of investing in early care and education as a support that stabilizes their workforce.

NEBRASKA CONTEXT

Like other states across the country, Nebraska is working hard to close the gap between what we know our young children need and what we currently provide. Nebraskans value early childhood care and education, yet we fall short of providing the level of sustained investment needed to support a diverse early childhood workforce in providing high-quality care and education.

A statewide poll of Nebraska residents shows that Nebraskans value early care and education. Yet, only 15 percent report being very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs available in the city or area where they live, and only 10 percent strongly believe that most young children in Nebraska are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten. In addition, 84 percent of Nebraska counties that have child care facilities lack sufficient child care slots to meet the needs of families living in the county, with many providers reporting chronic difficulty finding qualified staff to work in early care settings and the primary grades. In fact, early childhood education and early childhood special education are considered areas of teacher shortage for the state.²³

We know that increasing the number of skilled early childhood professionals and quality child care and learning environments is key to the healthy growth and development of Nebraska's young children. Yet, in our current system, Nebraska's early childhood professionals are undervalued and underpaid, making it difficult to retain the highly qualified professionals we have and recruit the additional professionals we need to meet the demand and fulfill families' expectations for quality. For example, in Nebraska today:

- In 2016, the median wage in our state for early childhood professionals teaching in community-based settings was \$18,706 a year—below the federal poverty line for a family of three.²⁴
- Salaries are higher for PreKindergarten – Grade 3 teachers, but many still struggle financially. About 20 percent hold second jobs, and nearly 1 in 10 use public assistance.
- The benefits picture is also problematic. Early childhood professionals do not consistently receive retirement benefits or paid maternity leave. Only half of those working in community-based centers get paid sick leave.

This lack of support causes significant hardships for many early childhood professionals, resulting in high turnover rates and significant rates of depression.²⁵ If we want our children to thrive—now and for the rest of their lives—we need to be sure that the adults who care for them can also afford to take care of themselves and their families. We need to provide adequate compensation and professional support to retain the highly qualified professionals who are already in the early childhood field and to attract new people to the field.

Nebraska's early childhood professionals work in various settings—including homes, child care centers, and schools—and expectations and requirements for their professional practice vary based on setting and funding.

Like many states across the nation, the early care and education system in Nebraska is a patchwork of efforts and initiatives that have developed at different times throughout our history in response to specific needs and contexts. As a result, Nebraska has a “mixed-delivery” early care and education system, meaning that (1) early care and education services are delivered in a variety of settings, including homes, centers, and schools, and (2) delivery of early care and education is embedded within different parts of the economic system. For example, most schools and many community-based child care centers operate in the not-for-profit sector, whereas home-based owner-operated child care centers function as small businesses in the for-profit sector. This mixed-delivery

Why the Early Childhood Workforce Matters

system entails various regulatory standards and monitoring requirements that are not coordinated across settings and funding sources. As a result, there is no shared understanding of what constitutes high-quality early care and education across settings, yet the needs of children do not differ based on where they are receiving their care and education. Regulatory inconsistency across early care and education settings has significant implications for the early childhood workforce, affecting qualification indicators such as teacher licensure and credentialing. Members of our early childhood workforce are confronting contradictory expectations based on where they work, rather than consistent professional standards based on what their day-to-day work with children entails. Rather than focusing on the place, or setting, in which an individual works, we must focus on the needs of the children and families served—and on ensuring that the early childhood workforce has the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively meet those needs.

Nebraska’s early childhood professionals live and work in communities across the state, including rural areas, small towns, and big cities.

Nebraska is a large state, covering more than 77,000 square miles. The major urban centers are in the eastern part of the state, with widespread rural areas outside the larger cities. More than half of the state’s children live in Douglas, Lancaster, and Sarpy Counties, which encompass the state’s largest cities of Omaha and Lincoln. Outside of the Omaha and Lincoln metro areas, the two largest population centers are Grand Island, with a population of 51,390, followed by Kearney, with a population of 33,835. Nebraska has 28 cities with populations ranging between 5,000 and 30,000, and 117 towns with populations ranging between 800 and 5,000. Hundreds of communities across Nebraska have populations of less than 800. This rural-urban continuum results in dramatic variations in tax bases, programs, and implementation possibilities for local communities across the state.

Nebraska’s early childhood professionals serve children and families with diverse backgrounds and experiences, yet the workforce does not reflect the diversity of children and families served.

Variations in lived experience are related to a family’s culture, structure, language, religious beliefs, and economic status as well as a child’s racial/ethnic identity, gender, and ability status. Consequently, Nebraska’s early childhood professionals must be able to respectfully and effectively serve the children and families in their classrooms.²⁶ Nebraska's population is becoming more racially, ethnically, and

culturally diverse. In 2018, 33.5 percent of Nebraska's population under the age of 5 were children of color.²⁷ However, the *Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey* reports that the majority of the state's early childhood workforce is white—ranging from 87 percent of center-based teachers up to 99 percent of school-based PreKindergarten – Grade 3 teachers. Across all settings, the early childhood workforce is less than 2 percent black and less than 2 percent Hispanic; just over 2 percent of survey respondents reported their race as “other.” The workforce also lacks gender diversity: 98 percent of Nebraska's early childhood professionals across all settings are women.

SPOTLIGHT

Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference

A powerful example of an existing statewide effort to ensure Nebraska's children and families have access to high-quality early care and education is the annual Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference. In 2019, the conference drew more than 415 community leaders from 92 communities across the state. These leaders gathered to focus on building high-quality early childhood programs in their communities, underscoring the central role such programs play in a community's vitality and economic development. Co-sponsored by 20 statewide organizations, the conference highlighted the demand that exists for high-quality early care and education programs in communities across the state and Nebraskans' desire to learn more and do more on behalf of children and families, as well as on behalf of the businesses that rely on working parents.

In Nebraska, a family's ability to choose the early care and education environment that is best for their child varies based on where they live and how much they can afford to spend.

As Nebraskans, we value autonomy and recognize the importance of providing families with choices. In our mixed-delivery system, families may choose to have

Why the Early Childhood Workforce Matters

their child enrolled in a variety of settings such as home-based child care, a center-based program, or a program connected to a public school. Elementary-aged children may be in private or public schools, and a wide range of choices may exist within those schools for services in and beyond the classroom. This system of early care and education offers families options for their children based on the needs of the family and the child. Preferences for care may stem from a family's culture or religious affiliation, the child's medical needs or ability, or from many other unique considerations. Many communities, however, do not have the resources to provide families with a variety of high-quality options. Even when such options are available, many families do not have the financial resources to pay for the quality of care they want for their child.

Nebraskans are working to expand access to high-quality early care and education for children and families.

Motivated and committed people across the state are striving to provide young children in our state with the care and education they need to thrive intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Many of these efforts include collaboration across sectors and communities, demonstrating Nebraskans' willingness to work together on behalf of children and families. Collectively, these efforts all point in the same general direction. However, increased coordination, collaboration, and communication are needed to ensure that individual initiatives complement rather than compete with each other. Collectively, we want to invest our time, resources, and money in evidence-based strategies that are mutually reinforcing and propel us toward our common goal of creating an early childhood system that will improve the life of every child, every family, every community, and every member of the early childhood workforce in Nebraska. With this in mind, the commission identified the following four areas of focus, based on Nebraska's existing strengths and challenges:

- Professional qualifications
- Funding
- Public will and commitment
- Infrastructure for accountability and implementation

For each of these focus areas, the commission defined a goal and recommendations, all of which contribute to an overarching vision. The next section provides the vision, followed by detailed discussion and justification for each goal and recommendation.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"I'm usually the first to know when a woman in my town is pregnant because she has to get on the waiting list for child care. I usually know before the grandparents and sometimes even before the fathers."

"We must ensure that all Nebraskans recognize that the early childhood workforce are members of a profession — one that is in need of being elevated to a priority profession."



A Plan for Elevating Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce

VISION

Nebraska will elevate the early childhood workforce to a priority profession benefitting all children from birth through Grade 3.

WHO IS THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE?

Those who are paid to provide care and education for young children (birth through Grade 3) on a daily or near-daily basis, as well as home visitors who partner with families, and coaches and others who work directly with early childhood educators.

Members of the workforce are part of the early childhood profession and are referred to in this report as early childhood professionals, educators, teachers, or caregivers.

WHAT IS A PRIORITY PROFESSION?

A priority profession is a profession whose work is essential to the social and economic well-being of communities and, therefore, critical to the state's future.

Its members are:

- Qualified in accordance with professional standards and fairly compensated for their work
- Deserving of professional recognition

We must ensure that all Nebraskans recognize that members of the early childhood workforce are members of a profession—one that is in need of being elevated to a priority profession.

Goal 1: Highly Qualified Workforce

GOAL 1: NEBRASKA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE WILL BE HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND WILL REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THEY SERVE.

- 1.1 Define and support high-quality practice across all early care and education settings.
- 1.2 Develop professional pathways that are affordable and accessible in order to recruit and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.

WHAT IS HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION?

Early care and education programs reflect the values, beliefs, and practices of their local communities, and, therefore, a quality program in one community may look quite different than a quality program in another community.²⁸ Despite such variations in appearance, however, all quality programs share some common characteristics. Research evidence is clear that the components of high quality must be defined in terms of each child's experience—and that early childhood professionals play an important role in shaping the experiences of the children they serve.²⁹ Highly qualified early childhood professionals are skilled at working with families and other professionals to create environments that allow each child to experience responsive interactions that nurture the child's development across social, emotional, physical, and cognitive domains. Characteristics of high-quality programs and settings include:³⁰

- Warm, supportive adult-child and family relationships
- Safe, stimulating physical environments
- Frequent one-on-one, language-rich, adult-child interactions
- Opportunities for children to explore and learn across a variety of developmental domains—cognitive, language, emotional, social, and physical
- Adult behaviors that are sensitive to the individual and cultural needs of young children and their families

Several of these characteristics point directly to the importance of ensuring that members of the early childhood workforce have the qualifications and support they need to build positive relationships with the diverse children and families they



serve. Yet, some measures of quality, such as licensing regulations for child care providers, focus more on classroom materials, routines, and teacher-student ratios than on the quality of interactions and relationships. Other quality standards, such as the Step Up to Quality program in Nebraska, which provides quality rating and improvement resources, include a focus on relationships, but if we are to ensure quality across settings, we must ensure that any assessment of quality takes into consideration the professional qualifications of—and the supports available to—our early childhood workforce.

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT A HIGHLY QUALIFIED EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE?

The commission identified three key requirements of the workforce that are crucial for providing high-quality care for children from birth through Grade 3. The Nebraska early childhood workforce must have:

1. Appropriate professional qualifications
2. Adequate compensation
3. A supportive professional environment in which to work

Each of these features of a highly qualified workforce is discussed on the following pages in the current context of early care and education in Nebraska. Additionally, to achieve and retain a highly qualified workforce, Nebraska must ensure that early childhood professionals have affordable and equitable access to professional development pathways.

Goal 1: Highly Qualified Workforce

Appropriate professional qualifications

Various approaches exist for describing the professional qualifications of the early childhood workforce, including those based on professional titles and related credentialing requirements and those based on professional competencies.

In Nebraska, no single system is in place that aligns these approaches across professional roles and settings. In fact, a challenge to understanding professional qualifications across the birth through Grade 3 early childhood continuum is the bifurcation between the birth – age 5 and the Kindergarten – Grade 3 system.

Examples of these variations include the following:

- **Quality as defined by professional titles and settings.** Within Nebraska's mixed-delivery system of early care and education, titles for early childhood professionals working with children from birth through age 5 vary based on where the professionals work and how their jobs are funded. Examples include preschool teacher, child care provider, Head Start teacher, Educare lead teacher, Sixpence home visitor, and others. The credentials required to obtain these titles also vary, with requirements ranging from a high school diploma to a master's degree in early childhood education (see Appendix B). Yet, despite the varied titles and credentials, these individuals often have a very similar role—building relationships that effectively support children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. The variations in titles and credentials make it difficult for families to know which individuals are best qualified to fulfill their child's needs. In addition, inconsistent titles and credentialing expectations make it difficult for early childhood professionals to identify and pursue clear career-development pathways.
- **Quality as defined by teacher certification.** Early childhood professionals who work in school settings serving children in PreKindergarten – Grade 3 must be certified to teach in Nebraska. In order to meet the state's requirements, these professionals must hold a bachelor's degree and complete an approved teacher preparation program. For these professionals, the bachelor's degree serves as a proxy for career readiness. In other words, institutions of higher education provide a system of accountability that supports the assumption that those who successfully complete the degree program will have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the classroom. There is no comparable system of accountability for those early childhood professionals who have extensive practical experience and are highly skilled but lack a bachelor's degree. Many of the early childhood professionals in this latter category are from communities and groups across Nebraska that face significant socioeconomic and/or educational-opportunity barriers.

- **Quality as defined by professional competencies.** As our understanding has grown of how children learn and develop, so has our understanding of what adults must provide to support optimal child development and learning. The specific competencies of early childhood professionals—the skills, knowledge, and dispositions required to work effectively with young children and families—can be and have been defined. For example, the Nebraska Department of Education published *Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals*,³¹ which define what adults who work with young children need to know, understand, and be able to do. These competencies emphasize that early childhood professionals must be more than warm and loving; they must also possess the specialized skills and knowledge required to effectively fulfill their roles. These recently revised competencies are based on national research and standards—but they extend only to Kindergarten entry. Standards for elementary teachers from first grade upward are outlined within other state regulations and district policies and often are tied to standards defined by national curriculum organizations. There is a lack of coherence between these standards and those for professionals working with children in pre-primary settings. This lack of coherence makes it difficult to develop a shared system of accountability to ensure high-quality practice for all professionals working with children from birth through Grade 3. The lack of coherence also presents challenges for early childhood professionals who seek to develop the skills and knowledge they need to pursue career opportunities in a variety of settings.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"Early learning people are specialists and if other people could understand that all of those interactions you have are deliberate and intentional and purpose-driven ... I just think they'd understand that's the magic of preschool, Kindergarten teachers, child care providers."

Goal 1: Highly Qualified Workforce

As illustrated by these examples, professional qualifications are described and defined in dramatically different ways across early care and education settings, with no clear connection from one setting to the next. Simply labeling someone as a “teacher” (whether in child care or second grade) does not mean the individual has the necessary skills and knowledge to be an early childhood professional. (Appendix B details the various roles, titles, and qualifications currently required across Nebraska’s early care and education programs.) The variety of professional titles, requirements, and competencies reflects the complexity of the early childhood field in practice—especially the historical division between birth – age 5 settings and Kindergarten – Grade 3 settings—and contributes to a fragmented understanding of the early childhood profession. This fragmentation is also reflected in how early childhood professionals are compensated for the work they do.

Adequate compensation

Like the variations in qualifications described above, differences in compensation for early childhood professionals are often determined by the setting in which a professional works, rather than by the qualifications or role. For example, early childhood professionals who work in community-based preschool settings are paid less than those who work in public school Kindergarten – Grade 3 settings, even if they are required to have identical qualifications.³² These discrepancies in compensation are largely due to funding sources that differ from setting to setting.

