

BY THE NUMBERS: EARLY CHILDHOOD IN NEBRASKA

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The Need for 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 76% of children under age 6 live in homes where all adults work, which is higher than the national average of 68%.²
- Ninety-one percent of counties in Nebraska with child care facilities do not have enough available slots to meet the current demand.³
- Twelve counties in Nebraska have no licensed child care facilities.⁴
- Seventy percent of mothers with infants and toddlers are in the labor force in Nebraska.⁵
- Teacher turnover is as high as 26% in some early care and education settings.⁶
- Thirty-six percent of children in Nebraska age 5 and younger are considered at-risk of failure in school (55,838 children).⁷

Nebraskans' Views on Early Care and Education⁸

- The vast majority of Nebraskans express support for early care and education.
- In overwhelming numbers, residents say that quality care and education is not available or affordable for all families in Nebraska.
- 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 quality early care and education.
- Few Nebraskans (11%) strongly agree that 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 the Early Childhood Workforce

- Nearly half of Nebraskans (48%) believe that teachers and caregivers are paid too little.⁸
- Who is caring for children and how they are doing it matter 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.⁹

- In 2015, the median annual salary 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.¹⁰
- 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.¹⁰
- The median annual pay for center-based teachers falls below the poverty line by almost \$1,400 for a family of three.¹⁰
- 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.¹⁰
- Nearly 30% of home-based providers and 20% of center-based teachers depend on some type of public assistance.¹⁰
- 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.¹⁰

Return on Investment

- Ensuring all families and children have equitable access to affordable 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.^{4,11}
- 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”.¹²
- 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 \$13.¹³
- This return includes money saved on special education, health care, social services, and the criminal justice systems, as well as money earned from greater educational attainment, increased earnings, and improved productivity.¹³

COVID-19 Impact on Early Care and Education Providers¹⁴

- One in 4 providers has seen their income reduced by over 50%.
- Almost all providers have experienced decreased enrollment, with greater enrollment reductions for center-based providers.
- In the event of illness resulting from COVID-19, less than 1 in 4 providers has paid sick leave.
- Most providers are experiencing symptoms of stress, such as changes in sleep, difficulty concentrating, social isolation, and anxiety about the future.
- The majority of providers (51%) reported that without financial assistance they will likely close if the pandemic continues or worsens.
- Most providers (87%) would apply for financial assistance, if offered. Less than 1% say they would not seek additional financial assistance.
- The majority of providers (59%) reported using the temporary child care subsidy rule allowing providers to bill when enrolled children are absent.

^{1.} National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Eds. J.P. Shonkoff and D.A. Phillips. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

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