

## NEBRASKA PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

RENEWAL YEAR TWO



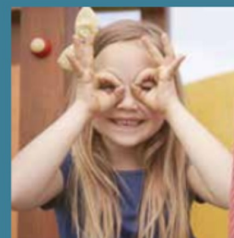
Bi-Monthly Newsletter - October 2021

### Nebraska's Strategic Plan Goal 2: Quality

This is part 1 of the focus on quality in Nebraska's Preschool Development Renewal Grant Birth to Five Years. For the coming year, issues of the newsletter will not only focus on the particular goals of the Strategic Plan, but also the major themes that the Plan addresses. This month's issue continues to spotlight PDG initiatives that focus particularly on quality.

The initiatives focused on Goal 2 seek to establish a statewide definition of quality that shapes and directs early childhood system change efforts, to promote quality by supporting and training the early childhood workforce, to improve family engagement practices, and to promote quality through the assessment of spaces and facilities in which children receive care.

## GOAL 2 Quality



### Strategic Plan Update

All across Nebraska, individuals and organizations are doing great things that contribute to better early childhood care and education for many children. The [Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan](#)'s vision is that *ALL* Nebraska children and their families have access to quality early childhood services that support children's healthy development from birth through age 8.

To achieve the vision, the Strategic Plan calls for changes in the early childhood system to remove any structural barriers to opportunity. Currently, the plan's four goals describe the work stakeholders said was necessary to improve early childhood outcomes:

- **COLLABORATION** among partners across a community will lead to more **ALIGNMENT** in the system.
- Working together, partners can better increase **ACCESS** to **QUALITY** early childhood services.

You and your colleagues are invited to join the conversation to ensure that all of Nebraska's communities are represented as we identify strategies to meet families' and providers' needs. Please join us to share your priorities for change and success stories.

[Get involved or learn more about the strategic plan.](#)

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

## Needs Assessment Update

The Needs Assessment team spoke with 86 people from 15 focus groups across the Omaha metro including Black, Hispanic and Latino families; Somali and Karen families; and families of children with a disability--all of whom shared their thoughts about childcare and development.

Eight themes appeared from their conversations about quality early care and education. Three of these themes focused on trust and safety, including a need for quality ECE that is physically and emotionally safe for their children, builds trust with families through direct communication, and that is disseminated in varied ways such as email, text, phone applications, verbal, and written. In addition, three other themes focused on diversity and equity, including their desire for experiential content for their children, such as traveling, visiting the zoo and museums, and interacting with people from different backgrounds to prevent "culture shock" in kindergarten.

Families stated they wanted early childhood education to provide learning opportunities based on each child's needs. Additionally, these parents stated they want their children to be familiar with people from different races and cultures and to address cultural differences. Parents said they want early childhood educators to assist children when discrimination happens amongst their peers, incorporate a curriculum that appeals to a diverse background, and hire a more diverse workforce. The remaining two themes focused on having early childhood educators teach children to be kindergarten-ready and having patience for when children make mistakes or have "tantrums" or "meltdowns."



## Achieving Access through PDG Funding



### Coaching Collaboration Celebrates Expansion

The Coaching Collaboration project saw tremendous growth over the last year. The Early Learning Connection Coach Consultants (ELC-CCs) Becky Morton in Educational Service Unit Three (ESU3) and Gina Defreece (ESU6) continued the groundbreaking work supporting coaches and building the coach consultant system. They were joined by Amy Sjöholm, who is housed at ESU 10 and is supporting coaches across the middle part of Nebraska.

In addition to the three full-time ELC-CCs, two versatile coaches were added to pilot a new initiative were added: one in the northeast part of the state and one in the Panhandle. These two skilled early childhood service providers have brought the Coach Consultant project and the Early Childhood Multi-Tiered System of Support (EC-MTSS) together in a joint work venture. Kary Pfeil is housed at ESU1 and serving the ESUs 1 and 7, and Alison Place is working in ESU13 serving the Panhandle and southwest Nebraska. They both support early childhood coaches as well as schools and others implementing EC-MTSS.

