

BUFFETT INSTITUTE/GALLUP SURVEY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the goal of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education in Nebraska?

The purpose of the survey is to understand the public's attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge concerning early care and education across Nebraska.

2. Why did the Buffett Institute partner with Gallup to conduct this survey?

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska is a multi-disciplinary research, practice, policy, and outreach center that began operations in 2013. Our mission is to use the resources of the four NU campuses to transform the development and learning of children from birth through age 8. In order to learn more about the state's attitudes and knowledge regarding early care and education, the Institute reached out to Gallup, a global company that conducts public opinion polls and surveys that are respected and valued nationally and internationally. Headquartered in Omaha, Gallup brings deep knowledge of Nebraska. Their extensive survey experience makes them an outstanding partner.

3. How do we know that the survey sample is representative of all Nebraskans?

More than 7,100 Nebraskans responded to the survey, making it the largest public opinion poll about early care and education ever conducted in the state. The survey was available in both English and Spanish and mailed in late 2015 to a random sample of Nebraska residents, age 18 and older. To ensure that the sample was representative, respondents were selected using address-based sampling, a technique that randomly selects recipients from a list of all households on file with the U.S. Postal Service. This ensured that all Nebraskans with a valid address had an equal chance of being selected to receive the survey. Gallup then divided the sample by urban centers, large towns, and small towns/rural areas to allow for estimates at the area and state levels. In addition, Gallup scientifically weighted the data to match Nebraska's demographics by gender, age, education, race, and Hispanic ethnicity.

4. Why are the early years so important for young children's later success in school and life?

Scientific research demonstrates that birth through age 8 is a unique period of life that can have a dramatic impact on the child's entire life. Critical brain circuits are built, language is learned, ways of interacting with others are established, and cognitive and social skills are formed. If this essential foundation is in place by third grade, children are likely to be able to master complex learning tasks, to problem-solve, and to sustain productive and caring relationships. If not, the pathways through school and life may be uphill challenges, often too steep for some to surmount.

5. What is the definition of "early care and education"?

"Early care and education" is how we refer to all programs and services designed for children in the first 8 years of life. It includes Pre-K, child care, home-based programs, and even Kindergarten – Grade 3. High-quality early care and education programs are committed to being both emotionally supportive

and cognitively stimulating. Such programs are best able to help children realize their potential, particularly children who are at risk due to poverty or familial circumstances.

6. The survey finds that most Nebraskans believe that quality early care and education is unavailable and unaffordable for all families. What can be done to increase access and lower cost?

As in many states, the cost of child care for infants in Nebraska is equal to or greater than tuition at a 4-year college or university. In rural parts of the state, access to quality child care is of great concern since many areas may have few choices for their children and families. Making child care affordable while maintaining high quality standards will require collaboration between public and private sectors including local school districts, ESUs, the Legislature, private providers, and others. The Buffett Institute is partnering with communities, policymakers, higher education institutions, and public agencies to increase access to high-quality care for all children.

7. One of the most striking findings of the survey is that fewer than half of Nebraskans are satisfied with the quality of early care and education where they live. How does the Buffett Institute define quality?

A variety of factors contribute to the quality of early childhood care and education programs, including small class sizes, excellent adult-to-child ratios, highly skilled staff, safe environments, and stimulating learning materials. Also essential are responsive, consistent primary caregivers, who help build positive attachments and support healthy social-emotional development. Instruction must be culturally, linguistically, and educationally appropriate, guided by curricula and assessments that are aligned with children's development and are supportive of families' backgrounds.

8. What can Nebraska do to increase the quality of its early care and education programs?

Nebraskans are entitled to expect high quality from their programs and from the early childhood educators and caregivers in whom they place their trust. In 2013 the state established the quality rating and improvement program called *Step Up to Quality* as a means to ensure higher quality in Nebraska early care and education efforts and a way for Nebraskans to monitor programs in their community. We need to support those early childhood programs that are part of the *Step Up to Quality* effort and to encourage more programs to participate in it.

