

## NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION

### KEY POINTS

1. **New Report** – A groundbreaking report with far-reaching recommendations for Nebraska’s future is being released by the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission. The commission is composed of more than 40 state and local leaders from a wide range of disciplines and has spent the last three years determining the most effective ways to strengthen and expand the early childhood workforce.
2. **Importance of Early Childhood Education** – The commission’s recommendations are anchored in research about the importance of brain development and children’s early learning and development. Nearly 90% of brain growth takes place during the first years of life and the greatest opportunity for lifelong impact is in the years from birth through age 8.
3. **Role of the Early Childhood Workforce** – The single most important building block of brain architecture and childhood development is reliable, positive, and consistent interactions between the developing infant or child and familiar, caring adults. The skills and knowledge of caregivers, teachers, and others who have professional responsibility for young children while their parents work are essential for helping children realize their potential. **A highly qualified early childhood workforce is the cornerstone of high-quality early care and education.**
4. **Response to Statewide Need** – The formation of the commission was in response to the need to strengthen early care and education and better support the state’s early childhood workforce who care for and educate the state’s children, birth – Grade 3.
  - **Child Care Is an Economic Necessity for Working Families and Businesses** – Nebraskans depend on the early childhood workforce to care for and educate their young children. Yet access to high-quality services is limited and inconsistent, depending on where families live and what they can afford.
    - More than 75% of children under age 6 live in a home where all adults work.
    - 84% of counties do not have enough child care slots to meet the needs of families with young children.
    - In 2016, more than 4,000 parents were forced to leave, not accept, or change jobs because of child care problems.
    - Providing high-quality early childhood services is an essential strategy for filling the 58,000 jobs that are estimated to be open in Nebraska today.
  - **Need for High-Quality Programs** – Nebraskans express overwhelming support (68%) for early care and education but have serious concerns about access, affordability, and quality. Only 15% of Nebraskans report being very satisfied with the quality of the early care and education programs where they live.
5. **Key Findings** – The report contains a wide range of findings about the state of the early childhood workforce in Nebraska, including:

- **Low Wages and High Turnover** – Low wages and lack of benefits contribute to high rates of turnover of teachers, in some settings as high as 26%. For example, the median annual salary for a teacher in a community-based early childhood setting is \$18,706, which is below the poverty level for a family of three. Approximately 27% of home-based and 20% of center-based teachers are on public assistance.
- **Limited and Uneven Access to Affordable, High-Quality Care** – Families’ ability to access affordable, high-quality care and education is uneven and depends on where families live and what they can afford. For example, 11 counties in the state do not have any licensed child care facilities, and a year of high-quality infant child care can cost more than college tuition.
- **Connection to Communities and Economic Development** – Early care and education programs are linked to a community’s vitality and economic development with long-term implications for the state’s future. Working parents depend on child care, and communities across the state have identified child care as one of their most pressing needs. Research shows that when early childhood investments are made, they lead to high rates of return. A dollar spent for high-quality early care and education yields an average return of \$4; in circumstances where children are extremely vulnerable, the return can be as high as \$13, reflecting savings from money spent for special education, health care, social services, and criminal justice.

**6. Recommendations** – The commission’s vision—that **Nebraskans elevate the early childhood workforce to a priority profession benefitting all children from birth through Grade 3**—centers on four key goals:

- **Ensure the early childhood workforce is highly qualified and reflects the diversity of the children and families they serve** – 1) Define and support high-quality practice across all early childhood settings, and 2) Develop accessible and affordable professional pathways.
- **Fully fund high-quality care and education by 2030** – 1) Build on Nebraska’s current early care and education investment, 2) Develop locally informed cost estimates of high-quality early care and education, and 3) Close the funding gap.
- **Nebraskans champion the critical role of the early childhood workforce in young children’s learning and development** – Lasting change requires collective action: 1) Inform Nebraskans, 2) Engage Nebraskans, and 3) Seek Nebraskans’ commitment.
- **Implement the commission’s recommendations** – 1) Develop and implement the infrastructure needed, and 2) Engage stakeholders across Nebraska.

**7. Next Steps**

- **Engage Fellow Nebraskans** – The commission’s immediate focus is sharing this report and recommendations across the state and engaging with fellow Nebraskans. We want to learn more about their experiences, share our recommendations, and talk about how together we can help move Nebraska forward.
- **Form a Statewide Coalition to Help With Implementation** – In the coming months, commission members will be involved in forming a statewide coalition to bring Nebraskans together to implement the recommendations in the report. There is a role for everyone.
- **Come Together for Nebraska’s Future** – The future this report aspires to is within our reach. Nebraska is the place where the early years of all children matter. Let us come together to elevate the early childhood workforce to a priority profession that is better able to support Nebraska’s children, families, and communities.