

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **NEBRASKANS SPEAK ABOUT THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE**

**1. What was 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 parent report, released March 29, 2016, showed that the vast majority (68 percent) of Nebraskans value and support early care and education, but 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. The first is *Nebraskans Speak About the Early Care and Education Workforce*. The other two reports will focus on urban and rural residents' views on early childhood across the state, and parents' perspectives on early care and education. We believe findings from these additional reports can help further inform policymakers, community leaders, educators, and others about the future of early care and education in Nebraska.

**4. Why was the early childhood workforce selected as the focus for the first additional report?**

The early childhood workforce is critical to Nebraska's children and families today, with nearly 80 of the state's children from birth through age 5 are enrolled in some form of child care. Given the emerging science about the importance of the early years, the professionals who care for and teach young children play a critical role in shaping their success in school and life.

**5. What are the findings from *Nebraskans Speak About the Early Care and Education Workforce*?**

There is a rich data set included in the report, including the following key findings:

- **Nebraskans recognize and value the early care and education workforce.** A majority (66 percent) of Nebraskans say an early care and education center or home-based center is best when families cannot care for their children during the day. Almost half of Nebraska parents (46 percent) have turned to schools or teachers, and many (37 percent) have turned to child care providers for information about child care.

- **Nebraskans believe that postsecondary education is needed for those who want to work in the care and education field.** At least half of Nebraskans believe that some higher education is needed, and that the level of education varies with the age of the child.
- **Nebraskans want greater support for the early care and education workforce.** Nearly half (48 percent) of Nebraskans believe that teachers and caregivers are paid too little, and 55 percent of parents with children in early childhood programs feel this way.

**6. Who is part of the early childhood workforce?**

The early childhood workforce includes those who care for and educate children—from birth through age 8—in child care centers, home-based settings, preschool and PreK, and the primary grades (Kindergarten through Grade 3). Also included are professionals such as home visitors and family support specialists who work primarily with parents and families.

**7. 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 that can have a dramatic impact on a 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 overcome.

**8. How do early care and education professionals influence young children?**

Research is clear that quality relationships with adults are key to children’s healthy growth and development. Through caring, responsive, and cognitively stimulating daily interactions, early care and education professionals help children learn non-cognitive skills such as how to regulate their emotions, interact with others, solve problems, adapt to adversity, and build confidence. Early care and education professionals also directly impact children’s cognitive development. For example, multiple studies have demonstrated that teachers’ use of high-quality language is directly linked to differences in children’s language and literacy skills.

**9. The survey finds that 66 percent of Nebraskans say an early care and education center or a home-based center is best when families cannot care for their children. Are there enough affordable, quality programs to meet this need?**

There is not a system in place to track affordability and accessibility of high-quality child care options statewide, but we know from the Buffett Institute/Gallup survey that parents report an alarming lack of affordable, high-quality options where they live. *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, the first survey report released in March 2016, revealed that only 11 percent of Nebraskans believe high-quality care and education is available to all families, and only 6 percent say it is affordable. Just 15 percent of Nebraskans are very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs in the city or area where they live.

**10. More than half of parents say teachers and caregivers are paid too little, but the main report from the survey (*Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*) revealed that most Nebraskans think child care is unaffordable. How can we pay the workforce more without driving up the cost of child care?**

There is no easy answer to this. Finding a solution will require collaboration between the public and private sectors, higher education, local school districts, child care providers, policymakers, public

agencies, and others. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute is working with others in a multi-year effort to forge a consensus approach for tackling these challenges. Failing to address these critical issues would come at great expense to Nebraska's children and families, our communities, and the state as a whole.

**11. Nebraskans believe that the level of postsecondary education that is needed to care for and teach young children increases with the age of the child. Do early care and education professionals who work with 4-year-olds need more training than those who work with babies and toddlers?**

Training and postsecondary education is equally important for all early care and education professionals, no matter the age of the children they serve. Research has demonstrated that children's brains develop most rapidly during the earliest years of life, and highly qualified teachers and caregivers can play an essential role in supporting that development throughout a child's first eight years. Understanding how children's cognitive and non-cognitive development builds and progresses across the birth through Grade 3 continuum is critically important to teaching and caring for children at each stage.

**12. A majority of current teachers and caregivers would recommend a career in the early childhood field to a family member or friend. Are there opportunities in this field?**

Yes. In fact, the Nebraska Department of Labor lists child care workers among the occupations with the highest estimated annual openings during the 2014 – 2024 time period. We must increase efforts to recruit Nebraska's best and brightest into the field, and then support and prepare them for the challenging yet rewarding work of helping to shape young children's lives at a critical time in their development. Without highly qualified teachers and caregivers, we cannot have high-quality early care and education programs.

**13. 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. Its extensive survey experience makes it an outstanding partner.

**14. 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.