

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

URBAN AND RURAL NEBRASKANS SPEAK ABOUT EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

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. 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.

2. What were the findings of the main report, *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*?

This survey's main report, released March 29, 2016, showed that the vast majority (68 percent) of Nebraskans value and support early care and education, but residents have serious concerns about its availability, affordability, and quality. Only 15 percent of Nebraskans are very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs in the city or area where they live, and even fewer (10 percent) strongly agree that most children are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten. More than two-thirds of respondents voiced strong support for more investment by the state in young children.

3. Why is the Buffett Institute producing additional reports from the survey?

The Buffett Institute and Gallup are releasing three additional reports from the survey. These reports focus on Nebraskans' views of the early childhood workforce; on urban and rural residents' views of early childhood across the state; and on parents' perspectives on early care and education. We believe findings from these additional reports can help inform policymakers, community leaders, educators, and others about the future of early care and education in Nebraska.

4. Why did the Buffett Institute choose to focus on similarities and differences among Nebraskans from counties of various population sizes?

Nebraska is a large state with geographic diversity. While almost two-thirds of the state's population live in four counties with an urban center, there are many Nebraskans who live in large towns, small towns, or rural areas. Understanding the similarities and differences in their views about early childhood issues can help ensure that support and investments are tailored to match communities' needs.

5. How did Gallup and the Buffett Institute decide to divide respondents into the three population categories? Why were these categories selected?

To accurately represent the counties of various population sizes in Nebraska, we created three categories:

- Counties with an urban core with a population of 50,000 or more, also called metropolitan. These counties include Douglas, Lancaster, and Sarpy Counties.

- Counties with a large rural town with a population between 10,000 - 49,999, also called micropolitan. They include Adams, Buffalo, Dakota, Dawson, Dodge, Gage, Hall*, Lincoln, Madison, Platte, and Scotts Bluff Counties.
- Counties with a small rural town or isolated rural area with a population less than 10,000 (all others).

*Note: When the survey was conducted, Hall County was considered micropolitan. However, the population has grown to 60,000-plus since that time, and it is now considered metropolitan.

6. What are the findings from *Urban and Rural Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*?

Key findings from the report include:

- **Nebraskans are concerned for children’s future.** Though the vast majority of Nebraskans from urban and rural areas share a belief that the state is a good place to be a young child today, they are worried about the future. Only 30 percent of rural Nebraskans and 39 percent of urban residents are optimistic that children’s lives will be better 10 years from now. Only 8 percent of urban and 11 percent of rural residents strongly agree that most young children in the state are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten.
- **Child care costs and availability are concerns.** Urban residents are significantly more likely than rural residents (44 percent, compared with 23 percent) to report that cost is the greatest challenge families face in obtaining high-quality care. Conversely, rural residents are more likely than urban residents to cite availability of high-quality early care and education programs as the biggest challenge.
- **Support for increased investments.** There is consensus among residents across the state about the need for greater state investment in early care and education. Two-thirds of all Nebraskans agree or strongly agree that the state should make early care and education a higher priority than it is today. A majority of urban (61 percent) and rural (55 percent) Nebraskans say the state is investing too little in these programs.

7. The survey finds that only 35 percent of Nebraskans think young children’s lives will get better in 10 years. Yet eight in 10 respondents say Nebraska is one of the best states in which to be a young child. How do you explain this contrast?

This shows that although Nebraskans generally love their state, they recognize that there are challenges to ensuring that the state remains one of the best for young children. Findings from the main report from the Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education demonstrated that Nebraskans don’t think most young children in the state are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten. In overwhelming numbers, residents say that high-quality early care and education is not available or affordable for all families in Nebraska, and the majority of Nebraskans believe the state should make early care and education a higher priority than it is today. Based on these findings, we can conclude that in order for children to continue to succeed, Nebraskans believe more attention has to be paid to early care and education.

8. Do Nebraskans have reason to be concerned about the future?

There is much to take pride in for Nebraska, including relatively low unemployment and crime rates. However, there are segments of Nebraskans that are less likely to achieve success in school and in the long term, including portions of urban, rural, minority, immigrant, and low-income populations. In order for Nebraska, with its small population, to continue to be a vibrant and economically stable state, we must take steps to ensure that all children have educational and economic opportunities that will enhance their future happiness and productivity.

9. Urban residents are significantly more likely than rural residents to report that cost is the biggest challenge families face in obtaining high-quality care. Is child care more expensive in urban areas?

While the cost of living in Nebraska is 5 percent lower than the national average, the cost of living in urban areas in Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster Counties is higher than in rural communities. In addition, the cost of child care in the Lincoln and Omaha areas is 5 percent higher than the national average.

10. More rural residents than urban residents cite availability as the greatest challenge to obtaining high-quality early care and education programs. Are there fewer programs in rural areas? Why?

Based on data from the *2016 Kids Count in Nebraska Report*, 11 counties in Nebraska have no licensed child care facilities and approximately 84 percent of counties in Nebraska with child care facilities do not have enough available slots to meet the current demand. Most of these counties are in rural areas. A number of factors contribute to lack of availability including a statewide shortage of early childhood professionals and the cost of providing high-quality care.

11. 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 is 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.

12. What is the Buffett Institute's response to the findings from this report?

Nebraskans—no matter where they live—share similar views on a range of early childhood issues. Despite a consensus on many issues, some differences associated with where one lives show up in the survey. Residents of counties with an urban core were somewhat less positive than other respondents about whether Nebraska is a great place for children. But urban-area residents were more optimistic about the future than residents of small towns/isolated rural areas and large rural towns. Results also indicate differences in perceptions about the affordability and availability of early care and education across counties of various population sizes.

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

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. In addition, Gallup scientifically weighted the data to match Nebraska's demographics by gender, age, education, race and Hispanic ethnicity.