

BY THE NUMBERS: EARLY CHILDHOOD IN NEBRASKA

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The Need for High-Quality Early Care and Education

- Early childhood is regarded as the period of time in a young child's life from birth through age 8. The brain is developing more rapidly during these early years of life than at any other time.¹
- Parents are children's first teachers, but most young children are not with their parents for many hours of the day. In Nebraska, more than 72% of children under age 6 live in homes where all adults work, which is higher than the national average of 67%.²
- Who is caring for children and how they are doing it matters greatly. The safety, relationships, and interactions between young children and their parents, caregivers, and teachers are the most important elements of a high-quality experience.⁸
- Ninety-one percent of counties in Nebraska do not have enough available licensed child care slots to meet the current demand.³
- Eleven counties in Nebraska have no licensed child care facilities.³
- Seventy-six percent of mothers with children under the age of six years old are in the labor force in Nebraska.⁴
- Teacher turnover is as high as 26% in some early care and education settings.⁵
- Forty-one percent of children in Nebraska age 5 and younger are considered at risk of failure in school (62,729 children).⁶

Nebraskans' Views on Early Care and Education⁷

- More than two-thirds (68%) of Nebraskans say that early care and education has a significant impact on the long-term success of children.
- Only 10% of residents strongly believe that most young children are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten.
- Just 1% of residents say all children birth to age 5 in Nebraska receive high-quality early care and education.
- Few Nebraskans (11%) strongly agree that high-quality early care and education is available to every family in the state. Even fewer (6%) believe it is affordable.
- A substantial majority of Nebraskans (67%) believe the state should make early care and education a higher priority than it is today.
- More than half (51%) of the state's residents say the state should provide early care and education for all children from low-income families who choose to use it.

Status and Compensation of Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce

- Nearly half of Nebraskans (48%) believe that teachers and caregivers are paid too little.⁷
- In 2015, the median annual salary for early childhood professionals was \$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.⁹

- 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.⁹
- The median annual pay for center-based teachers falls below the poverty line by almost \$1,400 for a family of three.⁹
- More than 11% of home-based providers have a second job and nearly 20% of center-based teachers, public PreK teachers, and K–3 teachers report holding a second job.⁹
- One in four (24%) home-based providers and center-based teachers depend on some form of public assistance. For home-based providers alone, that segment is nearly 30% and for center-based teachers alone, 20%.⁹
- More than 13% of home-based and center-based child care providers report that their own school-aged children qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.⁹

Return on Investment

- 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 also to the economic vitality and prosperity of the state.¹⁰
- Nebraska’s lack of sufficient child care is a burden on working parents, employers, and state revenues, resulting in “nearly \$745 million annually in direct losses.”¹¹
- 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 \$13.¹²
- Return on investment (ROI) 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.¹²

COVID-19 Impact on Nebraska’s Early Care and Education Providers (2020–22)

- One in four providers reported their income reduced by over 50%.¹³
- Almost all providers have experienced decreased enrollment, with greater enrollment reductions for center-based providers.¹³
- In the event of illness resulting from COVID-19, less than 1 in 4 providers had paid sick leave.¹³
- Most providers experienced symptoms of stress, such as changes in sleep, difficulty concentrating, social isolation, and anxiety about the future.¹³
- The majority of providers (51%) reported that without financial assistance they would likely close if the pandemic continued or worsened.¹³
- Most providers (87%) would apply for financial assistance, if offered. Less than 1% say they would not seek additional financial assistance.¹³
- The majority of providers (59%) reported using the temporary child care subsidy rule allowing providers to bill when enrolled children are absent.¹³
- Nine in 10 providers employing staff had difficulty hiring for open positions, citing a lack of applicants and inability to offer sufficient pay.¹⁴
- Two-thirds of child care employers experienced staff turnover, with nearly 7 in 10 providers saying staff were leaving the field of early childhood entirely.¹⁴
- Three in 10 providers experienced food insecurity, reporting that in the last year their household would sometimes run out of food before they were able to purchase more.¹⁴
- More than half of providers had to close their program due to COVID exposure and/or infection in the past year.¹⁴

- More than half of providers had COVID-19 at least once and almost half of providers who have contracted COVID-19 exhibited post-COVID conditions, or symptoms that last longer than four weeks.¹⁴
- More than half of providers employing staff indicated that staff experienced post-COVID conditions, and half of those reported that it impacts their staff's ability to care for children.¹⁴
- Two in five providers reported experiencing burnout.¹⁴

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