

Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan



TALKING POINTS

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is a dynamic plan by and for Nebraskans that seeks to ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood services.

- 1. Importance of Quality in Early Childhood Services** – Ensuring access to quality early childhood services for each child in Nebraska is at the heart of the strategic plan. This focus is driven by the understanding of the unparalleled growth and development that occurs between birth and age 8.
 - **Statewide need.** Nebraska has more than 235,000 children birth through age 8, and currently, many children and their families experience significant disparities in access and availability of quality early childhood services.
 - **Benefits to children.** Science provides overwhelming evidence of the beneficial impact of quality early care and education on children’s development. Quality early care and education is defined in terms of what each child experiences and is characterized by positive and consistent interactions between the developing child and familiar, caring adults – no matter the setting.
 - **Economic benefits.** Recent evidence demonstrates the return on the investment in quality early care and education; every dollar spent on quality early care and education yields an average return of \$4, and in circumstances where children are extremely vulnerable, the return can be as high as \$13.
- 2. Dynamic Plan by and for Nebraskans** – The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative statewide process that builds on Nebraska’s strengths.
 - **Needs-based framework.** Development of the plan began in 2019 with a comprehensive needs assessment, followed by conversations with stakeholders across the state. The plan describes goals and objectives that provide a clear framework and targets for the shared work ahead.
 - **Ongoing, collaborative, and inclusive process.** In 2021–2022, Nebraskans will be engaged in an effort to further develop the plan, with a focus on identifying strategies and action plans for accomplishing the goals. Stakeholders will be invited to participate in conversations to ensure the plan addresses the priorities and needs of Nebraskans in diverse and unique communities across the state.
 - **Results-oriented focus.** Conversations with stakeholders will include questions about what success looks like and how changes can be measured, helping to ensure that Nebraska has the capacity to evaluate progress and make data-informed decisions about how to improve early childhood services.
 - **Sustainable change.** This integrated and collaborative approach to needs assessment, strategic planning, and performance evaluation will help ensure that Nebraska creates sustainable change at the community and state levels.

3. **Vision** – The overarching vision of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is to provide all Nebraska children and their families with access to quality early childhood services that support children’s healthy development from birth through age 8.

4. **Four Goals** – The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic plan defines four interrelated goals, each with corresponding objectives. These goals are intended to create a more integrated early childhood system—work on any one of the goals will impact and inform the other goals.
 - **Goal 1: Access** — Each child and their family can access the quality early childhood care, education, and essential services they need to support each child’s healthy development.
 - **Goal 2: Quality** — All early care and education settings provide quality experiences for children.
 - **Goal 3: Collaboration** — Communities coordinate a locally designed mixed delivery system that provides continuous care and meets the needs of families.
 - **Goal 4: Alignment** — Statewide systems align to support communities in creating an integrated and comprehensive mixed delivery system for all children.

5. **Focused Conversations** – As the strategic planning process continues, several areas of focus will be central to the development of the plan’s strategies and action plans.
 - **Ensuring Equitable Access to Services** – The next stage of strategic planning will include a special focus on listening to community voices to ensure that, no matter where a family lives or what challenges they face, each child in Nebraska can access quality early childhood education and other essential services.
 - **Defining Quality in Early Care and Education** – A top priority in the planning process is to achieve a shared understanding across Nebraska of what quality means in early care and education settings and to infuse that definition into every aspect of the work.
 - **Collaborating with Communities** – Continuing work with communities will focus on collaborating with community leaders, including families and early childhood educators, to identify strategies and action plans that leverage local strengths and resources to support the needs of children and families within specific communities.
 - **Aligning Statewide Systems** – Stakeholder conversations will also highlight changes that are needed to ensure that statewide policies and processes align with the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan, facilitating coordination of resources and creating a more integrated early childhood system that provides seamless access to all services needed to support the child’s development and well-being.

6. **Learn More and Get Involved** – Informational materials, including a Summary of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan, are available and will continue to be developed as the plan evolves. Opportunities for input and engagement will also be shared with stakeholders statewide. Learn more at NEarlychildhoodplan.org.

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