

NEWS RELEASE

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NEARLY 700 NEBRASKANS FROM ALMOST 100 COMMUNITIES TO ATTEND VIRTUAL CONFERENCE TO FOCUS ON QUALITY CARE AND EDUCATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

*Linda Smith of the Bipartisan Policy Center to Deliver Keynote Address
and Nebraska Sen. John Stinner of Gering to Announce New Effort
to Reach Parents and Business Leaders During Pandemic*

(OMAHA, NE) — Community leaders from across Nebraska are joining together virtually to collaborate on how to ensure that children and families in every Nebraska community have access to high-quality early childhood programs and services – a topic that has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly 700 civic, business, and education leaders, from 99 communities in Nebraska and a total of 20 states including Nebraska and Washington, D.C., are attending the third annual “Thriving Children, Families, and Communities” conference to learn more about how they can provide quality child care and early learning opportunities for young children in their respective communities.

Attendance for the 2020 conference is triple that of the inaugural conference in 2018 and points to the growing demand for high-quality early childhood programs. Now, more than ever, communities recognize the critical role these birth through Grade 3 programs and services play in nurturing children, strengthening families, and helping communities prosper. Communities are continuing to look for resources, support, and other assistance.

Nebraska ranks as one of the top states in the nation where all available parents work yet research shows Nebraska, like many other states, faces great challenges, including a shortage of high-quality early childhood programs and services.

Keynote speaker Linda Smith, Early Childhood Initiative director at the Bipartisan Policy Center, will address critical issues and obstacles from a state and national perspective and highlight the special role for communities, businesses, and policymakers in charting a better path forward.

“For years, early childhood advocates have had a conversation with themselves. We need to have a conversation, as you are doing in Nebraska, with businesses, with government, with health care, with

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education, with these other sectors that have a very important role and concern about what happens with early childhood,” said Smith.

During the conference, Nebraska Senator John Stinner of Gering will announce a new initiative aimed at involving more parents and business leaders in the conversation about child care needs.

In partnership with the University of Nebraska, Stinner is inviting Nebraska parents and business owners to respond to a special survey to share their experiences regarding child care during the COVID-19 pandemic. His goal is to receive a response from parents and business owners in all 93 Nebraska counties. Responses will be shared with the Appropriations Committee of the State Legislature in the coming months in conjunction with LR390, an interim study that is examining the fiscal and economic impacts of COVID-19 on the early care and education workforce and the financing requirements of a high-quality early childhood system. The survey can be found at nechildcaresurvey.com/covid.

“Ninety-one percent of counties in Nebraska do not have sufficient child care capacity to meet the current demand,” Sen. John Stinner said. “Eleven counties do not even have a single licensed childcare provider. So there are significant challenges.”

During the half-day Thriving Children conference, panel discussions and workshops will feature community leaders from across the state who will discuss the economic impact of both high-quality and inadequate early childhood programs and how the pandemic has shined a brighter light on these challenges.

This year’s event is sponsored by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), First Five Nebraska, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Community Foundation, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, Nebraska Extension, Buffett Early Childhood Fund, and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. Ten other statewide and regional organizations provide support as conference partners. For more information, visit <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/news-and-events/events/2020-thriving-children-families-and-communities-conference>.

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