Our current system provides limited financial incentives for early childhood professionals to personally invest in their own professional development. The *Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey* data clearly demonstrate that earning a degree in early childhood does not necessarily lead to a subsequent increase in wages.³³ In order to earn more, early childhood professionals must be certified to work in school settings. These settings require teacher licensure, a requirement that is often unaffordable and inaccessible for many in the current workforce.

Similarly, there are no financial incentives for providers to invest in the ongoing professional development of the early childhood professionals they employ. In fact, providers who do so run the risk of losing their employees to more lucrative opportunities, because they are not able to meaningfully increase compensation when qualifications increase. All too often, early childhood professionals who earn degrees move from home- or community-based settings to school settings in order to receive increased compensation. Not surprisingly, low levels of compensation often result in high turnover rates (as high as 26 percent in some Nebraska early

care and education settings).³⁴ This revolving door phenomenon is associated with lower-quality care for children.

Given the low wages in the field, many early care and education professionals face economic insecurity and stress; 27 percent of home-based teachers receive some type of public assistance (see Table 1.1). Lack of health insurance, low wages, and the need to hold multiple jobs to earn a living wage are associated with depression in early childhood professionals. Such depression can lead to less sensitivity to young children and more frequent staff turnover, both impacting the quality of settings for children and families.³⁵

TABLE 1.1 | CURRENT STATUS OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

	HOME-BASED	CENTER-BASED	PREK	K-3
Associate's degree	21%	23%	1%	—
Bachelor's degree (or higher)	23%	46%	98%	100%
Utilizing public assistance	27%	20%	10%	8%
Holding second jobs	12%	19%	20%	19%
Have health insurance	—	39%	91%	94%
Have sick leave	—	50%	97%	98%
Have retirement benefits	—	35%	94%	94%
Have paid maternity leave	—	20%	48%	50%
With clinically depressive symptoms	8%	11%	10%	8%
Median annual pay	\$25,980	\$18,706	\$36,000	\$41,000

Supportive professional environment

The early childhood workforce must have access to a supportive professional environment that assists and empowers professionals to provide high-quality care and education for children and families. A supportive professional environment—one that compensates workers fairly and offers career advancement opportunities—is critical for attracting and retaining high-quality practitioners in the field. Moreover, a professional environment in which supervisors, principals, and directors have a background in child development and early education is

Goal 1: Highly Qualified Workforce

essential for enabling early childhood educators to implement best practices for children and families. These leaders must also provide a context in which stress is minimized for early childhood professionals and well-being is made a priority. Currently, access to such contextual supports and professional development opportunities varies by setting and funding source.

Working in a setting that lacks environmental supports takes its toll on professionals, limiting their ability to provide high-quality care. Early childhood professionals' well-being is essential for supporting their engagement in high-quality interactions and instruction with young children and families. Yet, early childhood professionals experience higher rates of stress than those in many other fields, which in turn results in many professionals leaving the field. Daily stress within the early education field can lead to emotional exhaustion, physical illness, burnout, and loss of interest in teaching.³⁶ Depression and other mental health conditions are also common among early childhood professionals; in the *Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey*, 86 percent of early childhood educators reported experiencing some depressive symptoms during the previous week. The health and well-being of Nebraska early childhood professionals is essential for supporting high-quality services for children and families.

Affordable and equitable access to professional development pathways

If we are to recruit and retain a diverse and highly qualified early childhood workforce—which is essential for ensuring high-quality care and education for all children—Nebraska must provide affordable and equitable access to professional development pathways. Our existing system of fragmented workforce regulations and credentialing requirements creates significant structural, cultural, and intrapersonal barriers that prevent some professionals from enrolling in higher education. Attending college requires knowledge of the culture of higher education and access to resources not readily available to individuals from communities and groups that face socioeconomic and/or educational-opportunity barriers.

Some cities, such as Washington, D.C., and New York, have started to implement higher entry-level requirements for the early childhood workforce—associate's or bachelor's degrees. These efforts are designed to increase qualifications and allow for higher wages within the field. However, many in the current workforce do not have access to or cannot afford to pay for traditional higher education training, and many cannot afford to take the time off work needed to complete a degree. Access to higher education programs depends upon a host of factors, including where a

program is offered, how much it costs, program flexibility, program focus/content (e.g., infant/toddler, pre-elementary, literacy), and program length. Opportunities exist that target one (sometimes two) of these variables (e.g., T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood®), but clear, affordable, and accessible pathways are not consistently available to those who are already working in the field. For example, requirements for field-based placements and attendance in courses requires time away from work—time that is typically not covered or reimbursed by employers. In addition, the lack of articulation of courses between preparation programs (especially between associate's and bachelor's degree programs) often means that students must repeat classes or take additional courses, adding time and expense when financial resources are already strained. Even for those individuals who are entering the early childhood workforce for the first time and follow a traditional higher education pathway, the costs of pursuing a degree are not offset by the salary in the field. Among early childhood professionals working as lead teachers in community-based settings in Nebraska, 46 percent have a bachelor's degree—yet the median salary for this group of professionals is

"Differences in compensation for early childhood professionals are often determined by the setting in which a professional works, rather than by the professional's qualifications or role."

\$22,870,³⁷ whereas student loan debt in Nebraska averages \$25,750.³⁸

Further, we do not want to diminish the accumulated expertise of seasoned early care and education professionals. There is more to ensuring equitable access to professional development pathways than removing barriers to success in higher education. Currently, we have no way of acknowledging the professional competencies of workforce members who acquired their early childhood knowledge and skills outside of a college classroom. The creation of equitable access to professional development pathways needs to include career lattice options where demonstrated expertise is recognized and can be communicated to those seeking high-quality care and education.

Goal 1: Highly Qualified Workforce

Barriers to higher education, limited opportunities for ongoing professional development, and a lack of clear career pathways for advancement limit early childhood professionals' ability to provide high-quality care and education to all of Nebraska's children. The early childhood workforce needs equitable access to clear and affordable professional development pathways in order to develop and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. These pathways are fundamental to ensuring that both the current and future workforce are prepared to meet the needs of Nebraska's children.

WHAT WE CAN DO: GOAL 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful early care and education systems in other states and countries have created common conceptual understandings of quality that explicitly align qualifications, financing, and regulations across agencies. Developing a common understanding and framework will allow Nebraskans to similarly align systems across settings, while honoring the strengths of the current workforce and the choices available to families in our current mixed-delivery system. To fulfill Goal 1, the commission proposes two recommendations, each of which is described below. Detailed strategies that would support implementation of the recommendations are summarized in Appendix C.

GOAL 1: NEBRASKA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE WILL BE HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND WILL REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THEY SERVE.

Recommendation 1.1: Define and support high-quality practice across all early childhood settings.

The commission recommends developing a framework for understanding high-quality practice that (1) defines shared terminology for professional roles, (2) establishes a common set of core professional competencies for all professionals working with children from birth through Grade 3, and (3) identifies entry-level requirements for early childhood professionals across all settings. Defining such a framework will:

- Facilitate alignment of professional competencies for early childhood professionals across job requirements, degree programs, teacher certification programs, and other systems of professional credentialing and licensure.
- Facilitate alignment of policies and processes across systems of initial preparation, professional development, regulatory oversight, and funding for early care and education.

- Provide clarity to families and the public about what constitutes high-quality early childhood care and education.
- Empower professionals by promoting greater continuity and coherence in pre-service preparation, ongoing professional development, qualification requirements, and accountability efforts.

Nebraska's future depends upon the state defining and supporting high-quality early childhood experiences and professionals, no matter the setting.

Recommendation 1.2: Develop professional pathways that are affordable and accessible in order to recruit and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.

Explicitly defining the competencies needed for professionals upon entry into the field—and, over time, defining competencies for specialized roles within the field—will allow clear delineation of career pathways for all professionals in the field. A distinct advantage of developing professional pathways based upon competencies is the ability to honor the skills and knowledge of those in the field who do not have degrees from institutions of higher education but who have acquired requisite knowledge and skills from years of experience. These professionals bring expertise, experience, and diversity to early care and education. Yet, no system exists that honors and elevates this expertise.

By explicitly identifying barriers within communities and across the state that prevent current and aspiring early childhood professionals from accessing professional development pathways, the state can better support the early childhood workforce. For example, such factors as lack of transportation or broadband access in rural communities, financial constraints, and a shortage of alternative practicum settings to meet the needs of students who work full time all negatively impact the ability of early childhood professionals to attain the skills and knowledge they need to effectively serve Nebraska's children and families.

Goal 2: Full Funding by 2030

GOAL 2: EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION IN NEBRASKA WILL BE FULLY FUNDED BY 2030.

- 2.1 Build on Nebraska's current investment in early care and education.
- 2.2 Develop locally informed cost estimates of high-quality early care and education with a highly qualified, adequately compensated workforce.
- 2.3 Close the funding gap between Nebraska's current investments and the total investments needed to fully fund high-quality early care and education.

WHAT CHALLENGES TO FUNDING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION DOES NEBRASKA CURRENTLY FACE?

It is clear that if we increase the expectations of the early childhood workforce without improving compensation and working conditions, we are not only creating a situation that is unfair, but also one that is unsustainable. We simply cannot recruit and retain the number of highly qualified early childhood professionals we need in Nebraska without ensuring adequate compensation and support for the workforce. However, we also cannot raise wages for the early childhood workforce without considering the impact on other aspects of funding early care and education. The question of how to cover the costs of ensuring adequate compensation for the early childhood workforce is dependent on addressing a number of other challenges related to funding high-quality early care and education across the state, including the following:

- **Most businesses cannot afford to pay early childhood professionals more.** When the revenue received is insufficient to cover the costs of providing care, business owners and operators cannot afford to pay workers a fair wage.
- **Parents cannot afford to pay more.** Simply increasing fees paid for early care and education services is not the answer, because the majority of families with young children cannot pay more than they do currently.
- **Programs intended to assist parents with the cost of early care and education are not designed with children's needs or business stability in mind.** Government programs originally designed to support parental employment by helping to pay all or part of child care expenses, such as



child care subsidy, do not pay service providers enough to cover the actual cost of providing those services. In short, service providers who accept child care subsidy payments do so at a net loss to their bottom line or personal budget. Further, such assistance programs for employment support can actually undermine enrollment stability, making a child's early learning and development contingent upon a parent's employment status rather than basing it on the child's developmental and learning needs.

- **Without stable enrollment, providers' business models are unsustainable.** Without stable enrollment, providers cannot establish stable revenue, and without stable revenue, providers cannot create business plans that cover the costs of high-quality programs delivered by highly qualified professionals. In the absence of revenue stability, the investments required to ensure that early care and education professionals meet quality standards are too risky, often putting investments in quality at odds with meeting the bottom line and keeping the doors open.

Given these challenges, we must rethink our approach to funding early care and education. To build revenue stability among service providers and support investment in high-quality programs delivered by highly qualified professionals is a challenge that requires commitment from all of us. The success of early care and education in Nebraska depends on private-sector revenues from families, businesses, and the philanthropic community, in combination with public-sector revenues from local, state, and federal governments.

WHAT IS FULL FUNDING?

Simply stated, full funding is defined as the combined public- and private-sector funding necessary to cover the total cost of ensuring that high-quality early care and education is available and accessible for every young child in Nebraska. Until recently, we have not fully recognized the total cost of early care and education, not to mention the total cost of high-quality programs staffed by highly qualified professionals. Confounding this is the fact that there is a significant difference between the sources of funding for the early care and education of children from birth to Kindergarten entry and the sources of funding for the early care and education of children enrolled in Kindergarten through Grade 3. In the United States, families pay the majority of early care and education costs for children under age 5. By comparison, public K-12 education is delivered with few or no fees charged to families; instead, the costs of delivering K-12 education are shared across Nebraska citizens. Because of this distinction, it is of the utmost urgency to address gaps in funding for service delivery to children from birth to Kindergarten entry.

Simply adding up what it costs for all children currently enrolled in early care and education programs statewide does not represent the total cost of providing early care and education for all families in Nebraska. At present, the gap in revenue to cover the true cost of care is being subsidized by the early childhood workforce itself. These professionals work for exceedingly low salaries and benefits. Many are small business owners who work upwards of 60 hours per week to make ends meet. Unless we address the issue of inadequate compensation for the early childhood workforce, we will fail to ensure high-quality early care and education is available and accessible for every young child in Nebraska.

"Simply adding up what it costs for all children currently enrolled in early care and education programs statewide does not represent the total cost of providing early care and education for all families in Nebraska."

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"I just had a major surgery, and the doctor suggested I take six weeks off. Well, I have an in-home child care. There's no way I could take six weeks off. So, I only took two weeks off, without pay. Between my health insurance and my medical bills, so far I owe \$10,000 out of pocket."

WHY TACKLE FUNDING THE TOTAL COST OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND NOT JUST THE COSTS OF A HIGHLY QUALIFIED WORKFORCE?

The short answer to this question is that one is not possible without the other. A lot of work has gone into understanding what it takes to be a highly qualified early care and education professional and the supports needed to recruit and retain these professionals⁴⁰ in every setting where early childhood education is provided.⁴¹ In fact, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine called together a committee of experts to figure this out. Charged with the task of outlining a framework for a funding strategy that would provide reliable, accessible, high-quality early care and education for young children from birth to Kindergarten entry that included a highly qualified and adequately compensated workforce, experts representing the fields of education, economics, child development, early learning, and public policy, among others, recommend the adoption of a quality-oriented, cost-based approach to financing early care and education.