To complete the coaching support system, a new staff person at the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) was hired. Tracy Went, a highly effective coach with experience coaching in multiple initiatives, started work in June as NDE's Coach Specialist. She is working with the three full-time and two blended initiative Coach Consultants to accomplish the work of the Coach Collaboration project at the state level.

In order to align different coaching initiatives, the Coach Collaboration Team, comprised of many stakeholders inclusive of those mentioned above, continues to meet as does the subcommittee, Coach Development Network (CDN). The CDN plans training and develops materials collaboratively to support coaches across the many early childhood coaching initiatives statewide. The Network created a *Coach Competency Guidebook* and training on this which is being specifically vetted to ensure attention to inclusion and equity across the domains.

If you want to learn more about the project, please contact [Melody Hobson](#) or [Lynne Brehm](#).

### CHIME Receives Ringing Endorsements

Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators (CHIME) is one of Nebraska Extension's Early Childhood Interest Group's signature programs that focuses on the emotional well-being of early childhood teachers, which is critically important for mitigating teacher turnover and stress, and for



increasing the capacity of early childhood teachers to deliver high-quality care. In 2021, sixty-three early childhood teachers participated in CHIME to support their use of compassion, mindfulness, and social-emotional learning strategies to promote positive teaching practices and positive relationships with children in their care. One teacher who completed the 8-week program expressed what she learned, “I believe CHIME has given me new tools to use with my students that will help them control their feelings and fun activities to use in my lesson plans.”



CHIME also promotes early childhood teachers in being more aware of their feelings and in using effective strategies to reach out for support. As one early childhood teacher commented, “I am better able to pick out what is causing stress and anxiety and have tools to work through it. It has given me more support and confidence to talk to someone.” Another teacher commented how CHIME helps her cope with emotional stress, “I feel a great deal of stress at work. CHIME has helped with this stress, and I believe if I continue to use these practices, I can continue to help myself and the children deal with emotions in a healthy way.”

Of the 63 early childhood teachers who completed CHIME, 96% agreed they would recommend it to other teachers and also agreed that it was a positive professional development experience. This year we are excited to expand CHIME to include information that can be shared with families. These “family tip sheets” and practice ideas can be shared by educators participating in CHIME and will align with the weekly CHIME session content.

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

## The Workforce Commission Builds Leadership Cadre

The Workforce Commission is currently working on the Leadership Cadre, which will bring together a diverse group of early childhood professionals, birth through Grade 3, from across settings to collectively grow their capacity to lead implementation efforts in their communities. Authentically involving the workforce is a critical component of implementing report recommendations toward equity and sustainability. Ensuring that the history and context of Nebraska’s early childhood educators are embedded in the solutions created will highlight and build upon the unique resources and solutions that already exist.



Up to 25 members will be recruited in the fall of 2021 to participate in the cadre. In September, Cama Charlet, at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, is convening a group of ten stakeholders to co-create the selection criteria for potential Cadre applicants.

Members of the early childhood workforce are included in this “think tank,” as are community leaders, parents, and those who support early childhood professionals. Once the selection criteria have been created, the application will be launched on the Buffett Institute website and shared with PDG partners.

For more information, please contact [Cama Charlet](#).

## PDG-Related News

## Race Equity

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### C4K+ Funds Additional Bilingual Projects

In September, the Communities for Kids Plus initiative was able to offer \$55,000 in additional contracts through their Spanish-Speaking/Bilingual Provider Support Initiative (SSBPSI—PDG Activity 4f). The 9 Nebraska communities participating in SSBPSI were encouraged to submit proposals for projects “that directly benefit Spanish speaking or bilingual child care providers and thus, the children and families they serve” with a caveat that the projects had to either benefit the entire state’s Spanish-speaking providers or be easily replicable in other areas across Nebraska.

