

Heard at the Workforce Commission Launch Event

“In spite of its important role, frankly the early childhood workforce is in trouble. Its members are stressed by low wages, long hours, lack in many cases of formal benefits, and sometimes poor working conditions. Many, many love what they do. But they can’t afford to keep doing it. Moreover, young family wage earners can’t afford to pay the full cost of the high-quality programs all young children deserve.”



Marjorie Kostelnik

Commission Co-Chair and Professor, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

“We learned many things. But one thing rose above all. This workforce and therefore this report is crucial to the well-being of everyone in our state. The need for a strong early childhood workforce affects us all. We are all part of this endeavor. We are all in this together.”

“I think the challenge for us is just closing that knowing and doing gap. We know what we need to do for our students, but when you have a mixed delivery method—there’s so many ways that our students can receive, whether it’s in-home care or center-based and depending on who you work for and where you work, those qualifications, they differ. And I think what the commission has done has really put in front of us how do we create coherence so that every student, regardless of their ZIP code, regardless of where they are, every student has the opportunity to have that high-quality instruction.”



Tawana Grover

Superintendent, Grand Island Public Schools

“Often people want us to think about our graduates. So I just want to get to the other end of the spectrum. We are expected to graduate students who can help create jobs, who can attract jobs, who can fill jobs, and I think we cannot ignore the foundational facts. That when we look at the students who graduate from high school, the students who are more likely to go on to college, the higher learning, it all starts back with early childhood education. And that has to be part of the conversation.”

“We can’t afford not to invest, as we talk about the earlier years. I don’t think we as superintendents want to be put in the position to choose between college readiness and early childhood education. We’re saying that they’re both fundamentally important to the work that we do.”

“It’s going to take all of us. We are not isolated from our home care providers, from our center providers. We have to lock arms.”

Tawana Grover
continued

“We cannot ignore the investment, the return on investment is just too high. We cannot ignore it.”

“I think for me as an educator, being on the commission showed me that my voice mattered. That people were listening and that when you can come to the table and bring these issues up, that there are people that do care. It’s not, I think there’s sometimes an us-versus-them mentality. And it was not that at all. From the commission and going on through the commission to other organizations, I have always been met with very welcome arms and people want to hear the voice of people working in the field. With the commission I felt my voice was heard and that it mattered what the people who were in the trenches were doing.”



Mariah Stowe
Owner-Operator, Splash of Color Child Care

“Brain development is huge. Those first years are going to affect how they are in the later years. So if we don’t have an educated workforce caring for those children, then they may not be prepared and ready for entering school. It’s a different skill set. It’s just as complex and just as needed.”

“When the child is ready for school, they’re not going to end up as a dropout. That improves the quality of our workforce. I think we can bring the business community into this. And after they understand what has gone on and what is the benefit, they will be ready participants.”



Sen. John Stinner
Commission Member and Chair of the Appropriations Committee

“We lead the nation with two parents working. The good news is two parents are working, because we have a work ethic. The bad news is two parents are working.”

“We did a survey across the state, and early childhood, early childhood development is a big area of interest for the entire population. So there’s interest, there’s data to support it, and now we have to do something.”

“We’ve got the data. It’s now a matter of resource allocation. And how do we effectively do that and stay focused, execute. That’s my mission today, to convey that message. I will convey it to you, I will convey it to the business community, to the Legislature.”

“I think we can execute something significant in the state of Nebraska.”

“From the moment of birth, families are taking on this responsibility to provide reliable, positive, and consistent interactions. But families work. Parents and guardians have to find other familiar, caring adults to build those relationships, to have those interactions, to continue that brain building that’s still going on even while they’re working.”

“These professionals are not only the cornerstone of high quality, they’re the foundation for families and communities. Nebraskans depend on these professionals: 75% of children under age 6 live in a home where all parents are working. And many of these families can’t find the care they need.”

“The commission envisions a future where every Nebraska family has access to high-quality early care and education, no matter where the family lives or their income. A future where every family has confidence that every setting has a consistent, caring, reliable adult. These adults have specialized knowledge that they bring to work with them every day.”

“Educating and caring for an infant is just as complicated as caring for a third grader. It just requires a different set of skills. The commission envisions a future where qualifications are based on the developmental needs of children and consistent across the settings. For the family looking for the best option for the child, these specialized skills and knowledge should be a given, not a guess.”

“An educator with a bachelor’s degree who teaches in a school setting in Kindergarten is going to earn an average of \$37,000. That same professional, if they went to a community-based child care, would earn \$15,000 less per year. The same professional. The setting matters, and it matters a lot. But what children need does not change with their setting. They need caring, qualified teachers. They all need educators who can afford to show up for them every day and give them the very best. But the stress created by dealing with poverty-level wages and lack of benefits can have an impact on the quality of care that children receive.”

