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## NEBRASKA PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT



Bi-Monthly Newsletter - December 2020

### **Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan Goal 2: All early childhood care and education settings provide quality experiences for children.**

This newsletter continues to focus on Nebraska's Early Childhood Strategic Plan. This month focuses on Goal 2 and the organizations who align well with this goal.

Goal 2 of the plan is focused "on ensuring that the care provided to each child in the state is quality care, consistent with the state's new definition of quality." Under the Strategic Plan, quality is "defined by each child's experience. A child experiences quality early care and education as physical and emotional safety in the context of frequent one-on-one interactions with a caring adult who engages the child in warm, language-rich, and educational activities."

Goal 2 seeks to foster a more supportive environment for childcare providers by promoting professional development for early education staff; by encouraging family engagement practices so as to better bridge between ECCE and home; and to assess physical childcare spaces that are most conducive to the well-being of children and their providers.

### **Strategic Plan Update**

With gratitude to stakeholders who contributed to its development, we are excited to share the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan on its new [webpage](#).

This dynamic plan was created by Nebraskans for Nebraskans. It is designed to transform early childhood systems to ensure that each child between birth and age 8 in Nebraska have access to quality early childhood care and education no matter their race, ethnicity, geographic location, ability status, home language, culture, or families' preferred hours, location, and types of care.

In 2021, we will continue to engage stakeholders in more communities across the state to ascertain needs and priorities that have not yet been incorporated into the Plan. Our aim is to build a comprehensive and strategic plan over two years that represents the voices of all families, providers, partners, early childhood professionals, and other partners in communities across the state.

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan and other supporting materials are available on the new webpage. Please bookmark this page and check back frequently for more useful information about the ongoing strategic planning process and for information about upcoming events.

For questions about the Strategic Plan contact [Susan Sarver](#).

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## The Strategic Plan at Work



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### CHIMEing in on Healthy Early Childhood Educators

With approximately 60% of three- to five-year-olds attending childcare, early childhood education forms a central part of many young children's lives, and educators' well-being is critically important for children's well-being. Children thrive in environments where they can establish strong relationships with their educators. The work of early childhood education, while very rewarding, can also be emotionally and physically taxing, leading to higher turnover and decreased quality of care.

In an effort to support the emotional well-being of early childhood educators and enhance their interactions and relationships with young children, the Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful

Educator (CHIME) program was developed in 2017. CHIME is an 8-week program that focuses on the emotional well-being of the educator, as well as provides educators with techniques for using reflection, mindfulness and social-emotional learning strategies in their classrooms. CHIME is delivered by extension educators from the University of Nebraska Extension's Learning Child team. In 2018, three months after participating in CHIME, one infant teacher commented that participating in CHIME was "life changing" for her, and another educator wrote, "You will find tools to help you feel more peaceful and ways to help the children in your class with self-regulation tools and skills and awareness of how they are feeling and eventually be able to articulate those feelings."

As part of the Preschool Development Grant, Dr. Hatton-Bowers, Assistant Professor in the Child, Youth, and Family Studies Department at UNL is leading an evaluation of CHIME with her co-principal investigator, Dr. Carrie Clark, an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at UNL. Collaborators for the PDG funded project also include Dr. Jessica Calvi, Research Assistant Professor at the Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior and Gilbert Parra, Associate Professor of Child, Youth and Family Studies.

The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the mindfulness-based intervention's promise among 80 early childhood educators. Some of the outcomes include measures assessing mindfulness, emotional and physiological regulation, and perceived stress. The PDG affords us an exciting opportunity to learn how CHIME supports statewide efforts to promote quality ECCE by focusing on the emotional well-being of early childhood educators. We hope to learn how to improve the online delivery of CHIME, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and have a better understanding for whom in ECCE CHIME may be most helpful.

For more information on CHIME, please contact [Holly Hatton-Bowers](#).

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## A Healthier Approach to Childcare Through Reflective Practice

Childcare is often physically and emotionally exhausting, and caregivers' own personal histories, traumas, and experiences can compound that exhaustion. As a result of those and other factors, burnout and turnover among early childhood teachers can be high. Reflective practice offers childcare workers the opportunity to examine and grow from past experiences. Reflective practice is a relationship-based practice that assists in mitigating the effects of emotionally intrusive work by helping individuals examine their current and past actions, emotions, and experiences; understand how and why they react to situations; and learn how to become more resilient in the face of stress.

Through the use of this method, the Nebraska Center on Reflective Practice (NCRP), which is part of the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center on Children, Families, and the Law, seeks to support early childhood providers and other professionals working with young children.

