Monday, September 14, 2020

2020 Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference
Agenda

8:30 a.m.  Welcome and Opening Remarks
            Samuel J. Meisels, Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska

8:40 a.m.  Remarks
            Senator John Stinner, Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Nebraska Legislature, District 48

8:50 a.m.  Keynote
            Introduction
            Jessie Rasmussen, Buffett Early Childhood Fund
            The Business of Early Childhood Education: What It Is and Why It Matters
            Linda Smith, Bipartisan Policy Center
            Nebraska ranks as one of the top states in the nation where all available parents work. Three out of every four children under the age of 6 are in some form of paid child care. Yet research shows Nebraska, like many other states, faces great challenges, including a shortage of high-quality early childhood programs and services. Why is this and what can we do about it? This keynote address by Linda Smith, early childhood initiative director at the Bipartisan Policy Center, will examine critical issues and obstacles from a state and national perspective and highlight the special role for communities, businesses, and policymakers in charting a better path forward.

9:40 a.m.  Panel Discussion
            Community Perspectives Response Panel
            Moderator: Jessie Rasmussen, Buffett Early Childhood Fund
            Casey Madsen, Learning Adventures Child Care Center, Inc.
            Darby Paxton, Holt County Office of Economic Development
            Linda Smith, Bipartisan Policy Center
            Jay Wolf, Wagonhammer Ranches

10:25 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. Breakout Sessions

11:15 a.m. Break

11:20 a.m. Breakout Sessions Repeated

12:05 p.m. Break

12:10 p.m. Closing
            Jason Prokop, First Five Nebraska
            Michael Medwick, First Five Nebraska

12:30 p.m. Conference Closes
Breakout Sessions

The Bottom Line: Economic Impacts of Inadequate Child Care Access in Nebraska
Mike Feeken, First Five Nebraska
Garry Clark, Greater Fremont Development Council
David Rosenbaum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Eric Thompson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Access to quality child care plays a key role in Nebraska’s prospects for ongoing economic stability and growth. When working parents have inadequate options for child care, it has serious implications for individual incomes, business outputs, and state revenues. A recently released study from First Five Nebraska in partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Bureau of Business Research examined the annual financial impacts of gaps in child care access. In this panel discussion, we’ll examine what those impacts mean for Nebraska’s working parents, employers, and economy.

Planning Outside of the Box — How the Pandemic Challenge Brings About Change and Growth
Marcia Herring, Nebraska Association of School Boards

Leadership is paramount to the success of the school district when coping with an unexpected challenge or crisis. The board must respond with a resolve to sustain purposeful planning and governance through policy to support administration. This session will highlight the board’s leadership required to empower administration, collaborating with the community to serve students, where we are today as we cope with the unknown, and planning for where we are going in what is now our new “normal.”

Community Child Care and School Partnerships: An Essential Connection
Ron Hanson, North Platte Public Schools
Nichole Hetz, Gothenburg Early Childhood Learning Coalition
Allison Jonas, Gothenburg Public Schools
Chantel Tonkinson, Ladybug Crossing Early Learning Center

A strong partnership between school and the community can build a collaborative culture around early childhood education. In this session, North Platte Public Schools and Ladybug Crossing Early Learning Center—which work collaboratively to provide high-quality child care and education so all North Platte children are thriving by age 3, are ready by age 5, and are on their way toward success by age 8—will share the story of how the Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference provided the opportunity to develop a “big idea” into a reality for the North Platte community. Also, Gothenburg Public Schools and the Gothenburg Early Childhood Learning Coalition will share their story on must haves for a partnership including data-driven decisions, collaboration, shared materials, curricula, and training, and why “all” means ALL!

The Role of the Early Childhood Workforce in Community-Led Change
Leslie Baker, Fits & Giggles, LLC
Cama Charlet, Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska
Erika Fink, Educational Service Unit #1
Brandee Lengel, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative

In this session, participants will be introduced to strategies for prioritizing the voice of early childhood professionals in community-led change efforts. Presenters will frame key takeaways in approaches that can be easily implemented and will add value to your local implementation efforts.
How Are Rural Families and Communities Surviving and Thriving in Nebraska? A Research and Resource Highlight

**Maria Rosario de Guzman,** University of Nebraska-Lincoln

**Cody Hollist,** University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Nearly two-thirds of Nebraska’s 93 counties have experienced declining populations in the past decade. However, an influx of immigrants and ethnic minorities has helped many rural communities survive and thrive. Yet the well-being and adjustment of ethnic minorities and immigrants can vary based on factors such as family-centered resources, a sense of belonging, and the experience of discrimination. In 2019, a Nebraska study examined which factors impact rural community residents’ well-being and the quality of life of ethnic minorities and immigrants. Maria Rosario de Guzman, the study’s principal investigator, will present the research findings. Information will also be shared from the Coming Together for Wellness project, a free resource developed at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in response to the strain and stress families have experienced during the coronavirus pandemic. Cody Hollist, the project’s leader, will share how residents across the state can find social media support groups, mental health consultations, and other resources to strengthen their mental health and resilience. This resource is for anyone needing assistance, but especially those in rural communities who may not have access to other mental health services.

Building Back Better: Resources for COVID-19 and Resiliency in Action

**Saffron Buettner,** Communities for Kids

**Elizabeth Everett,** First Five Nebraska

**Julie Nash,** Hall County Community Collaborative

**Sarah Papa,** Platte/Colfax Community and Family Partnership

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll, but it has created an opportunity for communities and businesses to understand the close relationship they have with early childhood care and education. This session will highlight stories of communities being intentional about types of action and using available resources to get through the crisis while also creating a network for future collaboration. First Five Nebraska shares a wealth of resources available to communities and child care providers related to COVID-19. Navigating resources, providing explanations, and offering practical advice to sustain and build back child care in communities will be a highlight of this session. First Five will be joined by two communities that have used these resources and put them into action at a local level. Columbus/Schuyler and Grand Island will share how they are supporting their early care and education providers with supplies, resources, and connections. Their stories will showcase the support they offered and how building relationships and connections between child care, cities, schools, and businesses is making a long-term impact on their communities.