A quality-oriented, cost-based approach to financing early care and education sets funding targets to levels that meet the total cost of high-quality early care and education, including a highly qualified, adequately compensated early childhood workforce. This approach places the emphasis on developing funding levels to cover the cost of quality for all children instead of letting quality and access be determined by the available funding. The total cost of quality accounts for the following interdependent parts of the early care and education system:

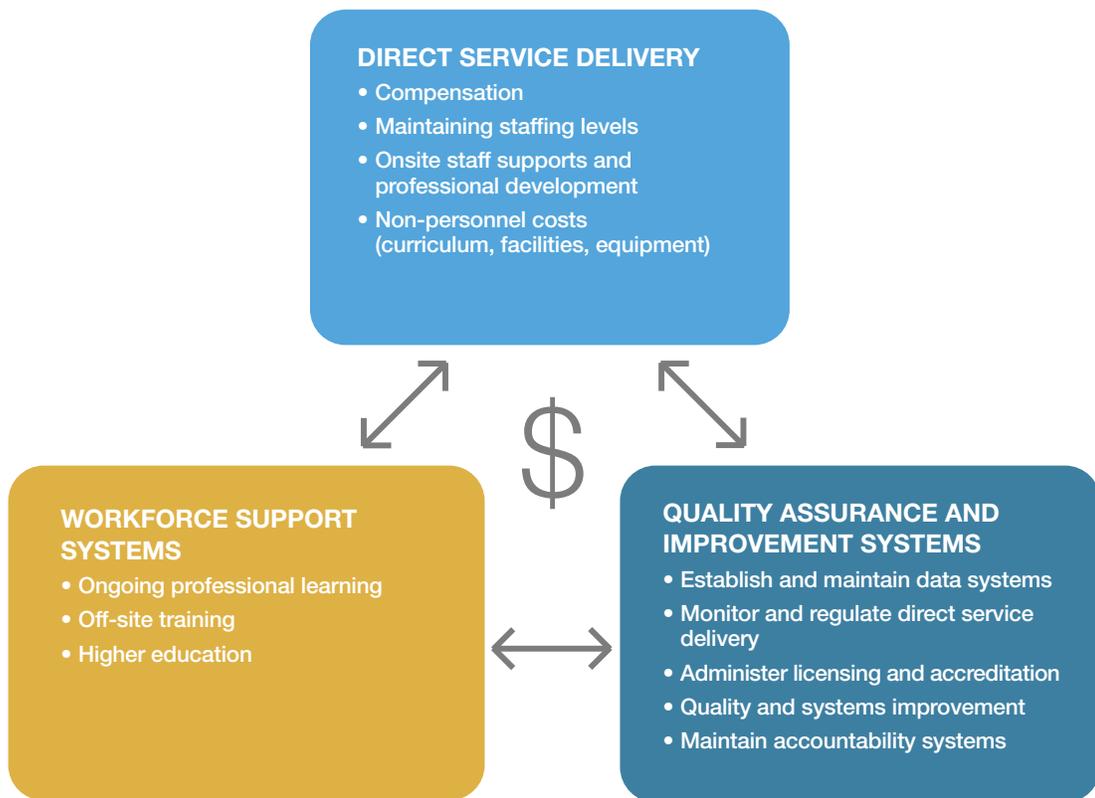
Goal 2: Full Funding by 2030

- **Onsite costs of providing early care and education.** Examples include teacher compensation, adequate staffing levels to cover hours of operation, and maintenance of facilities and equipment. Two types of capital costs contribute to facilities costs: immediate costs for modernizing or building facilities (transition costs) and long-term costs (occupancy costs) for maintenance or rental costs of the space. Ongoing occupancy costs for facilities are included in onsite cost estimates, but transition costs for building or renovating facilities are generally not accounted for in the costs of delivering services.
- **System-level workforce development costs of recruiting, preparing, and retaining a highly qualified early childhood workforce.** Examples include investments in affordable access to higher education programs at Nebraska's colleges and universities as well as the state's support of such resources as Nebraska's Early Learning Coordinators, who provide ongoing professional learning opportunities regionally across the state.
- **System-level quality assurance and improvement costs to maintain the integrity of the early care and education system.** This broad category of costs includes monitoring activities, investments in quality and improvement systems (such as Nebraska's Step Up to Quality program), data systems, and licensing and credentialing systems.
- **Stabilizing family participation.** This is key to stabilizing enrollment and expected revenue, which is essential to making investments in workforce qualifications and compensation. Fully funding high-quality early care and education requires including the funds needed to ensure that no family is priced out of participation and all Nebraska families have equitable access to affordable services.

Each part of the early care and education system has distinct but interdependent functions (see Figure 2.1). Consequently, successful investment in the early childhood workforce is contingent on purposeful coordination of effort and resources across the system. Direct service delivery, where onsite costs are incurred, is the most visible part of early care and education. These include the home-based, center-based, and school-based providers that families take their children to every day. What may not be so obvious is how direct service delivery is dependent on other parts of the system. Direct service delivery depends on system-level workforce development to ensure individual members of the early childhood workforce have access to credible professional development opportunities that build the knowledge and skills required to work effectively with young children.

Additionally, providers, workforce professionals, and families all rely on system-level quality assurance and improvement as a stamp of approval that communicates whether an early care and education program or an early childhood professional has met quality standards. Further, quality assurance and improvement systems collect and analyze data to maintain accountability and identify needed improvements. From a quality-oriented, cost-based perspective on financing early care and education, there is no utility in trying to break down the funding needed for onsite direct service delivery costs separately from the funding needed to cover the costs of system-level workforce development or system-level quality assurance and improvement. The cost of any one of these investments is dependent upon investment in the others. And the ability to reliably fund each area of investment requires the stable revenue that comes from stable enrollment.

FIGURE 2.1 | DIRECT SERVICE DELIVERY, WORKFORCE SUPPORT SYSTEMS, AND QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"We have stringent poverty guidelines for Head Start. There is pride swallowing when I think about the fact that I could qualify to have a child in the program I work in. I am the teacher in my program, yet I qualify as a parent."

CAN WE ESTIMATE THE TOTAL COST OF QUALITY IN NEBRASKA?

Establishing the total cost of quality early care and education in Nebraska is central to understanding the investments needed to ensure that Nebraska's early childhood workforce is highly qualified and adequately compensated. In order to estimate this cost at the national level, the committee of experts assembled by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine relied on existing research to build a model that estimates what it would take to implement a high-quality early care and education system that is both supportive of highly qualified professionals and affordable for all families.⁴² Though the model they developed is an "illustrative, hypothetical, cost estimate," the results are remarkably close to the level of investment in early care and education recommended by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to their member countries. The OECD recommends nations allocate 0.8 percent, or 8/10ths of 1 percent, of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to early care and education.⁴³ By comparison, the cost model developed by the National Academies is equivalent to 0.75 percent, or 7.5/10ths of 1 percent, of the GDP of the United States. Further, the illustrative estimate outlines the investment needed to support a highly qualified early childhood workforce, the value of which cannot be overstated. Building their cost model on the groundbreaking work detailed in the Institute of Medicine's research-based report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*,⁴⁴ each of the policy specifications and assumptions applied reflects research from the fields of child development and early learning as well as principles for quality professional practice. This approach

moves beyond a sole focus on direct service delivery costs to include the system-level costs deemed essential for providing high-quality early care and education with a highly qualified and adequately compensated early childhood workforce. This is an important distinction because it informs our calculation of Nebraska's current investments in early care and education, enabling us to recognize all funds that Nebraska is investing.

Though imperfect, because Nebraska's population and economy are not a direct reflection of the national population and economy, our best projection of the total cost of quality is based on adapting the national model to the Nebraska economy. The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission recommends that Nebraska's private and public sectors work in partnership toward funding the early care and education system at the level of 0.75 percent, or 7.5/10ths of 1 percent, of Nebraska's GDP. Based on the size of Nebraska's 2017 economy of \$110.5 billion, the estimated total cost of high-quality early care and education with a highly qualified and adequately compensated early childhood workforce approximates to \$911.9 million⁴⁵ (details of calculations and assumptions applied are provided in Appendix D).⁴⁶ This estimate provides a direction, a north star, toward which we can aim our efforts. To get started, \$911.9 million can be our guide, but we must work to develop Nebraska-specific models of the total cost of quality that reflect community-level differences. Once we are able to work with community leaders to develop such models, we can refine our estimates of the total cost of care and hone our funding focus. In the meantime, the commission recommends the development of a plan that builds on Nebraska's current private- and public-sector investments to bridge the gap between what we currently invest and the investment needed to fully fund high-quality care and education in Nebraska.

"The ability to reliably fund each area of investment requires the stable revenue that comes from stable enrollment."

WHAT IS OUR CURRENT INVESTMENT?

The money used to finance early care and education comes from both public and private sectors. Public-sector contributions include federal-, state-, and local-government funds. Private-sector contributions are primarily made up of the money families spend on the tuition and fees charged for services rendered but also include funds from the business and philanthropic communities. Understanding our current investment in the total cost of high-quality early care and education starts with using the quality-oriented, cost-based approach to identify funds supporting direct service delivery as well as investments in system-level workforce supports and system-level quality assurance and improvement.

As shown in Table 2.1 and Figure 2.2, public-sector funds are allocated to support the provision of early care and education through financing mechanisms. Financing mechanisms distribute money to providers, families, and the early childhood workforce. Each mechanism has its own set of regulatory standards or monitoring requirements that reflect the policy and program goals of which it is a part. Distinctions between financing mechanisms can create situations where standards are not coordinated, or are even in conflict, across mechanisms. For providers, the complexity and cost of compliance with the requirements of multiple funders is burdensome, requiring time and energy that is therefore unavailable to the children in their care. National experts find the current structure to be inflexible, siloed, and inefficient and recommend that all financing mechanisms use consistent, high-quality standards as the basis for receipt of funds.⁴⁷ This is not to suggest that the policy and program goals of each mechanism be abandoned but that across all mechanisms, the same high-quality standards be expected.

To understand Nebraska's current public investment in early care and education for children from birth through age 5, the commission established estimates of the funding streams originating at the federal and state levels (see Table 2.1).⁴⁸ The federal and state combined contribution to early care and education in Nebraska was \$211.4 million in fiscal year 2017. Federally, Nebraska received a total of \$134.7 million in funding that was allocated through six different financing mechanisms originating in three agencies of the federal government—the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Agriculture,⁴⁹ and the U.S. Department of Education.^{50, 51}

The State of Nebraska provided a total of \$76.7 million allocated through nine different financing mechanisms originating in two agencies of state government—

the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the Nebraska Department of Education.⁵²

Beyond the public-sector contributions, calculating the private-sector contributions completes the current picture of Nebraska’s total investment in early care and education. The commission used the \$211.4 million public-sector total as the basis for estimating the private-sector contributions. According to research conducted

TABLE 2.1 | PUBLIC-SECTOR FUNDING

FEDERAL	DOLLARS	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Head Start and Early Head Start	\$54,190,068	40.2%
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$28,615,966	21.2%
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP 0-12)	\$28,361,038	21.0%
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Transfer	\$10,324,763	7.7%
Title I	\$8,210,489	6.1%
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	\$5,046,306	3.7%
Federal Subtotal	\$134,748,630	99.9%
STATE	DOLLARS	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$41,866,708	54.6%
Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act (TEEOSA)— Early Childhood Calculated State Aid	\$20,367,038	26.6%
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund (Sixpence)— State General Fund	\$4,800,000	6.3%
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund (Sixpence)— Endowment Income	\$3,600,000	4.7%
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program	\$3,619,357	4.7%
NDE Administration of Early Childhood Programs	\$1,836,887	2.4%
Nurturing Healthy Behaviors	\$384,000	0.5%
Early Childhood Provider (scholarships and bonuses) Allocation	\$162,240	0.2%
NDE Flow-Through Provider Fees	\$35,000	0.0%
State Subtotal	\$76,671,230	100%
TOTAL STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING	\$211,419,860	

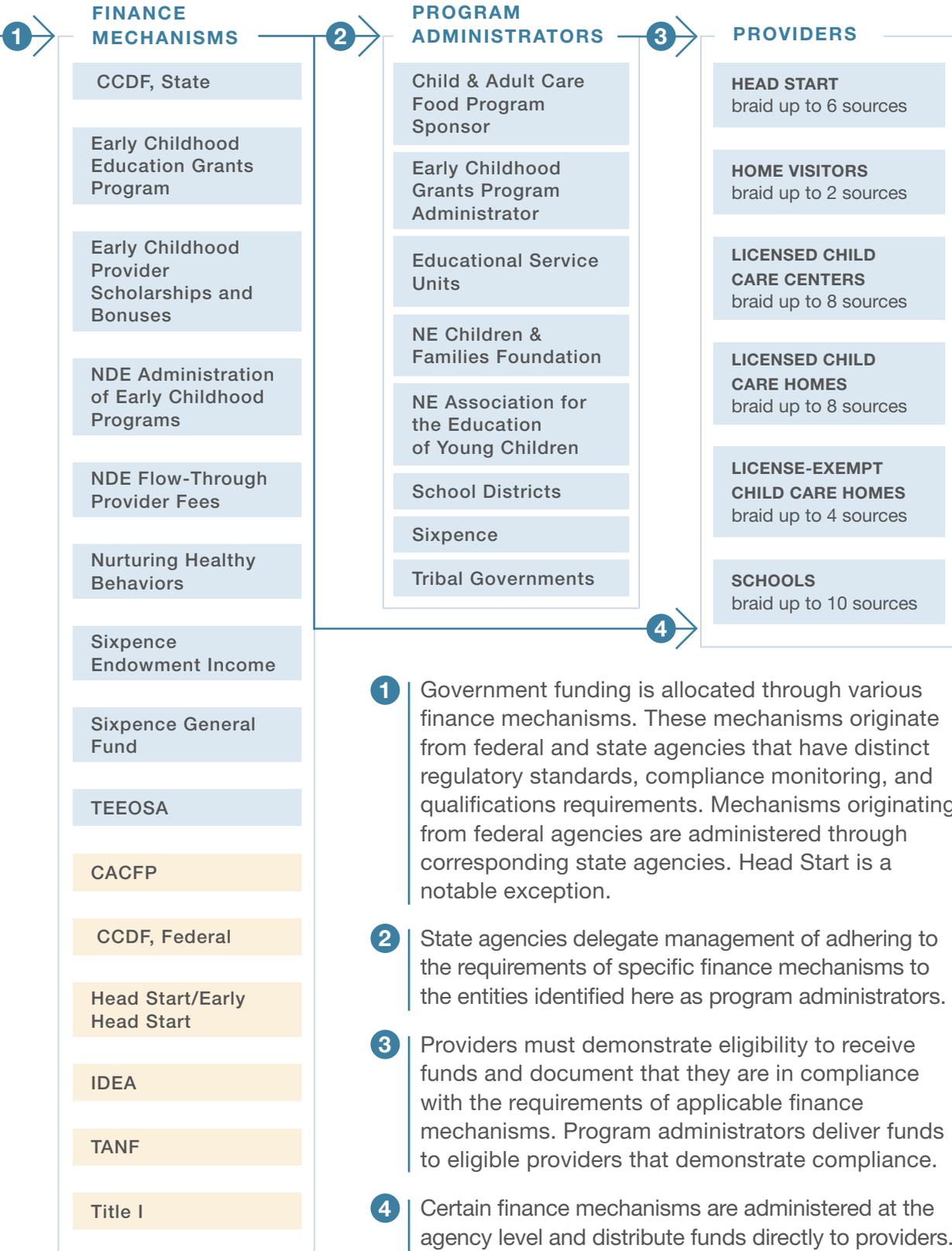
Goal 2: Full Funding by 2030

FIGURE 2.2 | PUBLIC-SECTOR FUNDING FLOW

This figure presents a simplified illustration of what is actually a complex patchwork that stitches together federal and state funds allocated for early care and education. Mechanisms to fund early care and education have emerged through incremental policy changes targeted at specific goals. The resulting funding structures are often inflexible, siloed, and inefficient.

Access to as many funding sources as possible is a lifeline to keeping early childhood program doors open and lights on, but the process of acquiring and braiding funds is burdensome to maintain and complex to master. Time and energy that professionals would otherwise make available to children and families must be devoted to the administrative task of securing and combining separate sources of funding to generate enough revenue to cover the cost of providing early care and education.





