

BY THE NUMBERS: EARLY CHILDHOOD IN NEBRASKA

The Need for High-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. Nebraska ranks as one of the top 10 states where all single or two-parent families are in the workforce. ²
- Nearly 80 percent of children age 5 and younger in Nebraska are in some type of paid care. ³
- Sixty-two percent of mothers with infants are in the labor force in Nebraska. ⁴
- Eighty-four percent of counties in Nebraska with child care facilities do not have enough available slots to meet the current demand. ²
- Eleven counties in Nebraska have no licensed child care facilities. ²
- Seventy-six percent of child care centers experienced turnover of lead teachers or assistant teachers during the prior year. ⁵
- Given the challenges faced by many families and the early childhood experiences that many children have, nearly 40 percent of children age 5 and younger are at risk of failing in school (60,744 children). ⁶

Nebraskans' Views on Early Care and Education

- The vast majority of Nebraskans express support for early care and education. ⁷
- In overwhelming numbers, residents say that high-quality care and education is not available or affordable for all families in Nebraska. ⁷
- More than two-thirds (68 percent) of Nebraskans say that early care and education has a significant impact on the long-term success of children. ⁷
- Only 10 percent of residents strongly believe that most young children are prepared to be successful in school when they start Kindergarten. ⁷
- Just one percent of residents say all children birth to age 5 in Nebraska receive high-quality early care and education. ⁷
- Few Nebraskans (11 percent) strongly agree that high-quality early care and education is available to every family in the state. Even fewer (6 percent) believe it is affordable. ⁷
- The majority of Nebraskans (67 percent) believe the state should make early care and education a higher priority than it is today. ⁷
- About half (51 percent) 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. ⁷

Affordability of Early Care and Education

- The annual cost for center-based infant care (\$9,043) is higher than the average cost of college tuition at a public four-year institution in Nebraska (\$7,883).⁸
- The average child care subsidy payment provided by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to assist low-income families with child care costs (\$2,948) is less than one-third the cost of annual infant child care (\$9,043).²
- Nebraska spends nearly twice as much per student on K-12 education (\$10,621/student) as it does on PreKindergarten (\$5,711/student).⁹

Status and Compensation of the Early Childhood Workforce

- 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.¹⁰
- In 2015, the median annual salary for child care professionals in Nebraska was \$18,706, which is nearly \$7,800 below the poverty line for a family of four. The median annual salary for K–3 teachers was \$41,000, more than twice as much as those who teach in other early childhood settings.¹¹
- More than 11 percent of home-based providers have a second job and nearly 20 percent of center-based teachers, public PreK teachers, and K-3 teachers report holding a second job.¹¹
- Nearly 30 percent of home-based providers and 20 percent of center-based teachers use public assistance.¹¹
- More than 13 percent of home-based and center-based child care providers report that their own school-aged children qualify for free or reduced price lunches.¹¹
- Nearly half of Nebraskans believe that teachers and caregivers are paid too little.⁷

Return on Investment

- The annual return on investment for each dollar spent on high-quality preschool programs for children living in poverty is 7 - 10 percent.¹²
- Investment returns increase to 13 percent annually when early childhood programs span birth through age 5.¹²

¹ Center of the Developing Child, Harvard University

² *Kids Count*, 2016

³ Buffett Early Childhood Institute research staff

⁴ *State Baby Facts, Zero to Three*

⁵ *Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey*, Buffett Early Childhood Institute

⁶ First Five Nebraska

⁷ *Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Childhood Care and Education in Nebraska*

⁸ *Kids Count*, 2016 and College Board

⁹ *The State of Preschool*, 2015, NIEER

¹⁰ *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies

¹¹ Roberts, A.M., Iruka, I.U., & Sarver, S.L. (2017). *Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey: A focus on providers and teachers*. This statistic is based only on those who responded to the survey and is not necessarily a representative sample of the state.

¹² *The Heckman Equation*