



## NEWS RELEASE

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# QUALITY RATING SYSTEM FOR NEBRASKA CHILD CARE, EARLY CHILDHOOD ED PROGRAMS LAUNCHED

Quality ratings for Nebraska child care and early childhood education programs are the focus of a new system launched July 1 to help parents and guardians evaluate child care facilities when choosing care for their young children.

The new system, *Step Up to Quality*, is aimed at improving the quality of all child care and early childhood education programs statewide — programs that typically care for children from birth to kindergarten age and are eligible to apply.

The Nebraska Department of Education will oversee the system that will rate participating child care and early childhood education programs as they work through five steps to reach a higher quality rating. Initially, staff will complete professional profiles in an online database, the Early Childhood Professional Record System. Staff may also access expanded professional development and complete health and safety self-assessments. Child care providers will be rated on other research-based standard areas that include curriculum, the learning environment, staff interactions with children, family engagement initiatives as well as child outcomes such as social growth and development.

Under a new state law, 10 of the state's largest child care providers will be required to participate. Those providers receive \$500,000 or more yearly in child care subsidy to provide care and services for at-risk children. Those programs are in Omaha and Lincoln. Over the next three years, the system will include about 60 programs that collectively serve between 13,000 and 14,000 young children. While those programs are required to participate, other child care centers, family child care homes and early childhood education and care programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start and public school pre-kindergarten programs are welcome to voluntarily participate. All participating programs will receive a quality rating.

In any given year, Nebraska has about 130,000 children pre-kindergarten age and many of those children are in programs or private child care, according to Eleanor Shirley, state director of *Step Up to Quality*. All licensed child care entities are encouraged to participate.

"Parents want to choose the best child care they can afford, and we hope *Step Up to Quality* sends a message that choosing quality is not about convenience," she said. "This is an accountability system for higher quality Nebraska child care and early childhood education programs of various types and funding sources.

“If the public is aware of what high-quality child care is, that may ultimately create the demand for change and improvement,” she said, “and Nebraska children will benefit by being better prepared to succeed in school.”

Beginning in 2017, parents and the public will have access to the ratings, but, in the meantime, programs that have achieved all or certain quality ratings will be issued certificates that they may display to inform parents about the quality of their programs. Phasing in public access to the ratings encourages programs to participate and offers them ample time to improve to make those changes, Shirley said.

For more information about the system go to: [www.education.ne.gov/StepUpToQuality](http://www.education.ne.gov/StepUpToQuality) . For questions about the quality rating system, you may send an email to [nde.stepuptoquality@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.stepuptoquality@nebraska.gov) or call 1-844-807-5712.