Goal 2: Full Funding by 2030

by the BUILD initiative,⁵³ public-sector contributions make up about 46 percent of total early care and education funding, and private-sector contributions account for the remaining 54 percent. BUILD further delineates private-sector contributions by estimating the proportion contributed by families separately from the proportion contributed by business and philanthropy, suggesting that family contributions make up approximately 52 percent and business and philanthropy covers the additional 2 percent. Similar to the importance of developing locally informed estimates of cost, the commission recommends establishing locally informed estimates of contribution. Nebraska citizens are generous and contributions from business and philanthropy, especially within some communities, may be higher than the estimated 2 percent. Further research could clarify this for local communities.

Using BUILD's proportions, the commission estimates Nebraska's total investment in early care and education to be \$459.6 million annually with 46 percent (\$211.4 million) coming from the public sector and 54 percent (\$248.1 million) coming from the private sector (see Appendix D for details). It is important to note that, though public-sector contributions make up slightly less than half of our current investment, as a proportion of the total investment, the State of Nebraska's \$76.7 million contribution makes up just 17 percent of our total current investment. While this is a significant contribution, it is evidence that our state government is not carrying the fiscal burden of the entire early care and education system.

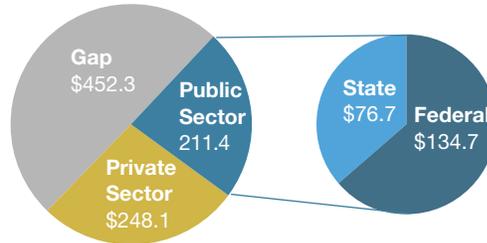
HOW MUCH MORE MONEY DO WE NEED?

To meet the target of \$911.9 million estimated for full funding, accounting for the \$459.6 million estimated to be the current investment, an additional investment of \$452.3 million is needed. This means our current investment covers half of the total required for full funding.

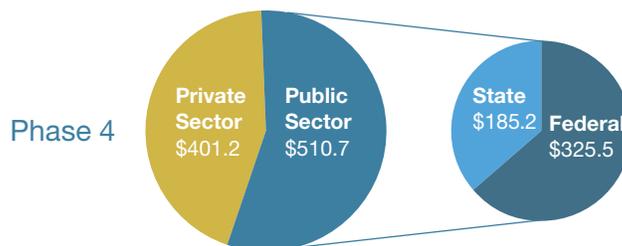
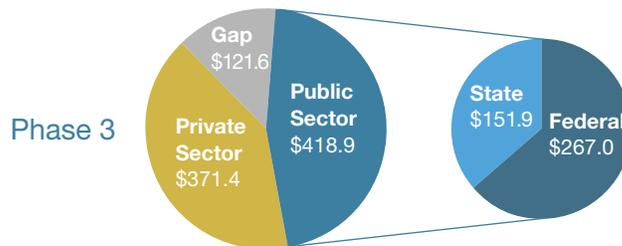
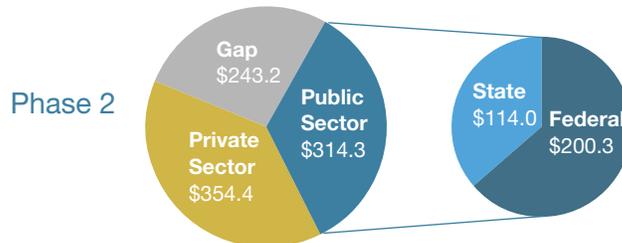
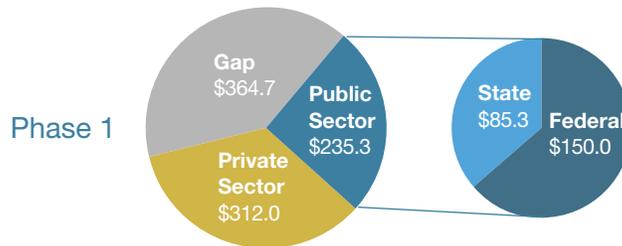
Clearly, the funds needed to bridge this gap will not materialize immediately, nor can we anticipate that a single sector will provide these funds. The committee of experts assembled by the National Academies proposes a phased approach in which funding of early care and education, as a proportion of GDP, increases incrementally over time.⁵⁴ By applying these proportional distributions to Nebraska's GDP over four phases,⁵⁵ we are able to generate our own illustrative example of the evolution toward meeting the total cost of high-quality early care and education with a highly qualified, adequately compensated workforce. Across the four phases, increases in private-sector contributions reflect the adoption of a sliding-fee approach based on family ability to pay in combination with expected increases in family participation rates as

FIGURE 2.3 | PHASED APPROACH TO FULL FUNDING (IN MILLIONS)

CURRENT



PROPOSED



Goal 2: Full Funding by 2030

access to high-quality early care and education becomes affordable. Included as well are potential investments from the business and philanthropic communities. Identified increases in public-sector contributions reflect increases in funding allocations. Though we cannot direct our federal-level funders to increase their allocations to Nebraska, we can leverage opportunities to maximize matching funds. Even so, a greater investment in early care and education at the national level is needed. To close the identified gap, the public sector, in partnership with the business and philanthropic communities of the private sector, must work together to ensure that no family seeking high-quality early care and education services is priced out of participation, safeguarding the imperative to provide equitable access to high-quality services for every young child in Nebraska.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"What we get reimbursed [for subsidy] doesn't even come close. You can't get paid if the child's not there."

WHAT WE CAN DO: GOAL 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

To fulfill Goal 2, the commission proposes three recommendations, each of which is described below. Detailed strategies that support implementation of the recommendations are summarized in Appendix E.

GOAL 2: EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION IN NEBRASKA WILL BE FULLY FUNDED BY 2030.

Recommendation 2.1: Build on Nebraska's current investment in early care and education.

The commission recommends we build on our current investments and attend to barriers and inefficiencies that exist. This includes addressing the need to coordinate revenue streams from disparate sources. Doing so will make the financing structure more efficient, transparent, and easier to navigate and

administer. We must reduce significantly the administrative burden placed on providers who must apply for and combine multiple funding sources to cover the costs of direct service delivery. We have a responsibility to make the best use of our current investment by linking receipt of public-sector funding to attaining and maintaining high-quality standards.

Recommendation 2.2: Develop locally informed cost estimates of high-quality early care and education with a highly qualified, adequately compensated workforce.

Just as there is no single early care and education setting that is ideally suited for the individual needs of all children, there is no one approach to financing the costs of high-quality early care and education that is ideally suited for the unique needs of every community in Nebraska. Together, we must work with community leaders to develop community-specific models of the total cost of quality that reflect community-level differences. This will allow us to refine our estimates of the total cost of care, sharpen our funding focus to meet Nebraska's needs, and customize funding goals for financing the specific needs of each community. Because much of early care and education funding comes from federal and state sources, the local and state cost estimates are dependent upon each other. Local community estimates do not replace the need for a state-level estimate.

Recommendation 2.3: Close the funding gap between Nebraska's current investments in early care and education and the total investments needed to fully fund high-quality early care and education.

The commission recommends we actively strive to close the gap between current investments in early care and education and the total cost of high-quality early care and education with a highly qualified, adequately compensated early childhood workforce. Taking a phased approach to closing the funding gap will provide the time needed for coordination of current financing mechanisms and allow us to set benchmarks for assessing progress toward our funding goals. The commission acknowledges the need to secure additional sources of funding and looks to leaders at the community level to help guide these efforts.

Goal 3: Informed, Engaged, and Committed Public

GOAL 3: NEBRASKA WILL CHAMPION HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE WORKFORCE IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.

- 3.1** Inform Nebraskans of the importance of the early childhood workforce to high-quality early care and education and what is at stake for Nebraska's future.
- 3.2** Engage Nebraskans in statewide efforts to support the early childhood workforce and high-quality early care and education.
- 3.3** Seek Nebraskans' commitment to support high-quality early care and education and the early childhood workforce.

WHAT IS MEANT BY "PUBLIC WILL AND COMMITMENT"?

Elevating Nebraska's early childhood workforce to a priority profession requires a departure from business as usual and a shift from old mindsets. It requires us to envision a Nebraska where all children have access to high-quality early care and education, no matter the setting their parents choose for them. It requires us to engage in efforts that ensure children are served by professionals with expertise in child development and early learning from birth through age 8. And it requires us to be committed to supporting our early childhood workforce in the settings where they work, ensuring they receive the salaries and benefits they deserve as well as the professional respect and recognition worthy of anyone engaged in such high-stakes activity. We must build public will and commitment.

Public will and commitment refers to the collective willingness and interest of the public to recognize a problem that needs to be addressed and to take corrective action—both in the short-term but also over time in ways that sustain the change and investments that are needed. Building public will and commitment involves the implementation of an effective set of strategies that educate, inspire, and mobilize people to take action.

Much is known about successful change initiatives such as state and national efforts to lower smoking rates, curb teen pregnancy, reduce drunken driving, and combat Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). All of these initiatives started with people recognizing a problem or need and then developing a comprehensive approach to change, including public policy and strategy development, strategic communications,



and grassroots outreach. The commission recommends that Nebraskans adopt a similar model in order to elevate the early childhood workforce as a priority profession benefitting all children from birth through Grade 3.

WHY DO PUBLIC WILL AND COMMITMENT MATTER?

What people believe and what they want their state to be is ultimately a choice—a choice determined by people’s values, priorities, and commitments. Public and private resources correspond to those priorities and represent a conscious decision about what we will invest in as a state and what we believe is important for our future. In developing a comprehensive approach to public will and commitment, the commission proposes an integrated series of actions that asks us all to act on behalf of the state’s future by building support for a highly qualified early childhood workforce. Public will and commitment matter because people matter.

In *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, the statewide survey conducted by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and Gallup, Nebraskans delivered a set of clear messages. They expressed overwhelming support (68 percent) for early care and education but made clear that high-quality early care and education is not available or affordable for all families in the state. Nebraskans also made clear that very few families (15 percent) are very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs in the city or area where they live. It was no surprise then that two-thirds of Nebraskans said the state should make early care and education a higher priority than it is today.⁵⁶

Goal 3: Informed, Engaged, and Committed Public

Throughout the life of the commission, members were candid about the challenges encountered in communities across the state, with many reporting a serious lack of early care and education programs and services, despite Nebraska being one of the leading states in the nation where all adults who are responsible for children in the home are working. Commission members expressed real frustration on behalf of communities struggling to secure appropriate child care and early learning programs, speaking openly about the “lifeline” that such programs represent for working families. In a number of instances, reports were shared of a county’s only licensed child care provider retiring or moving and the problems that represented for working families as well as small towns eager to retain population. Despite the challenges encountered by families in communities experiencing child care shortages, it is not enough to address those shortages without also taking account of the quality of early care and education provided. The implications of how a child’s learning and development is impacted by program quality and by the qualifications of early childhood professionals must be addressed by bringing the critical role of the early childhood workforce into focus.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"I don't know that it's so much that people choose not to value our work, but that they see it as easy and fun because kids are fun to play with, and kids are easy to be around."

BUILDING ON NEBRASKA'S FOUNDATION

Nebraska has a remarkably strong foundation on which to build future efforts. For example, decades ago, the state became one of the first in the nation to mandate services for children under the age of 3, recognizing the critical importance of early intervention for children with special educational and developmental needs. The state also pioneered the Sixpence program, a nationally known model of public-private partnership that is centered on local control, in which school districts work closely with community partners on behalf of young children under the age of 3. And notably, Nebraska is home to four Educare programs, including two in Omaha, one in Lincoln, and one in the Winnebago Nation, all serving vulnerable young children and their

families, representing innovation and commitment to partnership throughout. Many other efforts exist, recognized and unrecognized, both at the state and community levels. In communities across Nebraska, countless individuals work tirelessly to support young children and families. This level of dedication and effort bodes well for the future and provides a strong foundation on which to build further efforts.

WHAT WE CAN DO: GOAL 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Building public will and commitment is a strategic communications approach to being clear about what we want to accomplish together and then undertaking a focused set of strategies and activities. To accomplish Goal 3, the commission proposes three principal recommendations, which are described below. The strategies and many of the activities that would support implementation efforts are provided in Appendix F.

GOAL 3: NEBRASKA WILL CHAMPION HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE WORKFORCE IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.

Recommendation 3.1: Inform Nebraskans of the importance of the early childhood workforce to high-quality care and education and what is at stake for Nebraska's future.

Survey research confirms that Nebraskans express strong support for early care and education, but it is less clear whether Nebraskans understand the central role of the early childhood workforce in providing high-quality early care and education.⁵⁶ Recommendation 3.1 is aimed at increasing understanding among Nebraskans about the critical importance of the workforce.

To accomplish recommendation 3.1, we must understand Nebraska's current knowledge and attitudes and partner with communication strategists to ensure effective targeting and strategy development. This includes identifying current networks with statewide and community reach that are committed to elevating the importance of the early childhood workforce. Commission members will be key resources for this effort in their own organizations and communities.

Recommendation 3.2: Engage Nebraskans in supporting the early childhood workforce and high-quality early care and education.

Directly engaging Nebraskans is central to the effort to build public will and commitment. Nebraska has a small population and communities are our lifeblood;

Goal 3: Informed, Engaged, and Committed Public

when our small towns and local communities decide to tackle an issue, it gets done. Already in Nebraska, many efforts on behalf of early care and education are taking place. The commission proposes sharing information about those efforts to inspire others. Through a coordinated effort, those initiatives can be featured and easily shared through existing and new channels, serving as a springboard for further engagement.

SPOTLIGHT

Community Success Stories

Gothenburg—The Gothenburg Early Childhood Learning Coalition (GECLC) is a volunteer group of early childhood providers, educators, and community members committed to addressing community-wide issues impacting early childhood in Gothenburg. With support from the Communities for Kids initiative, a survey was conducted to identify early childhood priorities in Gothenburg, which led to GECLC receiving a \$25,000 grant to conduct further study and planning in support of early care and education in the community. Because of this work, Gothenburg was selected to be a part of a Nebraska cohort in the National League of Cities' City Leadership for Building an Early Learning Nation Initiative. This initiative is part of a national effort to identify and support communities that prioritize programs and policies to improve outcomes for young children. Other participating Nebraska communities in the cohort include Grand Island, Norfolk, Red Cloud, Schuyler, and Wood River.

Red Cloud—A group of committed citizens, together with the Red Cloud Community Foundation Fund and Nebraska Community Foundation, raised \$2.2 million to construct The Valley Child Development Center—a 7,300-square-foot facility that provides high-quality, year-round early care and education, before- and after-school care, and summer enrichment programs for children in and around Red Cloud. The project, which was developed over a six-year period, now serves as a model for other towns across Nebraska and across the country.

To accomplish recommendation 3.2, communities will identify the most meaningful ways to engage Nebraskans and will partner with communication strategists to create materials that feature community success stories, including website and digital strategies that make information easily accessible. This will be a statewide effort and will build on successful events such as town hall meetings, where community and state leaders are already gathering.

"Elevating Nebraska's early childhood workforce to a priority profession requires a departure from business as usual and a shift from old mindsets. It requires us to envision a Nebraska where all children have access to high-quality early care and education, no matter the setting their parents choose for them."

