

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION

NEWS RELEASE

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NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION RELEASES GROUNDBREAKING REPORT OUTLINING URGENT NEED TO PRIORITIZE STATE'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Too much at risk: Critical responsibility is placed on a workforce that is undervalued and underpaid

Lincoln, Neb. — There is an urgent need to prioritize the early childhood care and education workforce in Nebraska.

With more than 75 percent of Nebraska children under age 6 in some form of care while parents work—among the highest in the country—coupled with unparalleled human growth and brain development occurring from birth through age 8, the implications of early care and education are enormous for children, families, and Nebraska communities. This individual and societal responsibility is placed upon an early childhood workforce that is compensated at or near the poverty level and is poorly supported.

The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, a group of more than 40 Nebraska public- and private-sector leaders, is releasing a groundbreaking report today to address the challenges facing the early childhood workforce. *Elevating Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce: Report and Recommendations of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission* is the culmination of three years of effort by a commission formed to tackle one of the most complex and pressing challenges facing Nebraska today—expanding and strengthening the state's early childhood workforce to meet children's needs throughout the first eight years of life. The commission, which was convened by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, began work in February 2017.

The commission's vision is to elevate the early childhood workforce to a priority profession benefitting all children from birth through Grade 3. A priority profession is work that is essential to the social and economic well-being of the state. The commission's recommendations center on four key goals:

- Ensure the early childhood workforce is highly qualified and reflects the diversity of the children and families they serve.
- Fully fund high-quality care and education by 2030.
- Nebraskans champion the critical role of the early childhood workforce in young children's learning and development.
- Implement the commission's recommendations through the formation of a statewide coalition.

"We believe the will of Nebraskans will be the difference maker in bringing life-changing, economic-friendly, and community-driven solutions to the trio of barriers—funding, qualifications, and perceptions—holding down our early childhood workforce," said Samuel J. Meisels, commission co-chair and founding executive director of the Buffett Institute. "Nebraska is the model."

The commission's vision and goals address a wide range of findings about the state of the early childhood workforce in Nebraska, including:

- *Low Wages and High Turnover:* Low wages and lack of benefits contribute to high rates of teacher turnover, in some settings as high as 26 percent. For example, the median annual salary for a teacher in a community-based early childhood setting is \$18,706, which is below the poverty level for a family of three. Approximately 27 percent of home-based and 20 percent of center-based teachers are on public assistance.
- *Limited and Uneven Access to Affordable, High-Quality Care:* Families' abilities to access affordable, high-quality care and education is uneven and depends on where families live and what they can afford. In Nebraska, 84 percent of counties do not have enough child care slots to meet the needs of families with young children, while a year of infant care can cost more than a year of college tuition. In 2016, more than 4,000 working parents were forced to leave, not accept, or change jobs because of child care problems.
- *Connection to Communities and Economic Development:* Early care and education programs are linked to a community's vitality and economic development with long-term implications for the state's future. Working parents depend on child care, and communities across the state have identified child care as one of their most pressing needs. Research shows that when early childhood investments are made, they lead to high rates of return. 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, reflecting savings from money spent for special education, health care, social services, and criminal justice.

"The issues raised in the commission's report are as crucial for working parents as they are for those of us caring for and educating young children," said Mariah Stowe, commission member and owner/operator of Splash of Color Child Care in Lincoln. "I understand the critical importance of these issues, having been in the position of being a parent putting my own children in child care and now owning my own child care program."

The commission's report will be released in Lincoln today. More than 500 people are expected to attend and/or participate remotely via a livestream feed of the event, with 12 communities organizing local "watch parties" in anticipation of the release of the report. Commission co-chair Marjorie Kostelnik will convene the event and Senator John Stinner, commission member and chair of the Legislature's Appropriations Committee, will provide opening remarks, to be followed by a panel of commission members who will speak to different aspects of the commission's recommendations. State Commissioner of Education Matthew Blomstedt and Nebraska Health and Human Services CEO Dannette Smith will offer closing comments.

"High-quality early childhood programs are critically important to Nebraska's future and an economic driver in communities across the state," said Stinner. "I am fully committed to working together to find the solutions that work in our state."

Next steps are for the commission to share the report and recommendations with fellow Nebraskans and begin to convene a statewide coalition that will be involved with implementing the recommendations. To read the report, and for more information about the commission, go to earlyyearsmatter.org/workforce.