

REPORT HIGHLIGHT

Elevating Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce

Report and Recommendations
of the Nebraska Early Childhood
Workforce Commission

**NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE:
PRESENT AND FUTURE**

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NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE: PRESENT AND FUTURE

The data presented here describe two situations: the present reality for children, families, and the early childhood workforce, and a future reality in which the goals and recommendations of the commission are fully implemented. As we move from the present to the future, our focus on the valuable professional role of the early childhood workforce in the lives of children, families, and communities becomes more prominent. These facts and figures demonstrate the need for recognizing the specialized knowledge and skills of early care and education professionals and the importance of compensating them for the expertise they provide.

PRESENT

Nebraskans depend on the early childhood professionals who care for and educate their young children, but access to high-quality services is inconsistent and limited, depending on where families live and what they can afford.

- In Nebraska, more than 75% of children under age 6 live in homes where all adults work.⁹
- 84% of Nebraska counties do not have enough child care slots to meet the needs of families with young children.²³
- In 2016, more than 4,000 Nebraska parents were forced to leave a job, not accept a job, or change jobs because of child care problems.²¹
- Only 15% of Nebraskans statewide reported being very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs available in the city or area where they live.²³

FUTURE

Every Nebraska family has access to high-quality early care and education.

PRESENT

The qualifications required to be an early childhood professional vary dramatically, depending more on the setting where a child receives care and education than on the developmental needs of the child.

- The qualifications required for early childhood professionals are inconsistent across early care and education settings (see Appendix B).
- Early care and education settings with the least stringent teacher qualification requirements are those that serve the state’s youngest children, despite the knowledge that 90% of brain growth takes place during the first five years of life and success at this stage of development sets children up for success in school and life.¹³
- The specialized knowledge and skills required of early childhood professionals to provide developmentally appropriate care and education is just as great for those caring for and teaching very young children as it is for those teaching children in the elementary school years.¹

FUTURE

The qualifications required to be an early childhood professional will be based on the developmental needs of children and consistent across all early care and education settings.

PRESENT

Early childhood programs must apply for and combine funding from multiple sources, some of which have inconsistent quality standards, in order to cover operating expenses.

- In Nebraska, federal and state funds are distributed through 15 different financing mechanisms, originating from agencies with distinct regulatory standards, compliance monitoring, and qualifications requirements.
- Time and energy that professionals would otherwise make available to children and families is often devoted to the administrative task of braiding funding sources to generate enough revenue to cover the cost of providing early care and education.

FUTURE

Nebraska maximizes public-sector investments in early care and education by reducing the administrative burden of pursuing multiple funding sources, increasing coordination across government agencies, and linking the receipt of funds to high-quality standards.

PRESENT

Wages and benefits of early childhood professionals vary by the setting where children receive early care and education. The same work does not garner the same pay.

- The median annual pay for early childhood professionals is \$25,980 for those providing in-home early care and education, \$18,706 for center-based teachers, \$36,000 for PreKindergarten teachers, and \$41,000 for Kindergarten-Grade 3 teachers.²⁴
- The median annual pay for center-based teachers is half that of school-based PreKindergarten teachers, even though the age and developmental needs of children being served are the same.²⁴
- The median annual pay for center-based teachers falls below the poverty line by almost \$1,400 for a family of three.²⁴
- Only 39% of center-based teachers have health insurance, compared to 91% of school-based PreKindergarten teachers.²⁴

FUTURE

Wages and benefits will reflect the professional expertise required of the early childhood workforce.

PRESENT

Low wages and lack of professional support create severe hardships for the early childhood workforce.

- 27% of home-based and 20% of center-based teachers depend on some type of public assistance.²⁴
- 20% of center-based and school-based teachers hold second jobs.²⁴
- On average, 10% of early childhood educators from rural areas have clinically depressive symptoms, as do 9% from urban areas and 7% from large towns.²⁴
- Teacher turnover is as high as 26% in some early care and education settings.³⁴

FUTURE

Improved wages, benefits, and professional supports will bolster the early childhood workforce, contributing to professional well-being, continuity of care for children, and stability for families and communities.

PRESENT

Nebraska does not provide the level of sustained investment needed to reap the benefits of high-quality early care and education for all Nebraska children and families.

- In 2017, an estimated \$460 million was spent on early care and education in Nebraska, of which 17% came from state funds, 29% came from federal funds, 52% from families, and an estimated 2% from business and philanthropy (see Appendix D).
- Based on Nebraska's 2017 economy of \$110.5 billion, approximately \$912 million (0.75 of 1% of State GDP) in funding is needed annually to cover the cost of high-quality early care and education for all Nebraska children and families (see Appendix D).
- To bridge the funding gap, an additional allocation of \$109 million from state funds, \$191 million from federal funds, and \$153 million in private funds from families, businesses, and philanthropy is needed, an estimated increase amounting to roughly \$235 per Nebraskan annually (see Appendix D).
- Money spent on high-quality early care and education is an investment. One dollar spent on high-quality early care and education yields an average return of \$4 over time. In circumstances where children are extremely vulnerable, the return can be as high as \$13.^{17,18}

FUTURE

The total cost of high-quality early care and education is funded by combining public and private investments that ensure every child in Nebraska has access to high-quality care and education regardless of the setting their parents choose for them.

Visit EarlyYearsMatter.org/workforce for the full report and research citations.

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