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NEBRASKA PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT



Bi-Monthly Newsletter - October 2020

Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan Goal 1: For children to receive quality ECCE services, such services must be available in the communities in which they live and accessible to their families.

This newsletter is the first in a series that focuses on the Nebraska's Early Childhood Strategic Plan. The next four issues will focus on one of the primary goals of the plan. This month focuses on Goal 1.

Goal 1 of the plan envisions universal access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE), which is defined in terms of availability and access. Availability refers to having enough ECCE options in a given community—in terms of capacity, quality, and types of services—to meet the needs of families living in the community. Access refers to families' ability to actually enroll their child in the ECCE setting that best meets the child's and family's needs, without facing undue barriers (such as barriers related to cost, transportation, or flexibility of hours as well as systemic barriers related to race, ethnicity, gender, language of origin, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic).

Goal 1 focuses on ensuring equitable access to quality early childhood services for every child and every family in the state.

Strategic Plan Update

In 2019, over 5,000 Nebraskans participated in a statewide needs assessment that led to the creation of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan. The needs assessment identified gaps and opportunities facing families and providers across the state. To build the plan, hundreds of stakeholders joined conversations about how to fill the gaps and maximize the opportunities to make sure that children continuously experience quality early childhood services from birth through the transition to school.

Through those conversations, Nebraskans identified four interconnected goals: Access, Quality, Collaboration, and Alignment. Progress toward these goals will result in:

- All children and families in Nebraska having ACCESS to QUALITY early childhood care, education, and essential services that support children’s healthy development;
- Across the state, early childhood services will be supported and sustained through community COLLABORATION and statewide ALIGNMENT.

In the first year of development, stakeholders identified many strategies that will help achieve these goals, but not all communities reported. This year, with PDG funding, stakeholders will continue to develop the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan by listening to people in communities across the state. In order to truly achieve the goals, plan developers must understand how the strategies in the Plan can support communities’ unique priorities and needs.

A brochure of the Strategic Plan will be available soon to provide information to all partners.

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

Needs Assessment Update

Building on Nebraska’s 2019 PDG Needs Assessment, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska is leading efforts to continually assess needs and opportunities in Nebraska’s birth to 5 systems. In this first year of the renewal grant, the Needs Assessment will aim to explore questions that were not previously addressed and begin examining the ways in which needs have shifted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In March and August 2020, the Institute conducted two surveys of childcare providers in Nebraska to assess the economic, health, and personal challenges that are impacting their ability to care for and educate young children during the pandemic. Results from these surveys highlight the acute need for additional support to childcare providers. These findings have been shared with a wide audience across the state, including state legislators who are considering an Interim study to assess the fiscal and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nebraska’s early childhood care and education system.

The Needs Assessment team has also collected data from Nebraska’s PDG project leads about the information they need to better understand and address the needs and gaps in Nebraska’s birth to 5 systems. Thirteen project leads responded to this inquiry, and a few trends emerged in their responses. They are interested in:

- More in-depth information about the needs and perspectives of families, particularly those who are Black, Latino, Native American, or have immigrated from another country.
- Processes to monitor closures, changes in enrollment, and financial concerns of childcare providers.
- Information to identify strengths and areas for improvement coaching and professional learning for early childhood professionals.

This feedback will guide analysis of existing data and plans for new data collection, which will begin this winter.

See full [March and August Surveys](#).

For more information about the Needs Assessment contact [Amy Mart](#).

The Strategic Plan at Work



NECC Family Child Care Network: Taking Family Child Care Professionals from Surviving to Thriving

The Family Child Care Network (FCCN), offered by Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (NECC), provides business and professional development tools to help family child-care educators across the state stop surviving and start thriving. NECC recognizes a growing need to support child-care educators, as more care providers across the state close their doors. Many child-care educators are isolated, have little to no prior business training or experience, and have limited access to support. NECC's Family Child Care Network is changing that by providing access to tools that help build quality child care businesses.

Engagement with the program is driven by the child-care educator, who self-select benefits, services, and supports designed specifically for child care businesses. The supports are organized into three tiers, and educators can join the Network at any tier to access tools and resources that strengthen their business and improve their program quality. All resources are offered free of charge.

PDG-Funded NECC Programs

Wonderschool

Wonderschool's platform is a one-stop shop to elevate and modernize a child care businesses. This program helps child care educators create websites, market programs online, process online payments, manage enrollments, communicate with families, and much more. Wonderschool members get access to:

- An easy-to-use website to advertise their program;
- Automated billing tools to streamline payments;
- Online tour booking and enrollment management tools;
- Event creation and marketing tools;
- Parent messaging, communication, and attendance tools through a mobile app;
- Curriculum resources, professional development opportunities, and an active ECCE community.

Business Training Series

NECC also offers a 10-week Business Series, created by All Our Kin (AOK) in the spring and fall. The 10-session, 30-hour Business Series is designed to share innovative tools and strategies for supporting strong business development among child care educators.