NCRP has partnered with Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, UNL Extension and UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute and utilized Preschool Development funds to build its programs. The first year of PDG renewal grant funding helped NCRP to train one additional reflective practice trainer and send two cohorts of 20 individuals through reflective practice Facilitated Attuned Interactions (FAN) training.

Reflective practice FAN training is an 8-month process where a trainee learns the FAN model of reflective practice by participating in pre-training reflective consultation, three days of training, and six months of group and individual mentoring. The FAN model, which was created by the Erikson Institute, can build reflective capacity, increase mindful regulation skills, and provide tools to communicate better with others by "meeting them where they're at."

For trainees who are part of early education settings, use of the FAN model can improve supervisor-employee relationships, increase staff satisfaction, improve relationships between staff, and improve communication between teachers and parents.

For more information on the Center on Reflective Practice, please contact [Kelli Hauptman](#).



# Elevating Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce

Report and Recommendations  
of the Nebraska Early Childhood  
Workforce Commission

## The Workforce Commission Prioritizes Quality for Early Childhood Educators

From 2017-2019, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute commissioned more than 40 public- and private-sector leaders to expand and strengthen the early childhood workforce. In early 2020, the Nebraska Early Childhood Commission released its report and recommendations to the state, titled [Elevating Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce: Report and Recommendations of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission](#).

The commission's vision is to elevate Nebraska's early childhood workforce to a priority profession benefitting all children, birth through Grade 3. The commission defined "priority profession" as work that is essential to the social and economic well-being of the state. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute is coordinating implementation efforts, but the work of achieving the commission's vision is a collective endeavor shared across many organizations and within communities. The commission's recommendations center on four key goals:

- A. Goal 1: Ensure the early childhood workforce is highly qualified and reflects the diversity of the children and families they serve.
- B. Goal 2: Fully fund high-quality early care and education by 2030.

- C. Goal 3: Encourage Nebraskans to champion the critical role of the early childhood workforce in young children’s learning and development.
- D. Goal 4: Implement the commission’s recommendations through the formation of a statewide coalition.

Nebraska’s Preschool Development Grant funds implementation of the commission’s recommendations for the four goals. Specifically, within goal 1, the Buffett Institute is mapping the state’s early childhood career pathways from a child development associate to a bachelor’s degree with teacher certification. Funding also supports extension of the Commission’s work to map funding flows for early childhood in the state. The commission established the current investment in early childhood, and documentation is being prepared that explains funding mechanisms across state systems.

Finally, PDG funding supports the capacity building necessary for implementation. Sustainable implementation will require collaboration between all levels of the early childhood ecosystem. PDG funding is supporting the initial phase of implementation, providing the resources needed to map current workforce and early childhood system efforts already underway, aligning current progress to commission recommendations.

Preschool Development Grant funds will also allow the coordination team to facilitate community-led work, traveling to communities, and bringing members of the early childhood workforce into the work itself as part time members of the implementation team. Nebraska’s Preschool Development Grant funds will provide us the resources critically important to elevating Nebraska’s early childhood workforce in sustainable ways.

For more information about the Workforce Commission, please contact [Susan Sarver](#).

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## Ready Rosie Bridges between Providers and Home

With an eye aimed at increasing family engagement, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation began piloting the ReadyRosie program through the Communities for Kids initiative in 2019—introducing 300 classrooms and approximately 4,500 children statewide to an innovative way of learning and connecting. ReadyRosie is an evidence-based, birth-elementary age family engagement resource being offered to families with young children via teachers, coaches, health departments, and all types of child care providers.

ReadyRosie uses current research on family engagement, developmentally appropriate practice, standards, family protective factors, and core social emotional competencies as the foundation of learning games and activities. It offers 1,000 + English and Spanish “Modeled Moments” videos which are shared with care givers via text message or e-mail. Age appropriate videos are sent out weekly to care givers once they accept an invitation from an early childhood professional. Individually selected videos can also be sent out specifically to care givers from early childhood professionals to target a specific skill they may want to encourage learning at home as an extension from the classroom. The ReadyRosie platform also includes many interactive family workshops that support a cohesive family engagement plan available for educators to offer either in person or virtually.

With the Preschool Development Grant C4K+ funds, the opportunity to expand from 300 to 400 classrooms in hopes of reaching over 6,000 children was given. In June 2020, communities and programs across the state were offered the opportunity to apply to have classrooms considered for the funded access of ReadyRosie. A total of 29 communities/programs were selected and 400 classrooms were signed up by the end of August 2020. Full implementation by communities/programs was in place by mid-September.