“Today is not just the launch of a report. It is a launch into action. The 500 people listening today are taking that first step. And now we all need to get to work. We must all work together on behalf of children and families. Nebraskans don’t shy away from a challenge, and this is a very worthy challenge.”



Susan Sarver

Director of Workforce Planning and Development, Buffett Early Childhood Institute

“We are dedicated to doing this right. Today is one of many steps. This isn’t the first step. You got us here. Now let’s work together to go further.”

“One of the big questions that I expect people to ask is how are you going to pay for all of that? I mean, that’s a lot of money. For full funding, that cost is three-quarters of 1 percent of the gross domestic product of the state of Nebraska. Now needless to say, the gross domestic product of the state of Nebraska is not in a bank account anywhere where we can withdraw that money, but it’s also clear we’re not looking to Governor Ricketts and his successors to pay that bill alone.”

“We need to work, just as with small business, we need to work with our federal partners, we need to work with our state partners, we need to work locally. This is setting us up to work with all of you to do that. This isn’t a University of Nebraska thing—we actually took that name off the folder they have here. It says Early Years Matter. Because it matters to all of us.”

“Something important has begun. Thank you for being a part of it today.”



Samuel J. Meisels

Commission Co-Chair and
Founding Executive Director,
Buffett Early Childhood Institute

“All of this work has been based on science, and that is foundational to this report. And then from the business and economic perspective, it really is about the big picture. Every single day people are opening the doors of their homes and their centers, and it’s a business. ... We want to see that there’s proper compensation for the very important work that they do.”

“As we move to action, how do we make sure that those individuals, those small business owners that are starting at about 6 o’clock in the morning until about maybe even 7 o’clock at night caring for children in their home also have access to the training and education opportunities that maybe their peers in a center can maybe more easily access?”

“As I thought about this report, it is big, it is audacious, it is visionary, and it sets a guiding light 10 years out. Everything will happen with a step. It’s going to happen in a community and it’s going to happen with people.”

“What’s so exciting is what happens after the launch—and I love that word launch—it’s not a report on a shelf. How do we take that and really understand it and then begin to take steps, one at a time towards that point in the future. And the science guiding us all the way along.”



Catherine Lang

State Director, Nebraska
Business Development Center
at the University of Nebraska
at Omaha

“I represent 1,700 elected community leaders statewide. And the understanding we have about early childhood today is better than it’s ever been. The question I have is not how are we going to afford it, we can’t afford NOT to do it.”

“The highest rate of return for investments in governments and political subdivisions is in early childhood. So if we do run the state like a business, a business is going to say how can we prioritize in areas where there’s a higher rate of return, and that’s early childhood.”

“Honestly, I think what’s going to happen here, the more people understand the value of high-quality early childhood education, as people begin to understand the importance of that brain science, that brain development, I think what we’re going to see is increased demand. And as that demand increases, we need to plan to meet that demand all across Nebraska, in urban and rural places.”

“This is exciting to have a comprehensive plan like this. Because oftentimes when we try to solve problems in the state of Nebraska, there’s a lot of good things going on all over the place and that’s true in early childhood, but to have a vision that we can all point to really is exciting.”



John Spatz

Executive Director, Nebraska Association of School Boards

“This commission and this report has helped create a road map, ways to connect these things so there are efficiencies and opportunities to build a strong, highly qualified workforce even though they may come at it from different angles, different experiences, different levels of formal preparation. There’s lots of expertise across the spectrum. So this helps us weave that together and move this together in the right direction.”

“Right now our early childhood program is the fastest-growing program in teacher education. ... (Students) know how important it is. They know and understand and they embrace how important the work is, and they’re willing to take on this journey. Young people are idealistic and they believe in the future. And they’re willing to invest in that. But boy, we’ve got to meet them partway. And we have to do something about the compensation.”

“We all need to work really hard, and do it collaboratively and not competitively.”



Nancy Edick

Dean, College of Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha

“I want to say this is doable. I mean there are times when I think oh my goodness, are we going to get this all done? But what’s fascinating to me is the leveraged capacity in the state of Nebraska. All of you in communities, every parent, every family, everyone together doing this heavy lifting can actually get this done. It is clearly doable. It’s doable because we’ve all created a level of focus that this truly matters in our education system.”

“Nebraska will lead the nation in this area if we do this work right. That’s where I see us in 10 years. Let others keep up with us.”



Matt Blomstedt

Commissioner of Education,
Nebraska Department
of Education