9. Only 10 percent of Nebraskans feel strongly that most young children in the state are prepared to be successful when they start Kindergarten. What does it mean to "be ready" for Kindergarten? What can parents do to help their children?

School readiness is a measure of how prepared a child is to succeed in school—not just academically, but socially and emotionally as well. Parents play an important part in ensuring that learning begins long before children enter Kindergarten. Parents can support children by engaging them in language-rich conversations, reading to them regularly, providing stimulating learning materials and experiences inside and outside the home, and focusing on positive daily interactions that support children's social and emotional development.

10. The survey reveals that Nebraskans think more should be done to help children from low-income families be ready for success in life. Are high-quality early childhood experiences more important for children from low-income families? Aren't these experiences essential for all children?

Research is clear that high-quality early childhood care and education can benefit all children, no matter their family's socioeconomic status. However, early childhood programs are particularly vital for children who are placed at risk because of poverty, abuse, developmental delays, or other social or familial challenges. These children are more likely to face obstacles to learning and development than children from economically advantaged families. Evidence also shows that children who are most at risk are likely

to benefit the most from participating in high-quality early childhood care and education experiences.

11. How do these findings compare to similar surveys from other states and to national public opinion polls about early care and education?

Nebraskans' views are generally aligned with the growing national interest in policies that support high-quality early care and education. Recent public opinion polls in states from coast to coast—including North Carolina, Florida, Utah, Ohio, Colorado, California, and Iowa—show support for increased investments in early childhood. For three years running, the national First Five Years Fund's annual bipartisan poll has shown that early childhood education is a priority for all Americans, regardless of party affiliation.

12. The majority of Nebraskans want to increase the state's investment in quality early care and education. How do we make this happen?

There is no single answer to this question—it's not simply a matter of time, or money, or people. The best way to think about increasing the state's investment in quality care and education is to understand that the early years are part of a larger family, community, and educational system. We need more supports for families, especially those living in poverty and those with few resources available to them. We also need more support for community-based organizations that care for young children, beginning in infancy and extending through the first years of school. And we need more coordination and cooperation between the primary grades and the early years of life. Nothing is more important to our society than helping families get young children off to a great start in life. The return on this investment will last a lifetime. It is a task that involves us all.

13. What is the Buffett Institute's response to the findings from the survey?

As a new institute, our goal for this survey was to understand Nebraskans' views on early care and education. Given our roots in the University, we have approached this in a systematic and sound way. Now we are in a position to share the results with Nebraskans and especially with state and community leaders who will determine how to use the information.

In our view, the results of this survey are striking and compelling. They sound a call to action for Nebraska to determine more clearly the path—and the trajectory—for our youngest citizens. How our children fare will determine our state's collective fate and Nebraska's ability to achieve its potential. How we prepare young children today affects the experiences and challenges that our schools face, the ability of businesses to hire capable and competent employees, and the type of citizenry that Nebraska will have in the future.

14. What does the Buffett Institute recommend as next steps for Nebraska?

This survey underscores the opportunity that Nebraska has to deepen its commitment to young children and their families and to build on the work that is underway. Clearly, Nebraskans are supportive of doing more. Given what we have learned as a new institute these past two years, the time is ripe for Nebraska to embrace early childhood as an urgent statewide priority.

In more specific and programmatic terms, we would recommend that leaders in Nebraska view the needs of children and families within the context of those systems that serve them, and in particular by doing the following:

- Create partnerships between local school districts and community-based child care;
- Provide professional development to teachers, caregivers, and administrators who care for children in the first eight years of life, whether in schools, pre-K, or home-based child care;

- Strengthen higher education preparation programs at both the 2- and 4-year level so the state has access to a more highly qualified early childhood workforce; and
- Encourage policymakers to move fiscal resources “upstream” to the first years of life in order to relieve families of the tremendous cost of caring for their children and to encourage support for home visiting or center-based programs for birth-age 3, high-quality preschools, and aligned curricula for Kindergarten-Grade 3.