By enhancing providers business-related knowledge and practice, NECC Business Consultants will position child care educators to raise business efficiency and, in turn, focus more fully on giving children the high-quality early learning experiences they need and deserve.

After graduating from the series, participants will have the opportunity to apply for individual business consulting. During consulting, select business owners will get the chance to explore and apply topics from the Business Series to their own programs for 10 weeks. Business Series Topics Include:

- Contracts
- Policies
- Marketing
- Risk Management/Insurance
- Pricing
- Taxes
- Accounting/Finance

Licensing Toolkit

Modeled after AOK's highly successful program, NECC's Licensing Toolkit provides materials, guidance, and support to help unlicensed and potential providers fulfill state licensing requirements, meet health and safety standards, and become part of a professional network for child care business owners.

Features of the Licensing Toolkit Include:

- Mentorship providing participants with guidance and support in entering and completing the licensing process, including a comprehensive Licensing Toolkit Guidebook with state licensing application materials.
- Toolboxes equipped with health and safety supplies required for licensing and quality enhancement materials such as developmentally appropriate toys and picture books aligned to Nebraska's Early Learning Guidelines and the Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scales.
- Access to other professional network opportunities and resources sponsored by NECC's Family Child Care Network. Participants receive information regarding state-required professional development, and community connections for families and programs.

For more information about NECC's Family Child Care Network please [email us](#) or visit [Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative](#).

Coordinated Enrollment Pilot Expansion Gives Families Access to Child-Care Services

The Coordinated Enrollment Pilot Expansion will ensure that each child and their family can access the quality ECCE services and the essential services they need to support each child's healthy development. The program will provide one point of access for families to receive information and education about quality childcare, screen for eligibility and apply for public benefits, receive relevant community referrals to eliminate barriers, and complete enrollment paperwork as necessary for the participating childcare program of their choice. Families will be served by one Coordinated Enrollment Specialist throughout the process.

Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative currently provides limited coordinated enrollment services to the three Omaha Early Learning Centers at Gateway, Kennedy, and Skinner. In the course of that work, we have encountered many families who would benefit from assistance in accessing quality ECCE services as well as public benefits and other essential services to support their child's healthy development but who do not qualify for Early Head Start services or are placed on waiting lists for those services. The Coordinated Enrollment Pilot Expansion will allow those families to receive the support necessary to enroll in quality ECCE services.

Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative has hired one Coordinated Enrollment Specialist and is in the process of hiring another. We are working to partner with both center-based and family childcare programs to educate parents and allow them to make the best choice possible for their family's situation.

For more information about the Coordinated Enrollment Pilot Expansion contact [Mary Lariviere](#).

Access through Language: Communities for Kids Helping Families

For the past three years, the Communities for Kids initiative has been working hand-in-hand with communities—both small and large, both rural and urban, and both with experienced community leaders and those who would consider themselves quite green in their roles—in order to enhance the early childhood landscape all over Nebraska. The Preschool Development Grant is helping us to augment this work by infusing Nebraska communities with an array of resources aimed at increasing capacity and boosting quality in early childhood care. The Communities for Kids program provides access to vital resources for providers and to Nebraska families, particularly those who face obstacles in finding quality care.

One of these projects is the Spanish Speaking/Bilingual Child Care Support Initiative, a project that provides funding for communities to help Spanish-speaking early childhood professionals gain access to training and materials in their language. A particular advantage of the initiative is that it can help eligible providers to become licensed thus gaining access to Nebraska's Step up to Quality program, as well as participate in the many resources and programs available for licensed providers.

The funding will be managed by local early childhood coordinators; these coordinators will be responsible for uniting community leaders and researching “where” and “how” to get these vital materials and training opportunities to providers—whether that is through direct bilingual training or by using qualified interpreters. Communities participating in this project will be encouraged to innovate in their implementation so as to develop successful methods that can be duplicated in other places in the coming years.

Communities for Kids is also emphasizing the importance of local collaboratives developing a healthy sustainability plan to continue this work after the conclusion of the Preschool Development Grant. We have chosen 9 communities to contract with for this project—all of which have a Hispanic population of at least 12%—and we are beginning contracts this month. We are excited to start helping these communities increase opportunities for some of their most vulnerable populations.

For more information about the Communities for Kids Bilingual Support Initiative contact [Marti Beard](#).

Utilizing the PDG to Help Children Flourish Socially and Emotionally

For young children, “mental health” doesn’t mean the same as it does for adults. Rather, early childhood mental health focuses on a child’s social-emotional development, which is the growth of the child’s capacity to:

- Experience, regulate, and express emotion
- Form close and secure relationships
- Explore the environment and learn

All of these occur in the context of the caregiving environment whether that occurs within the family, as part of a community experience, or is expressed by cultural expectations.