The ReadyRosie platform provides the perfect opportunity for providers to maintain a collaborative relationship with care givers and help support each child’s learning and development (which is a quality indicator for Step Up to Quality). The C4K team is tracking and evaluating usage of the platform and

could not be more excited about this excellent opportunity to enhance family engagement all across Nebraska.

For more information about Ready Rosie, please contact [Marti Beard](#).

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## Providers and Parents Identify Successes and Gaps through Coaching Collaboration

Nebraska early childhood partners have long embraced coaching as an effective way to improve early childhood program quality. In 2008, Sheldon and Rush identified coaching as “an evidence-based adult learning strategy used for interacting with parents and other care providers to recognize what they are already doing that works to support child learning and development.” In Nebraska, ongoing collaboration has occurred for years to align existing coaching systems to provide early childhood programs streamlined services, efficient use of financial resources, and maintenance of skilled coaches.

In 2016 the Coach Collaboration Team was formed to represent multiple coaching initiatives across the state. The Coach Collaboration Team works to develop standardized processes for training coaches and providing support once in practice, improving methods of communication among coaches working in the same program or with the same provider, identifying strategies for reducing coaching overload, and aligning coaching practices across initiatives.

The Coach Development Team, a subgroup of the Coach Collaboration Team, coordinates initial and ongoing training and support. The Coach Development Team plans a series of Coach Booster Trainings provided twice a year to address ongoing coaching needs identified by coaches via survey. This year the team developed and finalized The Nebraska Early Childhood Coaching Guidebook: Competencies for Professional Practice. The team is in the process of creating a dissemination plan and training around the Coach Competencies, as well as other resources such as the [Nebraska Coaching Initiative's document describing state coaching programs](#) designed to reduce confusion about initiatives and their purposes.

Early Childhood, Step Up to Quality and Pyramid Coach programs have collaborated to fund these efforts and share the responsibility of maintaining a list of trained coaches. In addition, Rooted in Relationships, Step Up to Quality, and the Munroe-Meyer Institute are collaborating to get all their initiative coaches trained in the Reflective Consultation model.

To further the state’s training capacity, a process was developed to train additional trainers. Two coaches went through the two-day Early Childhood Coach Training last year and this year two Early Learning Coach Consultants are being trained and are helping to identify co-trainers with a mental health background in order to support regional training teams with expertise in both early childhood education and mental health.

In 2018, the Nebraska Department of Education began piloting a regional training system that was identified as a need for the state providing grants to two Educational Service Units (ESUs) that each hired an Early Learning Coach Consultant. Plans are underway to increase the number of Coach Consultants located in different ESUs to support coaches in other regions across Nebraska.

For more information about the Coaching Collaboration, please contact [Melody Hobson](#) or [Lynne Brehm](#).

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## Providers Get Ready for Getting Ready

Early Childhood Educators in Nebraska are learning strategies for building meaningful partnerships with families and promoting parent-child relationships through the Getting Ready parent-engagement approach. Getting Ready is a “way of doing business” defined by 8 strategies and a collaborative

structure that guides all interactive contacts. The combination of strategies and collaboration encourage a true partnership between parents and educators defined by shared decision making that focuses on supporting the child's growth, development and education.

Getting Ready has proven effective at improving children's developmental outcomes and responsive parenting behaviors as demonstrated through randomized trials conducted in Nebraska over the last 16 years and through the voices of those implementing Getting Ready in their work. One home visitor noted, "I am more confident in myself and my skills...she (GR coach) just built me up and helped me find new skills I didn't even know I had or were possible to learn. A supervisor indicated, "It has helped me identify more clearly what 'coaching' is and...how to focus on highlighting strengths and building on those." Another educator spoke about the benefits of Getting Ready for parents in, "gaining confidence... we're showing parents they're teachers too...and that's what we want, because we only have them for a short time but they have them for forever. So if we can teach them to be teachers and advocates for their children then the benefits are endless."

Through continued engagement with early childhood educators across the state, Getting Ready helps ensure that educators have the knowledge, skills, and sustained agency support to assist them in using high-quality family engagement practices to develop true partnerships with families that will result in positive child development.

For more information about Getting Ready, please contact [Lisa Knoche](#).

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## Spreading the Word that Learning Begins at Birth

Nebraska statute 79-1902 states that the Nebraska Department of Education and Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services will collaborate to create a resource booklet. This booklet is to be given to the parents of each child born in Nebraska to provide information on child development, child care, how children learn, children's health, services available to children and parents, and any other relevant information.