Recommendation 3.3: Seek Nebraskans' commitment to support high-quality care and education and the early childhood workforce.

Nebraskans are problem solvers, and at the end of day, we want to know what needs to get done. In the next goal, the commission proposes that Nebraskans work together to identify concrete, specific actions to solve the challenges facing the early childhood workforce. Communications strategists will assist in helping to transform public will and engagement to committed action, advising on how to effectively package and promote the concrete action steps that need to be taken. Communications materials and a website will include tool kits and checklists, as well as feature Nebraska communities that are taking steps to improve early care and education.

Goal 4: Implementation and Accountability Infrastructure

GOAL 4: NEBRASKANS WILL IMPLEMENT THE NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACHIEVE A HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND DIVERSE WORKFORCE ON BEHALF OF ALL YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

- 4.1 Develop and implement the infrastructure needed to support continued coordination, collaboration, and communication across sectors.
- 4.2 Authentically engage stakeholders within and across communities in order to broaden coalition participation.

WHAT TYPE OF INFRASTRUCTURE DO WE NEED?

Over the past three years, the commission has developed a shared understanding of what is currently taking place in early care and education in Nebraska and why prioritizing the early childhood workforce is critical to Nebraska's future. Commission members have worked collaboratively to deliver a set of recommendations intended to elevate Nebraska's early childhood workforce to a priority profession. The first step in achieving this collective vision is to develop the infrastructure necessary to implement the recommendations presented in this report and ensure accountability. Leading scholars on collaborative approaches to social change suggest that large-

"Successful implementation of the commission's recommendations will require ongoing coordination, collaboration, and communication across all sectors impacting early care and education and among Nebraskans from communities spanning the state."



scale change comes from effective cross-sector coordination, rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations.⁵⁷ Evidence of the effectiveness of this collaborative approach suggests that substantially greater progress can be made in alleviating many of our serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public are brought together around a common agenda to create collective impact. To successfully develop workable strategies for Nebraska communities, we must be willing to disrupt the status quo. It will require attending to current power differences by creating a coalition where all feel equally empowered to contribute. This will require ongoing coordination, collaboration, and communication across all sectors that impact early care and education and among Nebraskans from communities spanning the state. Such complex work will not occur without a supportive infrastructure to provide leadership, facilitate coordination, and ensure accountability.⁵⁸ Focusing on sustainable change, the infrastructure must:

- **Recognize the current efforts of Nebraskans engaged in this work.** Individuals and organizations across the state are already working to support Nebraska’s early childhood workforce and ensure high-quality early care and education. Implementation efforts must build upon, rather than compete with, ongoing improvement initiatives.
- **Build on existing collaborative relationships.** In the process of developing the plan described in this report, commission members have developed relationships with colleagues from across the state that are built on mutual understanding, trust, and a commitment to prioritize shared goals over individual interests. Implementation efforts will require a continued commitment to building and maintaining collaborative relationships.

Goal 4: Implementation and Accountability Infrastructure

- **Authentically involve innovative thought partners from communities across the state in implementation efforts.** An important role of the infrastructure will be facilitating and supporting capacity building in communities. Authentic engagement is about building relationships so that residents can meaningfully influence what takes place in their communities. Ensuring that the history and context of Nebraska’s local communities are embedded in the solutions that are created will highlight and build upon the unique resources and solutions that already exist. Authentic engagement will help spark innovative problem-solving rooted in the lived experiences of community members—including direct service providers, early childhood professionals, and the children and families they serve.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"I have three boys and one of them wants to be a teacher. I am not recommending it. I do not want him to go into teaching. It is not a viable living and I am not planning on subsidizing his income."

To provide this infrastructure, the commission is calling for a diverse, statewide, multi-sector coalition to be convened and be active over several years as well as a dedicated staff to coordinate and to support the coalition’s work. The vision, goals, and recommendations outlined in this report will guide the coalition’s efforts, serving as a framework from which a detailed implementation plan can be developed. The following is an outline of the key functions of the coalition and the supportive infrastructure.

Coalition

The commission is calling for the creation of a statewide coalition of adaptive leaders from across organizations and initiatives who will be charged with implementing the recommendations outlined in this report.^{59,60} Successful implementation will require a coalition with the following characteristics:

Goal 4: Implementation and Accountability Infrastructure

- **Membership is flexible and adaptive to the coalition's needs at any point in time.** Implementation of the recommendations presented here will require innovative thinking and adaptive leadership by members of the coalition. Members will be engaged at different levels and at various times throughout the phases of implementation, from planning, to coordination, to on-the-ground work. This means that no single organization or individual will be responsible for full implementation. Members and organizations will contribute their time and expertise when most appropriate.
- **An advisory board serves as the coalition's governing body.** It will be composed of strong supporters of early care and education from communities across Nebraska and representatives from organizations in multiple sectors of early care and education. The advisory board will assemble several active workgroups to coordinate the work necessary to implement a given recommendation or strategy. This structure will allow coalition members to contribute at various levels according to their availability and expertise, with opportunities for involvement ranging from one-time, short-term strategy projects to long-term oversight and planning efforts. Creating a coalition with depth of voice and participation, both across sectors and across communities, will build capacity for sustainable change. This type of flexible membership allows each organization or individual to share and build on their own strengths and prevents any single group from having to sustain the efforts of many.
- **Members are willing to contribute on behalf of the whole, while honoring individual interests.** Essential to implementation success is the requirement that coalition members view their work as part of a larger, collective effort and consider how their contribution fits into the bigger picture. Coalition members will be asked to lead implementation efforts that align with their specific areas of expertise and contribute to a system of shared measurement agreed upon by all members of the coalition. It is unrealistic to expect participating organizations to abandon self-interest. Instead, coalition partners will participate in shared implementation and accountability activities where and when it makes the most sense and will continue to pursue individual goals while contributing to the larger effort.

"To successfully develop workable strategies for Nebraska communities, we must be willing to disrupt the status quo."

Goal 4: Implementation and Accountability Infrastructure

The balance of “top-down” and “grassroots” change initiatives must be carefully considered as the coalition moves to action. Coalition success will be stalled without participation by those with decision-making power but will not be sustainable without the voice of those who live and work in communities across Nebraska. Implementation efforts must be grounded in equity; it is the responsibility of the coalition and its supporting infrastructure to ensure that representation on the advisory board and workgroups matches the diversity of the state.

SPOTLIGHT

Communities for Kids

Communities for Kids (C4K) is a community-based engagement process of the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation designed to help communities identify and prioritize the opportunities and challenges they are facing related to early care and education. C4K staff help facilitate community conversations and provide expertise, tools, and resources to the community to support the creation and implementation of right-sized, locally developed solutions. These solutions are focused on supporting and strengthening the current early childhood system in each community. C4K uses a collective impact approach to:

- Engage stakeholders through community assessment, focused public discussion, and development of key messaging relating to local early childhood opportunities and available resources. Identification of strengths and areas for growth is also a key piece of community engagement.
- Utilize informed decision-making to determine strategies and desired outcomes most relevant to meeting the priority needs and working toward the development of a community action plan. Communities are strongly encouraged to develop this work in connecting communities to innovative ideas, quality measurements, best practices, use of government/public resources, and community plan implementation strategies. This work is coordinated through a peer learning network made up of communities throughout the state that are tackling similar issues.

Supportive Infrastructure

Implementation efforts will require a dedicated staff to coordinate the actions of the numerous people and organizations required for this effort. This coordination requires an intentional structure. The commission proposes identifying one or more organizations that will commit the staff time and other resources necessary to fulfill the following five coordinating functions:

- 1. Facilitate strategic direction.** As implementation efforts get underway, the supportive infrastructure will be tasked with organizing for impact. This will require a strategic effort to understand the landscape of key players and work already underway in Nebraska, and to ensure that the coalition's work builds upon and does not undermine or compete with current efforts. The supportive infrastructure will not serve as the coalition leadership. Rather, the role of the supportive infrastructure will be to foster coalition leadership so that, over time, the coalition will become semi-autonomous, and the need for external coordinating support will fade.
- 2. Facilitate continuous communication among partners and support aligned activities.** Coordinating the efforts of a statewide coalition will require continuous communication, both to align organizations and to nurture collaboration. The supportive infrastructure will establish procedures to coordinate the feedback loops and shared measurement tools necessary to develop and maintain a high level of transparency among all stakeholders. Transparency and frequent conversation are necessary for sustainable action. Feedback loops ensure that the coalition leading the effort understands the impacts and challenges of that effort on a regular basis.
- 3. Manage data collection and analysis.** Indicators of success will be identified by the coalition for all the recommendations. The supportive infrastructure will collaborate with other organizations, as needed, to coordinate data collection and analysis and to provide feedback to coalition members about the status of the indicators, both individually and overall. Monitoring success using an agreed-upon set of indicators will facilitate progress and accountability. These shared indicators will allow each member of the coalition to build on their strengths (e.g., targeting an indicator they can influence directly) while maintaining the overall shared vision of elevating the early childhood workforce to a priority profession.
- 4. Coordinate public will efforts and community engagement.** Public will and commitment cannot be an afterthought in implementation efforts. The supportive infrastructure will be charged with supporting public will-building efforts to help grow community support of the early childhood workforce. Public outreach

Goal 4: Implementation and Accountability Infrastructure

efforts need to be threaded throughout and across implementation. Goal 3 of this report describes a public will and outreach approach that commission members view as a necessary component for success. The coalition's role in this outreach will be to help coordinate efforts with and provide feedback to partners and communities across Nebraska.

- 5. Mobilize resources.** Implementation of the recommendations, data monitoring, and support of the coalition will require dedicated funding. The supportive infrastructure will lead fundraising efforts on behalf of the coalition. Funding for the purposes of Goal 4 is not considered part of the full funding for early care and education; funding in this recommendation is to support the overall efforts of the coalition to implement all aspects of this report.

WHAT WE CAN DO: GOAL 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

To fulfill Goal 4, the commission proposes two recommendations, each of which is described below. Detailed strategies that support implementation of the recommendations are summarized in Appendix G.

GOAL 4: NEBRASKANS WILL IMPLEMENT THE NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACHIEVE A HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND DIVERSE WORKFORCE ON BEHALF OF ALL YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Recommendation 4.1: Develop and implement the infrastructure needed to support continued coordination, collaboration, and communication across sectors.

Elevating Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce will serve as a blueprint for the coalition. Coalition leadership will use the vision, goals, and recommendations outlined in this report to establish common strategies, create an attainable timeline, and establish a system of shared measurement. Articulation of the coalition's desired results and common agenda will drive the planning process and inform feedback loops of improvement, keeping Nebraskans' shared commitment to implementation alive and moving forward.

The coalition, with help from the supportive infrastructure, will develop and implement a results-based accountability approach to quality assurance in which analysis of data is informed by the expertise and experiences of Nebraska's early childhood workforce and the children and families they serve. The coalition will identify indicators of success that include both quantitative and qualitative measures, and data will be disaggregated by such factors as income level, race, ethnicity, gender,

Goal 4: Implementation and Accountability Infrastructure

and geographic location to gain a better understanding about what is working for whom and where. Throughout the implementation process, such data will be used to inform and improve the work of the coalition.

The coalition's ultimate measure of success will be Nebraskans' confidence in saying that every child in the state, beginning at birth, can access high-quality early care and education facilitated by a highly qualified early childhood professional in whatever setting the family chooses. To achieve this, we need to ensure the changes we make are efficient, effective, and sustainable. As a coalition of Nebraskans for Nebraskans, the goal is to be good stewards of our state's resources, investing time, energy, and money in solutions that work.

Recommendation 4.2: Authentically engage stakeholders within and across communities in order to broaden coalition participation.

Successful implementation and sustainable change require innovative ideas. Solutions must be adaptive and responsive to local communities. To ensure such innovation and adaptability, coalition membership must include Nebraskans who are leading community change efforts, emerging leaders, and leaders representing many communities and populations throughout the state—in addition to key decision-makers at the systems level. During implementation, coalition members will be asked to chair workgroups. For collaboration to be successful, members will be expected to practice culturally responsive communication, be committed to a child-centered approach, and engage in mutually reinforcing activities built on trust and strong relationships.

"All of this is within our reach."





Final Thoughts

The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission completes its work at a time of heightened attention throughout the nation to the significance of the early years of life. Never before have we known so much about how the brain develops. Never before have we had so much insight into how parent-child relationships are built. Never before have we understood more about how to enhance young children's development—socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually.

Yet, despite this accumulated knowledge and experience, too many children fail in school, too many fall behind their more socially and financially advantaged peers, too many face challenges in life that were preventable early on. Although Nebraska can boast of many exceptional teachers and caregivers working every day with young children, too many children are not being exposed to quality care and education. In short, we are not making use of all that we know and can do for all of our children.

This report of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission is devoted to enhancing the development of all children by strengthening and elevating the early childhood workforce. Our intention over the next decade in Nebraska is to enable the best of what is known about child development to be made available to parents, child care providers, teachers, and others actively engaged in the lives of children. We are not proposing that all children be treated the same; rather, we want all children to have the best opportunity to reach their potential and achieve their goals in life. This may look different for children from different families, different traditions, different cultures and languages, and different origins. But what remains the same is the intention to help all children find and use their unique strengths to learn, grow, and take their place in the world.

To accomplish this, the report provides a plan to guide statewide efforts in four areas:

1. A highly qualified early childhood workforce
2. Full funding of early care and education in Nebraska
3. An informed, engaged, and committed public
4. An implementation and accountability infrastructure for effective coordination, collaboration, and communication across the state

Achieving these goals will require substantial effort, dedicated participants, governmental and institutional commitments, and sufficient time and resources. We believe the key to all of this is elevating the early childhood workforce to a priority

profession—one that is critical to Nebraska’s children, families, and communities now and in the future. This report is but the first step. The plan outlined here has the commitment of the commission because of our confidence that it will make possible a future where:

- All **children** will experience warm, responsive professionals who understand their developmental needs from birth through age 8, regardless of the setting in which they are enrolled, how much their parents earn, or where they live.
- **Families** will be confident that their children are in the hands of qualified early childhood professionals.
- Members of the early childhood **workforce** will be recognized as professionals with specialized expertise who are appropriately prepared, suitably compensated, and adequately supported.
- **Home-based child care businesses, community-based centers, and school-based programs** will have stable revenue and other needed supports—such as simplified processes for combining funding sources and consistent regulatory and certification requirements—to effectively plan and implement high-quality programs for Nebraska’s children and families.
- Nebraska **communities** will thrive and be able to attract and retain employees of child-bearing years and families with young children because of the accessibility and affordability of high-quality early care and education.

All of this is within our reach. To make it a reality over the next decade we need a commitment to reach deeper. A commitment of knowledge, skill, and experience. A commitment to invest in a brighter future for all of us. And a commitment no one can deny: to do the best for every child.

Join us as we elevate the Nebraska early childhood workforce. Visit EarlyYearsMatter.org/workforce.

