

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission?

The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission is a group of approximately 40 public- and private-sector leaders convened by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute to develop a comprehensive plan for expanding and strengthening the state’s early childhood workforce. The commission’s ultimate goal is to ensure that a skilled, informed, and diverse workforce is available to meet the needs of all of Nebraska’s children from birth through age 8.

2. Who is on the commission?

The commission is co-chaired by Dr. Marjorie J. Kostelnik, senior associate to the University of Nebraska president and formerly dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Dr. Samuel J. Meisels, founding executive director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. Membership draws from state government agencies, higher education, public schools, child care, philanthropy, practitioners, and the business community. A full list of the members can be found on the Buffett Institute website.

3. What will the commission do?

The Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission will create a shared state vision for improving, supporting, and sustaining a skilled, informed, and diverse early childhood workforce. The group will foster consensus for needed improvements in multiple systems that impact early childhood settings and professionals, including higher education, early care and education, regulations, and public policy. The commission is also charged with facilitating and promoting collaboration among the state’s two- and four-year universities and colleges, the Nebraska Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, and other key stakeholders throughout the state, and assisting with public education and outreach.

4. How will the commission approach its work?

The work will be guided by a commission-approved version of the Buffett Institute’s proposed “Blueprint for Transforming Nebraska’s Early Childhood Workforce.” The blueprint was developed as a result of the Institute’s research, its statewide activities over the past two years, its knowledge of large-scale systems change, and input from early childhood experts and stakeholders. The blueprint outlines the need to work from a set of common definitions and competencies for the early childhood workforce, achieve alignment and integration of these competencies across systems, create and sustain a supportive professional environment, and recognize and expand the expertise of workforce professionals.

5. What is the timeline for the commission's work?

The commission will meet quarterly over a three-year period (2017 – 2019). In addition to the creation of a comprehensive statewide plan for improving and expanding the early childhood workforce, targeted implementation plans will be developed by task forces or workgroups consisting of commission members and other stakeholders. Reports and recommendations will be announced as appropriate. A list of key milestones for the commission's work is included in the "Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Overview," which is posted on the Buffett Institute's website.

6. Why did the Buffett Institute form the commission?

Nearly 80 percent of Nebraska children from birth through age 5 are enrolled in some form of paid child care. Research consistently demonstrates that the presence of highly qualified teachers and child care providers is the most important factor in the quality of early childhood programs. Healthy, trusting relationships and positive daily interactions with these professionals through the first eight years of life have a profound impact on young children's success.

Highly qualified early childhood professionals can help meet an urgent need for Nebraska families. However, tremendous challenges face the early childhood workforce. The Nebraska Department of Education's Teacher Vacancy Survey lists both Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education as "Teacher Shortage Areas." Additionally, training requirements for individuals in the early childhood workforce are often inadequate or non-existent, and professional education requirements are uneven. For example, each of Nebraska's 20 early childhood degree programs includes at least one practicum experience, but the required supervised classroom hours vary from nine to 150. Finally, salaries are so low that many in the workforce leave the profession for other jobs, contributing to high turnover and a lack of stability for young children. In 2015, the median wage for child care professionals in Nebraska was \$19,620, which is below the poverty line for a family of three.

These challenges are deep and systemic, and overcoming them will require a strategic, comprehensive approach involving a variety of public and private sectors.

7. 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 early elementary grades (Kindergarten through Grade 3). Also included are professionals such as home visitors and family support specialists who work primarily with parents and families. These professionals play an enormously important role in young children's development and learning. Highly qualified caregivers and teachers are essential for ensuring that children achieve their potential and grow into confident and capable young people.

For more information about the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, please visit buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/workforce-commission.