The social-emotional development that takes place during the early years is strongly influenced by the quality of the relationship between young children and their primary caregivers. According to the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, “Disruptions to this developmental process can impair a child’s capacities for learning and relating to others — with lifelong implications. By improving children’s environments of relationships and experiences early in life, society can address many costly problems, including incarceration, homelessness, and the failure to complete high school.” Research has shown that around 40% of children enter kindergarten lacking social-emotional skills and over 65% of students who are identified as having emotional and behavioral disorders drop out of school.

Through the Preschool Development Grant, early childhood stakeholders in Omaha intend to build upon and develop further an infrastructure designed to support early childhood social-emotional development. This work will contribute to the strategic plan’s goal that “each child and their family can access the quality early childcare and education services and the essential services they need to support each child’s healthy development.” Teaching young children social-emotional skills like sharing, problem-solving, and how to calm themselves when feeling overwhelmed, will provide them with the tools they need to enter school confidently and flourish into adulthood.

Through new and existing partnerships, families and early childhood professionals will be able to access a system of supportive services and resources that can help them meet the social-emotional needs of the children in their care. Currently, a team is being formed to look at data and take a neighborhood approach in partnering with families, early childhood providers, and additional community stakeholders to agree on an approach to pilot in the second year of the Preschool Development Grant.

To learn more, please contact [Stacy Scholten](#).

Help Me Grow Provides Families with Access to Support Services

Help Me Grow, like Children’s Hospital & Medical Center, believes all children should be able to grow, develop, and thrive to reach their full potential. At its heart, Help Me Grow is a parent-information line designed to connect families with child development and community resources. Parents or caregivers simply dial 2-1-1 and ask any question(s) they might have. To inform parents on normal child development, the program offers a free age-based developmental questionnaire that families can submit for their children.

Help Me Grow builds on existing community resources and works to ensure communities identify vulnerable children and link families to community-based programs and services through the implementation of four core components:

- Child Health Care Provider Outreach
- Family and Community Outreach
- Ongoing Data Collection and Analysis
- A Centralized Access Point

Nebraska's Preschool Development Grant supports the implementation of Help Me Grow in Lincoln/Lancaster County by providing funding for the establishment of a Centralized Access Point which will serve as a hub to link children and their families to community services and supports, while providing seamless care coordination. Children's Hospital & Medical Center is the backbone organization for Help Me Grow Nebraska.

Children's Hospital & Medical Center is working in partnership with many statewide partners to implement Help Me Grow in Nebraska, such as the University of Nebraska, United Way of the Midlands, Munroe Meyer Institute, the Nebraska Departments of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education.

Help Me Grow ensures providers and families have the resources, information, and support they need to help their children succeed. Child health care, early care and education, and human service providers can identify vulnerable children and partner with families to support them. Public officials and other stakeholders can address gaps in available services and build adequate capacity to meet the needs of children and families. Communities can see a high rate of return for investments in quality early childhood systems through improved short- and long-term outcomes.

To learn more contact [Rick Helweg](#).

Preschool Development Grant Related News





Message from Thriving Children Conference: We Must, and We Will, Fix Child Care in Nebraska

The state of Nebraska loses \$745 million a year because of inadequate child care, Sen. John Stinner told a virtual audience of more than 700 people during the recent Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference.

He paused for a moment after mentioning this bleak economic reality. He let that large number sink in.

Then Stinner acknowledged what much of the crowd already knew: Child care is in an even worse place in 2020.

“This was pre-COVID,” said Stinner, chairman of the Legislature’s powerful Appropriations Committee, of the study done by First Five Nebraska and University of Nebraska-Lincoln economists. “So obviously the impact is much greater during this COVID situation.”

Speaker after speaker and conversation after conversation at the Sept. 14 Thriving Children conference kept circling back to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it has exposed the weaknesses inside the system that cares for the vast majority of Nebraska’s youngest children.

The state’s child care industry has long teetered on the brink of disaster, they said. COVID-19 could well push it over the edge.

“In our field of early care and education, we have never before met anything with the destructive potential of this disease,” said Dr. Sam Meisels, the founding executive director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and one of the country’s foremost early childhood experts.

But, while acknowledging COVID’s destructive nature, conversation after conversation at the conference focused on the fact that Nebraskans have already identified both problems and potential solutions.

We are going to fix this, speakers said. We must fix this.

See the [full article](#) by Matthew Hansen.

Study Reveals the Cost of Insufficient Child Care Provisions

"The Bottom Line," a recent study commissioned by First Five Nebraska, estimates that "insufficient options for stable, reliable child care" cost Nebraska's families, employers, and the state "nearly \$745 million annually in direct losses." The report reveals that a lack of quality early childhood care and education providers leads to absenteeism at work, employees reducing to part-time work or remaining at that level, successful employees foregoing promotions, and job loss or turnover that result in huge financial losses for the overall state economy.

Read the [report overview](#).

Read the [full report](#).

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.

This project is made possible by funding received through Grant Number 90TP0079-01, of the USDHHS-Administration for Children and Families, Office of Early Childhood; Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services; Nebraska Department of Education; and Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, following grant requirements of 70% federal funding with 30% match from state and private resources. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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