Appendices

Appendix A

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION MEMBERS 2017-2019

Appendix A includes all members of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission since its inception. Titles listed reflect the member's title at the time of their service on the commission.

CO-CHAIRS	ORGANIZATION
Samuel Meisels	Founding Executive Director Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska
Marjorie Kostelnik	Professor, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies University of Nebraska–Lincoln
MEMBERS	ORGANIZATION
Teresa Berube	Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator Nebraska Department of Education
Linda Boeckner	Program Leader* University of Nebraska—Extension
Amy Bornemeier	Vice President of Early Childhood Programs Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Lynne Brehm	Associate Vice President of Early Childhood Mental Health Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Amy Bunnell	Part-C Co-Coordinator, Special Education Office Nebraska Department of Education
Melissa Comine	Chief Academic Officer of Curriculum and Instructional Support Omaha Public Schools
Robin Dexter	Associate Superintendent Grand Island Public Schools
Fabiola Dimas	Home Visitor Crete Sixpence
Beth Doll	Dean, College of Education and Human Sciences, Interim* University of Nebraska—Lincoln
Nancy Edick	Dean, College of Education University of Nebraska at Omaha
Sheryl Feinstein	Dean, College of Education* University of Nebraska at Kearney
Maddie Fennell	Executive Director Nebraska State Education Association
Cristina Fernandez	Pediatrician Children's Hospital and Medical Center
Jane Franklin	Dean of Social Sciences Metropolitan Community College

MEMBERS	ORGANIZATION
Deborah Frison	Deputy Commissioner of Education Nebraska Department of Education
Kelly Gewecke	Business Development Consultant (Central Nebraska Region) Nebraska Department of Economic Development
Tawana Grover	Superintendent Grand Island Public Schools
Kristen Hassebrook	Executive Vice President-Legislation and Policy Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Melody Hobson	Administrator of Office of Early Childhood Nebraska Department of Education
Nici Johnson	Director of Community Connections in Early Childhood Educational Service Unit 13 (Scottsbluff)
Sherri Jones	Dean, College of Education and Human Sciences University of Nebraska—Lincoln
Sharon Katt	Senior Administrator for Adult Program Services Nebraska Department of Education
Kelly Kiihne	Owner/Operator Kelly's Kids
Sarah Ann Kotchian	Vice President of Education and Early Childhood Policy* Holland Children's Movement
Catherine Lang	Director Nebraska Business Development Center, UNO
Kathleen Lodl	Associate Dean and State 4-H Program Leader University of Nebraska—Extension
David Ludwig	Executive Director Nebraska Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council
Joan Luebbers	Head Start State Collaboration Director Nebraska Department of Education
Kim Madsen	Applied Sciences Professor—Family and Consumer Sciences Chadron State College
Grace Mims	Dean, College of Education, Interim University of Nebraska at Kearney
Sara Morgan	Administrator, Lifespan Health Services, Division of Public Health Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
James Powell	Dean, School of Education Chadron State College
Jessie Rasmussen	President Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Sara Renken	First Grade Teacher, Eagle Elementary School Waverly School District 145
Carol Renner	Associate Superintendent* Kearney Public Schools

MEMBERS	ORGANIZATION
Jay Sears	Director of Instructional Advocacy Nebraska State Education Association
John Spatz	Executive Director Nebraska Association of School Boards
Jane Stavem	Associate Superintendent for Instruction* Lincoln Public Schools
John Stinner	Senator, District 48 Nebraska Legislature
Mariah Stowe	Owner/Operator Splash of Color Child Care
Michelle Suarez	Early Childhood Developer Prosper Lincoln
Drew Theophilus	Director* Dividends Nebraska
Patricia Timm	President* Nebraska State Board of Education
Becky Veak	Director* First Five Nebraska
Nicole Vint	Child Care and Development Fund Administrator I Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Matthew Wallen	Director, Division of Children and Family Services Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Jeff West	Administrator* Educational Service Unit 13 (Scottsbluff)
Stacie Williams	Central Elementary First Grade Teacher Kearney Public Schools
Thomas Williams	Chief Medical Officer and Director, Division of Public Health* Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Jeff Yost	President and Chief Executive Officer Nebraska Community Foundation
Joseph Young	Executive Vice President* Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Laurie Ziems	Owner/Operator Learningtree Childcare
BUFFETT INSTITUTE STAFF	
Lisa Caudle	Events Manager
Machaela Cavanaugh	Conferences and Special Projects Manager*
Cama Charlet	Program Specialist, Workforce Planning and Development
Amanda Garrett	Research Assistant Professor

BUFFETT INSTITUTE STAFF	
Catherine Huddleston-Casas	Associate Director of Workforce Planning and Development
Kelly Jefferson	Associate Director of Communications and Marketing
Erin Owen	Director of Communications and Marketing
Amy Roberts	Research Assistant Professor*
Susan Sarver	Director of Workforce Planning and Development
Shannon Sherman	Director of Communications*
Renee Wessels	Associate Executive Director for Strategy and External Affairs
CONSULTANT	
Bill Fulton	Founder and Co-Executive Director The Civic Canopy
ETHNOGRAPHER	
Sarah Zuckerman	Assistant Professor, Educational Administration University of Nebraska-Lincoln

*Titles listed reflect the member's title at the time of their service.

Colleagues at the Institute were essential to the success of the commission's work, especially those in the communications and events unit, including Duane Retzlaff and Rebecca Elder. Their standards of excellence made meetings welcoming and engaging and our publications professional and accessible.

Bill Fulton, co-director of Civic Canopy and consultant. Joining the effort at the commission's inception, Dr. Fulton facilitated each commission meeting and advised Buffett Institute staff on evidence-based strategies for collaborative engagement and the transfer of commitment needed to achieve sustainable change.

Sarah Zuckerman, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and Amanda Garrett, Buffett Institute. As ethnographer, Dr. Zuckerman led the effort to document and investigate how individuals and organizations mobilize and develop shared understandings that shape action. Dr. Garrett worked alongside Dr. Zuckerman in the collection and analysis of this longitudinal study and contributed her invaluable knowledge of qualitative research.

Sarah Moulton, senior editor. Integrating the writing of several contributors, all of whom were adamant that their words reflected the wisdom of more than 40 commissioners which must be protected, Ms. Moulton provided essential expertise in the writing, construction, editing, and completion of this report.

Appendix B

NEBRASKA EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION TERMINOLOGY, STAFF REQUIREMENTS, AND COMPETENCY CROSSWALK

Appendix B is a resource and documentation of the variety of terminology and requirements used across early care and education settings in Nebraska.

The commission has defined Nebraska's early childhood workforce as those who are paid to provide care and education for young children on a daily or near-daily basis, as well as home visitors who partner with families, and coaches and others who work directly with early childhood educators.

The crosswalk is divided by home-based, center-based, and school-based settings. Within each setting, educators and leaders are identified by position or role; closely allied roles such as special education intervention and mental health practitioners are not included in this chart.

These designations are only used for organizational purposes here and do not reflect suggestions or endorsements by the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission.

Terminology

- **Educators:** professionals with regular (daily or near-daily), direct responsibilities for the care and education of young children (this includes child care settings and centers, preschools, and elementary schools); included in this category are home visitors
- **Leaders:** those in such leadership roles as center directors, principals, and administrators
- **Home-based:** services delivered primarily in family, home or owner home. Home visitors are placed in this category since their services are primarily delivered in family homes; their positions, however, may operate out of centers or schools
- **Center-based:** services delivered primarily in centers, churches, public facilities (not schools)
- **School-based:** services delivered primarily in schools

TABLE B.1 | HOME-BASED EDUCATOR

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Family Child Care Provider (may also be a leader)	DHHS, Family Child Care Home I, Title 391	19 years of age; pre-service training, safety training, business management training, NE Early Learning Guidelines training; 12 clock hours of training annually	Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2019)
Family Child Care Primary Provider (may also be a leader)	DHHS, Family Child Care Home II, Title 391	19 years of age; pre-service training, safety training, business management training, NE Early Learning Guidelines training; 12 clock hours of training annually	Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2019)
Family Child Care Staff	DHHS, Family Child Care Home I, Title 391	16 years of age; pre-service training, safety training, business management training, NE Early Learning Guidelines training; 12 clock hours of training annually	Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2019)
Home Visitor (may be center- or school-based)	NDE, Rule 11	Bachelor's degree in early childhood or related field	NDE, Rule 11; Nebraska's Early Childhood Integrated Skills & Competencies for Professionals: Service Principles for Early Childhood Mental Health, Education, & Home Visiting (2015)
Home Visitor Specialist	NDE, Rule 11	12 credit hours of undergraduate or graduate credit in early childhood education or related field (the program may use a home visitor who does not meet the 12 semester hour requirement, but who meets other requirements).	NDE, Rule 11; Nebraska's Early Childhood Integrated Skills & Competencies for Professionals: Service Principles for Early Childhood Mental Health, Education, & Home Visiting (2015)
Head Start Family Support Specialist	Head Start Performance Standards	Have a minimum of a home-based CDA credential or comparable credential, or equivalent coursework as part of an associate's or bachelor's degree; and specialized knowledge	
Home Visiting Specialist	Sixpence Quality Criteria for Family Engagement Programs	Bachelor's degree in required field	

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Home Visitor	Sixpence Quality Criteria for Family Engagement Programs	Associate's degree, detailed educational plan, and supervision by a home visiting specialist	

TABLE B.2 | HOME-BASED LEADER

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Family Child Care Provider (Educator, Owner)	DHHS, Family Child Care Home, Title 391	19 years of age; pre-service training, safety training, business management training, NE Early Learning Guidelines training; 12 clock hours of training annually	Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2019)
Family Child Care Primary Provider (Educator, Owner)	DHHS, Family Child Care Home II, Title 391	19 years of age; pre-service training, safety training, business management training, NE Early Learning Guidelines training; 12 clock hours of training annually	Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2019)
Head Start Coach	Head Start Performance Standards	Program must ensure coaches have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education or a related field	Head Start Performance Standards
QRIS Coach (may also be center-based)	Step Up to Quality	Associate's degree in early childhood education; preferred bachelor's or master's degree in early childhood education or related field	

TABLE B.3 | CENTER-BASED EDUCATOR

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Preschool Teacher	DHHS Regulations, Title 391	18 years of age; high school diploma or GED and 1,500 verified clock hours in organized group activities with young children	Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2019)
Lead Teacher	DHHS Regulations, Title 391	18 years of age; high school diploma or GED and 1,500 verified clock hours in organized group activities with young children	Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2019)

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Lead Teacher (Program level requirement for Head Start)	Head Start Performance Standards	Associate's degree in early childhood education; 50% must have bachelor's degree in early childhood	
Sixpence Lead Teacher/ Caregiver	Sixpence Quality Criteria for Programs Serving Groups of Children	NDE Rule 11 guidelines AND coursework related to infants and toddlers	
Sixpence Assistant/ Paraprofessional	Sixpence Quality Criteria for Programs Serving Groups of Children	CDA or higher	

TABLE B.4 | CENTER-BASED LEADER

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Director	DHHS Regulations, Title 391	19 years of age; high school diploma and 3,000 clock hours of verifiable experience in organized group activities with young children and 6 credit hours (or 36 clock hours of training) and plan to acquire 6 credit hours (or 36 clock hours) within 12 months	Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (2019)
QRIS Coach	Step Up to Quality	Associate's degree in early childhood education; preferred bachelor's or master's degree in early childhood education or related field	
Master Teacher	Educare Model Framework	Bachelor of Science with a minimum of 18 graduate hours earned in ECE, child development or closely related field; experience in teaching children birth to 5; two years supervision/administrative experience in early childhood setting preferred	

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Omaha Early Learning Center Coach	Omaha Early Learning Center	Bachelor of Science with a minimum of 18 graduate hours earned in ECE, child development or closely related field; experience in teaching children birth to 5; two years supervision/administrative experience in early childhood setting preferred	
OPS Coach	Omaha Public Schools	Minimum of a master's degree in early childhood or early childhood special education or an elementary endorsement with provision to complete the early childhood or special education endorsement per NDE	

TABLE B.5 | SCHOOL-BASED EDUCATOR

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Teacher	NDE, Rule 24	Valid NE teaching certificate in early childhood education, early childhood special education, inclusive early childhood education (may hire a teacher without endorsement if teacher files a development plan to compete endorsement)	NDE, Rule 24 – Regulations for Certificate Endorsements
Paraeducator	NDE, Rule 24	12 hours of credit in child development/ early childhood education or current CDA credential or NE K-6 elementary endorsement	NDE, Rule 24 – Regulations for Certificate Endorsements
After-school teacher			Nebraska School-Age Youth Development Core Competencies (2010) – for after-school professionals

TABLE B.6 | SCHOOL-BASED LEADER

NEBRASKA TERM, TITLE, POSITION, OR ROLE	ORIGIN, RULE, AND/OR STATUTORY AUTHORITY	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OR QUALIFICATIONS	STANDARDS AND/OR COMPETENCIES USED
Program Coordinator (May also be curriculum supervisor or principal)	NDE, Rule 11	Valid NE teaching certificate and 9 college credit hours in early childhood education	NDE, Rule 24 – Regulations for Certificate Endorsements
Curriculum supervisor	NDE, Rule 24	Regular teaching certificate; 36 graduate semester hours; 2 years of teaching experience	NDE, Rule 24 – Regulations for Certificate Endorsements
Special Education Supervisor	NDE, Rule 24	36 graduate semester hours; 2 years of teaching experience	NDE, Rule 24 – Regulations for Certificate Endorsements
Principal	NDE, Rule 24	36 or 45 graduate semester hours; two years teaching experience	NDE, Rule 24 – Regulations for Certificate Endorsements
Superintendent	NDE, Rule 24	Regular teaching certification and administrative certificate; 2 years of teaching experience; 60 graduate semester hours	NDE, Rule 24 – Regulations for Certificate Endorsements

Appendix C

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR QUALIFICATIONS

Appendix C identifies ideas for addressing recommendations associated with qualifications. The potential strategies and tactics listed do not represent a prescriptive set of actions but are offered as a potential starting place for implementation of the recommendations. The coalition advisory board (described in Goal 4) will be tasked with identifying, assessing the feasibility of, and establishing the implementation of specific strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: DEFINE AND SUPPORT HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICE ACROSS ALL EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
1.1.1 Use Nebraska Preschool Development Grant definition of quality to align state systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate with Step Up to Quality, addressing specific workforce implications • Educate workforce and public using quality definition • Use definition of quality to help solidify professional identity of early childhood professionals (i.e., early childhood professionals are essential for quality early childhood settings)
1.1.2 Use a competency framework for members of Nebraska’s early childhood workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify core competencies for all adults working with children from birth through Grade 3 • Expand NE Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals to Grade 3 • Ensure competencies are culturally relevant • Encourage state government agencies and advisory groups and councils responsible for professional development, regulatory oversight, and funding to endorse professional competencies for members of Nebraska’s early care and education workforce • Recommend higher education institutions align courses to competencies • Align early education and care competencies at all two- and four-year higher education institutions in Nebraska • Identify existing competencies in the state • Map competencies by age and developmental progression of child • Cross-map competencies to each other and national competencies (e.g., NAEYC, DEC, CAEP, National Board for Professional Standards, CDA, ZTT)

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS THAT ARE AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE, AND EQUITABLE IN ORDER TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
1.2.1 Align early childhood education and care competencies with job requirements across public and private settings in Nebraska	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate with Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System (NECPRS) • Identify roles (e.g., jobs) for early childhood educators in the state • Endorse specialized competencies for each role
1.2.2 Develop certificate systems for early childhood educators who do not have teacher licensure but have met the competency requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review credential systems used in other states • Work with institutions of higher education to develop appropriate assessment systems • Review existing teacher certification structure
1.2.3 Establish entry-level requirements consistent across settings for early childhood professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As regulations are increased, some professionals currently in the field may need "grandfather" clauses • Evaluate the impact of changes in regulations and requirements on populations that have had limited access to prior training and higher education
1.2.4 Identify multiple pathways to demonstrate proficiency of competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore portfolio models for competency demonstration • Explore micro-credentials • Explore apprenticeship models • Increase articulation agreements between 2-year and 4-year institutions • Increase online offerings that are competency-based • Explore current models in the state that assist paraeducators to become certified teachers
1.2.5 Align competencies to evaluation and assessment systems across public and private employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that evaluation and assessment systems are culturally and linguistically relevant for the children and families who are served, and that they provide measurements that are meaningful to teachers, policymakers, and other important stakeholders
1.2.6 Identify funding to assist early childhood educators with pre-service and in-service professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase TEACH scholarships • Create substitute pools that allow professionals to attend training • Identify funding to pay for professional development • Increase online professional development • Increase scholarships for early childhood educators attending college

Appendix D

ESTIMATING THE TOTAL COST OF QUALITY IN NEBRASKA

Appendix D details the calculations and assumptions made for estimating the total cost of quality in Nebraska.

Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education

The examination of what Nebraska currently invests in early care and education and the estimation of the funding gap between the current investment and a fully funded early care and education system were guided by recommendations laid out in the *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education* report (*Transforming the Financing* report). Authored by a committee of experts convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (National Academies; formerly named the Institutes of Medicine) and subjected to a rigorous and independent peer-review process, this report tackled the challenge of “outlining a framework for a funding strategy that would provide reliable, accessible high-quality early care and education for young children from birth to kindergarten entry, including a highly qualified and adequately compensated workforce consistent with the vision outlined in the 2015 Institute of Medicine and National Research Council report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation.*” This is an important statement, as the analysis attended to all the interdependent factors necessary to support a highly qualified workforce. As such, there is no utility in trying to break down the funding needed for on-site direct service delivery costs separately from the funding needed to cover the costs of the other identified areas: system-level workforce development costs, system-level quality assurance and improvement costs, and the costs associated with stabilizing family participation so that no one is priced out of participation. The cost of any one of these investments is dependent upon investment in the others.

Understanding the Significance of the Cost Estimates

What sets the estimates developed in the *Transforming the Financing* report apart from previous models is the strict adherence to the research-based recommendations outlined within the report. Each of the policy specifications and assumptions reflect what the sciences of early childhood development and early learning have established are necessary to support best practices of early care and education professionals for optimal development of young children starting at birth. Application of the model to Nebraska is not a question of whether the assumptions of the model reflect the state. The assumptions of the model

reflect what science has established is necessary to support a highly qualified, adequately compensated early childhood workforce. The model provides a multiplier to calculate state-specific estimates of funding targets.

Cost Modeling Approach

In the *Transforming the Financing* report, dynamic cost estimates were developed to determine the costs of transitioning to high-quality early care and education over a four-phase process. Use of a dynamic estimate takes into account the likely response to higher quality and improved affordability produced by implementation of the recommendations made in the *Transforming the Financing* report. Below is a summary of the methodology and logic used (To see the full appendix of the *Transforming the Financing* report, go to <https://www.nap.edu/read/24984/chapter/11>).

Step 1: Center-based early care and education cost calculator adapted and applied to estimate early care and education costs per child-hour

- Separately for child-age group (infant, toddler, PreKindergarten)
- For multiple sets of policy specifications representing the four recommended phases of implementation, which are characterized by increasing staffing quality standards (see Table D.1)
 - Costs were computed on the basis of full-time (40 hours per week), full-year (52 weeks per year)
 - Supports for professional responsibilities and learning reflected in the operating budget
 - Costs allocated by adding to the number of FTE staff at different positions and salaries beyond the FTE staff required to meet child-to-adult ratios in classrooms or groups
 - A constant factor of 8 percent was applied to generate a non-personnel increment for Phase 1
- A constant 10 percent is added to staffing and non-personnel costs to reflect the need for providers to maintain a reserve to cover such inefficiencies and temporary drops in enrollment, delays in state reimbursement, or nonpayment by families
- Home-based costs were estimated by applying the ratio of home-based to center-based prices by child-age groups under a broad assumption that the ratio of prices to costs is a constant

TABLE D.1 | POLICY SPECIFICATIONS ACROSS IMPLEMENTATION PHASES

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4
Staff levels				
Infants child-to-adult ratio	5:1	4:1	4:1	3:1
Toddlers child-to-adult ratio	5:1	5:1	4:1	4:1
PreK child-to-adult ratio	11:1	10:1	10:1	10:1
Share of staff with desired qualifications				
INFANT EDUCATORS SHARE OF STAFF HOURS				
Lead (BA+)	25%	30%	40%	50%
Assistant (AA/CDA)	20%	25%	25%	25%
Assistant (some college)	40%	30%	30%	15%
Aide (HS)	15%	15%	5%	10%
TODDLER EDUCATORS SHARE OF STAFF HOURS				
Lead (BA+)	25%	35%	50%	65%
Assistant (AA/CDA)	35%	35%	25%	25%
Assistant (some college)	30%	20%	20%	10%
Aide (HS)	10%	10%	5%	0%
STAFF COMPENSATION^{a,b}				
Bachelor's degree level (BA+)				
as a % child-family social worker compensation	90%	100%		
as a % of kindergarten teacher compensation			90%	100%
Associate's degree level (AA)				
as a % of BA level	75%	75%	75%	75%
Child Development Associate (CDA) or some college				
as a % of AA level	81%	81%	81%	81%
High School degree or less				
as a % of CDA level	91%	91%	91%	91%

a Note: Wages reflect education level and do not vary by child-age group; salary levels are assumed to be applied consistently for all center-based care to eliminate disparity by sponsoring organization

b Note: Constant factor of 31.5% was added to salaries to cover benefits, including health care, retirement, payroll tax contributions, and paid leave

Step 2: Hourly costs derived in step 1 were applied to the estimated number of hours of early care and education used by U.S. children (utilization) to arrive at an aggregated national estimate

- Accounting for changes in utilization patterns due to increased use of high-quality early care and education services
 - Changes in utilization patterns were defined by child-age group and family income category assumes as affordability improves, average hours would increase by 8 percent for low-income families, 6 percent for middle-income families, and 2 percent for upper-income families
 - Affordable shares of income were specified for each family income category and applied to the estimated costs to estimate the potential family contributions and the remaining subsidy costs
 - To estimate systems-level costs, a constant factor of 8 percent was added to the aggregate service delivery costs at each phase

Commission’s Estimation of Total Cost

The cost modeling conducted for the *Transforming the Financing* report yielded an estimate of \$140 billion annually to fully fund early care and education nationwide, equivalent to about three-quarters of 1 percent (0.75 percent) of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP); slightly less than the current average of 0.8 percent of GDP allocated to early care and education for the nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The *Transforming the Financing* report authors recommend using 0.75 percent of GDP to estimate the funding level adequate to cover the total cost of high-quality early care and education.

In addition, efforts to account for adequate increases in compensation used the annual salary of kindergarten teachers as the compensation goal in the cost model. Although the salary of a kindergarten teacher is an annual figure, it represents the pay and benefits received for nine months of classroom time. Because many early care and education professionals work in home-based or center-based programs that deliver service across all 12 months of the year, *Transforming the Financing* report authors recommend that 10 percent be added to the total cost estimate to account for pay parity between educators working in schools nine of 12 months and educators working in year-round programs. These were applied to Nebraska’s 2017 GDP of \$110.53 billion to arrive at:

TOTAL COST ESTIMATE	=	(\$110.53 BILLION * 0.0075) * 1.10
TOTAL COST ESTIMATE	=	\$911,872,500

TABLE D.2 | PUBLIC-SECTOR FUNDING

FY17 (2016-2017) EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDING	\$211,419,860
Federal	\$134,748,630
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) ^a	\$28,615,966
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Transfer ^b	\$10,324,763
Head Start and Early Head Start ^c	\$54,190,068
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP 0-12) ^d	\$28,361,038
Title I ^e	\$8,210,489
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ^f	\$5,046,306
State	\$76,671,230
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) ^g	\$41,866,708
Nurturing Healthy Behaviors ^h	\$384,000
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program ⁱ	\$3,619,357
Early Childhood Provider (scholarships and bonuses) Allocation ^h	\$162,240
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund (Sixpence)—Endowment Income ⁱ	\$3,600,000
Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund (Sixpence)—State General Fund ^h	\$4,800,000
Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act (TEEOSA)—Early Childhood Calculated State Aid ^j	\$20,367,038
NDE Administration of Early Childhood Programs ⁱ	\$1,836,887
NDE Flow-Through Provider Fees ⁱ	\$35,000

a Note: FY17 CCDF Allocations (Including Redistributed Funds). Children 0-5 portion provided by agency administrator.

b Note: FY17 TANF transfer to CCDF for children of all ages provided by agency administrator and a methodology to estimate funds solely for 0-5 was established collaboratively to reflect that 67.8% of CCDF funds are spent on children 0-5 by multiplying total TANF transfer by 67.8% to determine the amount attributable for 0-5.

c Note: FY17 Head Start Program Facts. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start.

d Note: FY17 CACFP payment to Nebraska. Agency administrator provided CACFP investment for children only, which included \$27,237,629 for meals, \$980,409 for cash in lieu of food, and \$143,000 for trainings.

e Note: FY17 Title I grants to Nebraska. Children 0-5 portion (preschool set-aside) verified by agency contact.

f Note: IDEA Part B, Section 619 investment reported in Funds for State Formula-Allocated and Selected Student Aid Programs Report and verified by agency administrator. Part C investment provided by agency administrator. FY17 IDEA funds invested in Nebraska's 0-5 early education system does not include any Part B funding (other than Section 619) attributable to ages 3-5 due to no methodology available.

g Source: State portion of CCDF investment (Subprogram 44 child care for 347 public assistance) reported in the "Public assistance" line of Nebraska's biennial budget. State of Nebraska FY2017-18 and 2018-19 Biennial Budget, revised May 2018, Appendix C. Children 0-5 portion verified by agency administrator.

h Source: State of Nebraska FY2017-18 and 2018-19 Biennial Budget, revised May 2018 (page 67), Appendix C.

i Source: Nebraska Department of Education "Early Childhood Education Appropriations: State Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2017" report.

j Source: Nebraska Department of Education 2016/17 State Aid Certification "Inferred Calculated Early Childhood State Aid" report.

The estimated total cost for high-quality early care and education in Nebraska is \$911.9 million in 2017 dollars.

Commission’s Establishment of Nebraska’s Public Investment

To understand Nebraska’s current public investment in early care and education for children from birth to age 5, the commission collected the most precise and current data available on funding streams originating at the federal and state levels. Utilizing parameters from the *Transforming the Financing* report, the commission established boundaries to measure the costs associated with a high-quality early care and education system. Authorizations and expenditure amounts from federal and state funding streams were gathered, verified as accurate and adjusted accordingly by state agency partners.

Table D.2 provides the figures associated with the financing mechanisms in Nebraska’s early care and education system, with footnotes providing key decision information for collection and verification of each.

NEBRASKA'S PUBLIC INVESTMENT	=	(∑ FEDERAL) + (∑ STATE)
\$211,419,860	=	\$134,748,630 + \$76,671,230

Commission’s Estimate for Nebraska’s Total Investment

Research conducted by BUILD, an initiative of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, established cross-sector estimates of where the money flowing through early care and education originates. At present, these are the best estimates available for extrapolating Nebraska’s total investment from what the commission’s research established as Nebraska’s public investment. BUILD’s proportional estimates were applied to Nebraska’s public-sector contribution to arrive at estimates for contributions by families, and by business and philanthropic contributions in the private sector. According to BUILD:

PUBLIC-SECTOR CONTRIBUTION	=	46% OF TOTAL INVESTMENT
FAMILY CONTRIBUTION	=	52% OF TOTAL INVESTMENT
PRIVATE-SECTOR CONTRIBUTION	=	2% OF TOTAL INVESTMENT

Using these proportions as a starting point, the commission estimated Nebraska’s total investment:

46% OF NEBRASKA'S TOTAL INVESTMENT	=	NEBRASKA'S PUBLIC-SECTOR CONTRIBUTION
46% OF NEBRASKA'S TOTAL INVESTMENT	=	\$211,419,860
NEBRASKA'S TOTAL INVESTMENT	=	\$211,419,860/0.46
NEBRASKA'S TOTAL INVESTMENT	=	\$459,608,391

From the estimate of Nebraska's total investment, the commission then estimated contributions from families and from the private sector:

NEBRASKA'S FAMILY CONTRIBUTION	=	52% OF TOTAL INVESTMENT
NEBRASKA'S FAMILY CONTRIBUTION	=	0.52 * \$459,608,391
NEBRASKA'S FAMILY CONTRIBUTION	=	\$238,996,363

NEBRASKA'S PRIVATE-SECTOR CONTRIBUTION	=	2% OF TOTAL INVESTMENT
NEBRASKA'S PRIVATE-SECTOR CONTRIBUTION	=	0.02 * \$459,608,391
NEBRASKA'S PRIVATE-SECTOR CONTRIBUTION	=	\$9,192,168

Nebraska contributions from business and philanthropy, especially within some communities, may be higher than the estimated 2%. The proportion is applied to the initial estimate for illustrative purposes.

Commission's Estimate of the Funding Gap

To identify the gap between the total funding needed for high-quality early care and education and Nebraska's current investment, the difference between the estimate for Nebraska's total cost and the estimate of Nebraska's current investment was calculated:

NEBRASKA'S FUNDING GAP	=	TOTAL COST - CURRENT INVESTMENT
\$452,264,109	=	\$911,872,500 - \$459,608,391

Commission's Phased Approach to Full Funding

Following the exemplar of the *Transforming the Financing* report, the commission developed estimates of the costs of transitioning to high-quality early care and education over a four-phase process. Table D.3 provides details of proportions applied across phases. Though the illustrative estimate separates private-sector contributions between families and business and philanthropic communities, this distinction is not carried through Phases 1 through 4. These estimates were constructed to illustrate the need for increased funding across the phases while also capturing the dynamic nature of the initial cost modeling that takes into account the likely changes in utilization patterns in response to higher quality and improved

affordability. How the burden can best be distributed among levels of government and among revenue sources will have to be determined through political processes in which decision makers weigh different options for transitioning to and implementing a high-quality early care and education system and weigh the benefits of such a system against the potential political and economic costs of reducing other public expenditures or raising taxes.