A broad coalition of partners from the Nebraska Department of Education, multiple divisions of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, university professors, parents, and private organizations came together to push this project forward. Titled Learning Begins at Birth, funding from the Preschool Development Grant enabled this team to update, print, and distribute this guide across Nebraska. Nearly 140,000 copies have been printed and over 60,000 shipped in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Arabic to date. In this PDG cycle, the Learning Begins at Birth team is working to distribute Vietnamese and Arabic guides, ensure all birthing hospitals have adequate copies and practices for distribution, and expand the list of partners to expand distribution. As word of the project has spread, community partners have been reaching out requesting copies, which is exciting.

It is important to get every new parent access to this guide, as it promotes to parents the importance of quality experiences in early childhood. This guide improves the quality of children's education by emphasizing that learning begins at birth, not kindergarten; by making parents aware of the importance of quality early child care and education; by offering tools to help parents find quality child care and education; and by making parents aware of the many excellent resources available to them.

For more information about Learning Begins at Birth, please contact [Adam Feser](#).

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## Preschool Development Grant Related News





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## Baby Steps toward Collaboration and Developmental Milestones

What do a Needs Assessment, a Zoom meeting, and developmental videos have in common? And, no, this is not the set up for a joke. The answer, collaboration. Noelle Wegner, Assistant Vice President of Preschool Development Grant/Communities for Kids, made a connection with Dr. Kerry Miller of UNMC's Munroe-Meyer Institute, a program aimed at transforming the lives of individuals with special needs, disabilities, or other complex health care needs.

Wegner shared the Ready Rosie video program with Miller who saw in it potential for use with a program she champions called Learn the Signs, Act Early (LTSAE). As Miller describes it, LTSAE seeks to create awareness of important developmental milestones for children and to engage with families in helping meet those milestones or develop strategies for those children who don't. She sees potential in Ready Rosie to use the videos to create awareness for families of the important age-related developmental milestones for children and to offer practices that encourage children toward meeting them.

This small moment has budded into a much larger potential collaboration between two state organizations and the national company who produces the videos. And, as Miller points out, she would not be involved at all had it not been for a collaborative moment in which the state's Needs Assessment revealed a necessity for working with experts on children's developmental milestones.

Read the [full article](#).

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## Child Care Providers Should Act Now to Apply for 2020 School Readiness Tax Credits

In 2016, Nebraska became the second state to offer a tax credit encouraging early childhood professionals to deliver high-quality early care and education services to our youngest children—especially those most at risk. But there was a language problem in the 2016 Nebraska School



Readiness Tax Credit Act that prevented many of the providers for whom it was intended from benefitting. Working together, Nebraska’s early childhood advocates and lawmakers fixed it when the State Legislature concluded its 2020 session this past August.

The revised School Readiness Tax Credit Act offers tiered, refundable and non-refundable tax credits to child care providers who are committed to improving the quality of their services and programs. Individual child care professionals and self-employed child care owners can take advantage of a refundable tax credit up to \$1,567 depending on their professional training, education, and work experience. Alternatively, child care owners can apply for a nonrefundable credit based on their rating in Nebraska’s Step Up to Quality system and the number of subsidy-eligible children they serve.

While this is a win for child care providers, the current tax credits expire at the end of the 2021 tax year. That means it’s doubly important that credits be used—and used widely—by Nebraska’s early childhood professionals in their 2020 and 2021 tax returns. “Right now, Nebraska has earmarked up to \$5 million per year for these tax credits,” said Elizabeth Everett, Deputy Director for First Five Nebraska. “But those dollars will no longer be available after the 2021 tax year. Providers need to show Nebraska’s lawmakers how important these kinds of financial supports are if we are to have a good chance of renewing this program in the future.”

## Key Deadlines for the 2020 Tax Year:

### Refundable Tax Credit

- February 1, 2021—Deadline to submit a tax credit attestation to the Nebraska Department of Education via the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System.
- March 1, 2021—Deadline to submit attestation form and Staff Member Application form to the Nebraska Department of Revenue.

### Nonrefundable Tax Credit:

- March 1, 2021—Deadline to submit application for the nonrefundable credit to the Nebraska Department of Revenue.

Providers learn more about eligibility for the [refundable credit](#) and [non-refundable credit](#).

## PDG Partners

Nebraska’s PDG work is led by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) under the authority of Governor Pete Ricketts, in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the University of Nebraska system, and many other partners.

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For more information visit [Preschool Development Grant](#).

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