Three promising projects were chosen from Adams County, Hall County Community Collaborative, and Lexington, totaling \$37,888. The remaining \$17,112 of grant money has been allocated to Adams County and Lexington for coordination work, additional training, and translation of materials into Spanish.

In the coming month, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation blog site will feature a detailed article on the initiatives and the promising work they are doing for Nebraska’s Spanish-speaking providers and families.

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[View the PDG Events Calendar](#)

**The PDG Events Calendar is live. To see what's happening or to submit an event, please visit our [Calendar of Events Page](#).**

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## Family Engagement

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### Family Engagement Busy with Parent Recruitment and Family Conference Planning

The Family Engagement group is currently recruiting parents to engage with and provide feedback to PDG partners. The goal of the team is to connect, by the end of December, at least one parent to the PDG Task Force. The team is focusing on bringing parents who are representative of diverse lived experiences which will truly represent all of Nebraska’s families in the work the Task Force and PDG initiatives do. Intentional recruiting has started with postcards going out to both English- and Spanish-speaking families.

The team has also begun the planning process for a family conference in 2022. Early preparations include assembling a planning team, building a budget, promoting sponsors, garnering feedback from and recruiting parents, and building a promotional plan for the event. Originally, this event was planned for May 2022, but the date was extended to afford the recruiting of parents in planning so that content represents families’ needs. The conference is currently planned to be in the fall of 2022. The conference team is currently focusing on the creation of a parent survey based on feedback received by the strategic plan and needs assessment teams.

If you are interested in participating, please contact [Mariana Schell](#).

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## Spotlight on PDG

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### Wonderschool Modernizes Early Childcare Businesses in Nebraska

Fear of change can be hard . . . in fact so hard that *Forbes* reports 62% of us would rather remain in our comfort zone even if change might mean something better for us. When it comes to childcare, we certainly could use some change to make childcare businesses more sustainable and providers more financially solvent. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics the current average hourly pay of childcare workers is just \$12.88. Streamlining and modernizing business practices is a way for childcare providers to more efficiently conduct business, garner new clients, and dedicate time to the children in their care.

In 2019, the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (NECC) offered a new business tool for childcare providers called Wonderschool meant to help them modernize their business models. Brandee Lengel, Vice President of Child Care Partnerships for NECC and project lead for the Wonderschool initiative, describes the old model of childcare in which a stay-at-home mom might watch a couple of neighborhood children to help out a friend and/or to bring in a little extra income. Today, however, most families rely on two incomes to survive and the family childcare educator needs modern solutions for her family childcare business.

Wonderschool is a digital platform offering, Lengel says, website presence, attendance tracking, revenue collection, auto billing, expense tracking, messaging functions, and much more. As she says, “there’s lots of business software out there, but Wonderschool is designed for childcare businesses and does everything they might need.” She says she understands the difficulty of learning new things but emphasizes “what family childcare educators need now to be successful” That’s why NECC began offering Wonderschool in conjunction with their All Our Kin business series.

Initially, engagement was slow. Using Wonderschool meant, for business owners, learning a new system while working an already grueling and long day, overcoming technology issues, including lower levels of computer literacy and a lack of access to high-speed internet and smart phones. One of the main stumbling blocks, however, was the onboarding cost of the platform in a time when Covid had put evermore pressing financial strain on an already underfunded system. A solution came when preschool development grant funds were allocated to subsidize the cost of using Wonderschool.

[Read the full article.](#)

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## Do You Have Questions?

If you have questions about newsletter content, PDG-related activities, or partner organizations, we want to help you find answers. To receive information regarding your questions, please submit an online query by filling out the form at the bottom of our "PDG Progress" page, and we'll do our best to find you answers.

Get Answers to Your Questions



### 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 questions or comments regarding the Preschool Development Grant, please contact:

[Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal](#), Assistant Vice President Preschool Development

For more information or to subscribe to the enewsletter, visit [Preschool Development Grant](#).

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