TABLE D.3 | FOUR-PHASE APPROACH

	CURRENT	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4
Percentage applied to GDP	0.42% ^a	0.45% ^b	0.55% ^b	0.65% ^b	0.75% ^b
Percent of total from private sector	54% ^c	57% ^b	53% ^b	47% ^b	44% ^b
Percent of total from public sector	46% ^c	43% ^d	47% ^d	53% ^d	56% ^d
Percent of total from state ^e	17%	15%	17%	19%	20%
Percent of total from federal ^e	29%	28%	30%	34%	36%

a Note: Current percentage applied to GDP was calculated with available data (total cost estimate/GDP)

b Note: Phase 1-4 percentages applied to GDP were identified by commission based on recommendations from the Transforming the Financing report

c Note: Percentage provided by BUILD estimates

d Note: Dynamic estimates from the Transforming the Financing report combined public/private assistance

e Note: Current Nebraska public dollars are 36% state and 64% federal, this 36/64 split is applied across all 4 phases

FUNDING TARGETS BY PHASE			
	2017 NE GDP * % of GDP	* 12 mos pay adjustment	Funding Target
Phase 1	(\$110.53 BILLION * 0.0045)	* 1.10	\$547,123,500
Phase 2	(\$110.53 BILLION * 0.0055)	* 1.10	\$668,706,500
Phase 3	(\$110.53 BILLION * 0.0065)	* 1.10	\$790,289,500
Phase 4	(\$110.53 BILLION * 0.0075)	* 1.10	\$911,872,500

PROJECTED PRIVATE-SECTOR CONTRIBUTION BY PHASE			
	Funding Level	* % from family	Family Contribution
current	\$459,608,391	* 0.52	\$238,996,363
Phase 1	\$547,123,500	* 0.57	\$300,917,925
Phase 2	\$668,706,500	* 0.53	\$341,040,315
Phase 3	\$790,289,500	* 0.47	\$355,630,275
Phase 4	\$911,872,500	* 0.44	\$382,986,450

PROJECTED PUBLIC-SECTOR CONTRIBUTION BY PHASE			
	Funding Level	* % from public-sector	Public-Sector Contribution
current	\$459,608,391	* 0.46	\$211,419,860
Phase 1	\$547,123,500	* 0.43	\$235,263,105
Phase 2	\$668,706,500	* 0.47	\$314,292,055
Phase 3	\$790,289,500	* 0.53	\$418,853,435
Phase 4	\$911,872,500	* 0.56	\$510,648,600

PROJECTED STATE GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION BY PHASE			
	Public-Sector Contribution	* % from state government	State Contribution
current	\$211,419,860	* 0.36	\$76,671,230
Phase 1	\$235,263,105	* 0.36	\$85,317,962
Phase 2	\$314,292,055	* 0.36	\$113,977,743
Phase 3	\$418,853,435	* 0.36	\$151,896,837
Phase 4	\$510,648,600	* 0.36	\$185,186,275

PROJECTED FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION BY PHASE			
	Public-Sector Contribution	* % from federal government	Federal Contribution
current	\$211,419,860	* 0.64	\$134,748,630
Phase 1	\$235,263,105	* 0.64	\$149,945,143
Phase 2	\$314,292,055	* 0.64	\$200,314,312
Phase 3	\$418,853,435	* 0.64	\$266,956,598
Phase 4	\$510,648,600	* 0.64	\$325,462,325

Appendix E

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR FUNDING

Appendix E identifies ideas for addressing each recommendation associated with funding. The potential strategies and tactics listed do not represent a prescriptive set of actions but are offered as a potential starting place for implementation of the recommendations. The coalition advisory board (described in Goal 4) will be tasked with identifying, assessing the feasibility of, and establishing the implementation of specific strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: BUILD ON NEBRASKA'S CURRENT INVESTMENT IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
2.1.1. Make receipt of funding conditional on meeting quality standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess feasibility of linking funding to quality standards within current state and federal laws specific to the agencies who administer funds and programs• Linking funding to quality standards would require financing mechanisms use consistent, high quality-standards as the basis for receipt of funds• Incentives for programs to work toward and achieve quality could be built into formula• Families receiving assistance would be able to select among providers that meet their needs and personal preferences without having to lose the opportunity for a high-quality experience for their children
2.1.2. Support the coordination of revenue streams and associated standards and requirements originating from disparate sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess feasibility of coordinating of revenue streams and associated standards and requirements• Work with agency leaders and administrators to identify what is needed to support coordination• Changes to financing structures should increase efficiency, transparency, and be easy to navigate and administer• As barriers to efficiency are identified and addressed, funding streams designed to meet specific needs of vulnerable populations must be protected• Coordination of revenue streams should aim to relieve the burden on providers who currently must demonstrate that they meet requirements for funding individually for each funding mechanism

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: DEVELOP LOCALLY INFORMED COST ESTIMATES OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WITH A HIGHLY QUALIFIED, ADEQUATELY COMPENSATED WORKFORCE.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
2.2.1. Support research to develop locally informed cost estimates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on university/community partnerships (e.g., Cooperative Extension) • Leverage expertise across disciplines (e.g., economics, business, early childhood, policy studies, regional planning) • Honor the expertise of local community leaders • Provide technical assistance at the local level to track factors in cost calculation

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: CLOSE THE FUNDING GAPS BETWEEN NEBRASKA'S CURRENT INVESTMENTS AND THE TOTAL INVESTMENTS NEEDED TO FULLY FUND HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
2.3.1. Redirect current expenditures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any cost reductions should result from actual efficiency gains (e.g., fewer children requiring special education services) • Any cost reductions should avoid simply shifting the costs from one sector to another or from one level of government to another • Increased funding to early care and education should not be covered by reducing other essential services to children and families
2.3.2. Build on Nebraska's public/private partnership tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase share of contributions by private-sector business and philanthropy and leverage these increases to maximize public-sector contributions • Engage entrepreneurs in the development of short-, intermediate-, and long-term business planning that is inclusive of the cost of investment in early care and education anticipated returns from those investments
2.3.3. Expect natural economic growth in existing revenue sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think beyond property taxes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rely on several revenue sources, each taxed at a lower rate, rather than a single source taxed at a higher rate – Minimize tax-induced distortions by relying on broad-based taxes that can generate substantial revenue with relatively low tax rates – Rely on tax bases that are stable over the economic cycle and grow with population and general wages – Seek to minimize the need for frequent contentious debates about the level of the tax rate • Avoid bond financing as it simply changes the timing of the tax • Consider a dedicated revenue source: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advantage of a dedicated revenue source (e.g., a legislated levy) is that once enacted it is not subject to the vagaries of annual appropriations – Disadvantage of a dedicated revenue source (e.g., a portion of tax on cigarettes) is the possibility revenue may not be sufficient to cover full costs and is unlikely to be responsive to changes in costs of services

Appendix F

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING PUBLIC WILL

Appendix F identifies ideas for addressing each recommendation associated with building public will and commitment. The potential strategies and tactics listed do not represent a prescriptive set of actions but are offered as a potential starting place for implementation of the recommendations.

GOAL 3: NEBRASKA WILL CHAMPION HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE WORKFORCE IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: INFORM NEBRASKANS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE TO HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR NEBRASKA'S FUTURE.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
3.1.1. Understand Nebraskans' current knowledge and attitudes, audience segments, and channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that well-established science and research supporting the value of early childhood education is easily available to Nebraskans• Understand Nebraskans' attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about early childhood and the value they attach to these issues• Work with communications strategists to become clear on who we are most trying to reach and what we most want them to know
3.1.2. Partner with communications strategists to ensure effective targeting and strategy development, organizations and networks that have statewide and community reach, and community and business leaders and others who are committed high-quality early care and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop messages and a communications plan to build support• Identify and partner with organizations that have statewide and community reach, sharing an overall message strategy so that Nebraskans hear accurate, consistent, and concise messages• Focus on business leaders as an important partner in understanding what's at stake for Nebraska's future. Address the role of early childhood programs as economic drivers in communities and share the return on investment (ROI)—that each \$1 invested yields an average return of \$4, and in circumstances where children are extremely vulnerable, the return can be as high as \$13• Provide turnkey materials and digital tools that are able to be easily used and shared (and also localized by community-level partners)

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
3.1.3. Promote information about the importance of the early childhood workforce in providing high-quality early care and education by producing turnkey materials for partners and others to use, and organize commission members and other early childhood experts to meet and speak with fellow Nebraskans across the state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for commission members and other early childhood supporters to meet and speak with community and state leaders and organizations. Use speeches, presentations, and key meetings to share critical information and explain the impact at both the community and state level • Share opinion research that helps Nebraskans understand the growing support and momentum for early childhood education in the state and the ways in which support cuts across age, gender, rural and urban areas of the state, and political parties

RECOMMENDATION 3.2: ENGAGE NEBRASKANS IN STATEWIDE EFFORTS TO SUPPORT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE AND HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
3.2.1. Involve Nebraskans in addressing the need for high-quality early care and education in our respective communities and the state, including the many community and business leaders who are already engaged as well as the educators, child care providers, and administrators who are providing services and supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring people together through events, forums, and town hall meetings where there is an opportunity to be informed and engaged • Leverage commission members and other early childhood supporters as champions to lead efforts within their communities and constituencies • Tap business and community leaders as spokespeople who understand the bottom-line dollars and cents value of investing in high-quality early childhood programs and services • Work with partners and other key allies in law enforcement, the judicial community, and the military who are well versed in understanding the value and benefits of investing in high-quality early childhood education and know all too well what happens when those investments are not made • Engage educators, child care providers, administrators, and staff who provide early childhood programs and services to children from birth through Grade 3 to learn more from their perspectives and engage them in the broader effort to support high-quality education and care • Identify ways in which Nebraskans can make their views known, including through focus groups, online surveys, and social media
3.2.2. Strategize with communications specialists to identify the most effective ways to engage Nebraskans, including community forums, events, and town hall meetings as well as digital platforms, online surveys, and other effective means of engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with communications strategists on a pledge or unifying “call to action” that Nebraskans can take to indicate support and to be part of a growing statewide effort, and popularize and promote the pledge or slogan • Ask communities to share their strategies for how they are improving early childhood education and supporting the workforce and create a viral campaign for sharing with other communities

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
3.2.3. Create materials and supports that feature community success stories and other information, including a website and digital strategies that make information easily accessible to all Nebraskans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a website that provides access to information and ways for communities, businesses, schools, and others to be featured and to house campaign toolkits and other essential information

RECOMMENDATION 3.3: SEEK NEBRASKANS’ COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
3.3.1. Specify the actions that must be taken to ensure high-quality early care and education and support for the early childhood workforce in Nebraska	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and provide Nebraskans with concrete steps they can take in their communities, businesses, schools, and other settings to support young children and families. • Provide and promote case studies of states and communities that have decided to invest in early childhood education and the difference it is making. Highlight strategies that have worked well in states comparable to Nebraska
3.3.2. Enlist Nebraskans to join this growing effort to support young children’s learning and development and the early childhood workforce. This will be critical to the success of the coalition described in Goal 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Business Leaders Roundtable to speak out on why their companies are investing in early childhood education and the financial imperative it represents for the state • Work with campaign strategists to develop creative, exciting opportunities for communities to compete with each other to “start early, start well” on behalf of young children • Grow the effort for supporting high-quality early childhood education by enlisting more Nebraskans and communities to become engaged on behalf of young children and families
3.3.3. Grow the commitment that Nebraskans take through their actions and share those efforts with others, documenting success and continually evaluating the effort in order to inform ongoing campaign development and execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify the public policy changes that are needed to support early childhood education and make it easy for Nebraskans to have their voices heard through meetings with elected officials, an advocacy day at the State Capitol, and other outreach • Ensure that early childhood education is an issue discussed in local and state elections so that Nebraskans are aware of the perspectives of candidates for public office. Meet with candidates once they are elected to help ensure they are familiar with Nebraskans’ broad support for high-quality early childhood education and discuss their plans in this area of public policy critical to the state’s future • Create momentum by sharing success stories and celebrating key milestones that are part of this umbrella effort

Appendix G

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Appendix G outlines the considerations necessary for addressing each recommendation associated with implementation, infrastructure, and accountability. The considerations and tactics do not represent a prescriptive set of actions but are offered as a potential starting place as a supportive infrastructure and coalition advisory board move to implementation.

GOAL 4: NEBRASKANS WILL IMPLEMENT THE NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACHIEVE A HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND DIVERSE WORKFORCE ON BEHALF OF ALL YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT THE INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDED TO SUPPORT CONTINUED COORDINATION, COLLABORATION, AND COMMUNICATION ACROSS SECTORS.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
4.1.1. Develop a supportive infrastructure and coalition for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify partner organizations and relevant stakeholders that will ensure multi-sector collaboration• Recruit and secure coalition advisory board• Develop and articulate a common vision and indicators of success• Identify resources and key relationships necessary to accomplish objectives• Identify potential sources of funding and support, including in-kind support from partner organizations• Adopt mechanisms for communication and joint accountability• Establish the structure the coalition will use to function efficiently• Hire qualified staff to manage design, implementation, and evaluation of implementation efforts
4.1.2. Develop and implement systems of shared measurement and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree upon a shared set of success indicators• Create a dashboard of success indicators• Commit to collection of longitudinal data• Adopt a facilitative process for sharing data and results• Use data to track progress and improve efforts over time

- 4.1.3. Create and implement feedback loops for continuous improvement within and across systems
- Evaluate process and outcomes and inform stakeholders of the results
 - Make the dashboard of success indicators readily available to organizations and the public
 - Publish yearly reports on progress toward success indicators
 - Leverage successes to establish future funding
 - Continually monitor the effectiveness of implementation efforts and customize them for local contexts
 - Create opportunities for new partners to become involved
 - Evaluate outcomes and revise as needed

RECOMMENDATION 4.2: ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS AUTHENTICALLY, WITHIN AND ACROSS COMMUNITIES, IN ORDER TO BROADEN COALITION PARTICIPATION.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY	CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS
4.2.1. Engage community-based organizations and community members in ways that encourage genuine feedback and long-term meaningful partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify existing relationships within communities • Ensure that communities understand the implementation process and how they can influence the process • Understand a range of community perspectives • Identify engagement strategies that support community preferences • Ensure that community meetings are facilitated by trusted members of the community • Embed community members in every level of implementation, from advisory board to workgroups • Offer a variety of engagement options and modes of communication • If possible, compensate community members for their time and contributions to coalition-related work • Address common barriers to engagement • Host coalition meetings in spaces where community members gather • Create feedback loops to encourage transparency and accountability

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- ⁵⁰ Title I funds attributable to children 0-5 are commonly called the preschool set-aside.
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