

Nebraska State Board of Education Early Childhood Study Committee

Final Report
August 2015



History and Membership

The Nebraska State Board of Education organized an early childhood study committee which began meeting in August 2014 and met through June 2015. The Early Childhood study committee (Committee) was comprised of State Board of Education members Glen Flint (District #2), Patricia Timm (District#5), and Molly O'Holloran (District #7). Maureen Nickels (District #6) joined the group in December 2014. Nebraska Department of Education staff supporting the group included Deputy Commissioner Scott Swisher, Melody Hobson, Administrator, and Holly Johnson, recorder, from the Office of Early Childhood.

Areas of Study

The Committee focused on four distinct areas of study. First, the Committee grounded its work by delving into information about early childhood systems, including:

- Programs and services comprising early childhood systems in Nebraska
- Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) authority and responsibilities in Nebraska early childhood systems
- Regulations and monitoring authorities for the different types of early childhood programs and services in Nebraska
- Funding sources and infrastructure needs for early childhood programs and services in Nebraska
- Staffing of Early Childhood programs and professional development needs of adults working in early childhood professions

The following reports and documents provided information to the Committee:

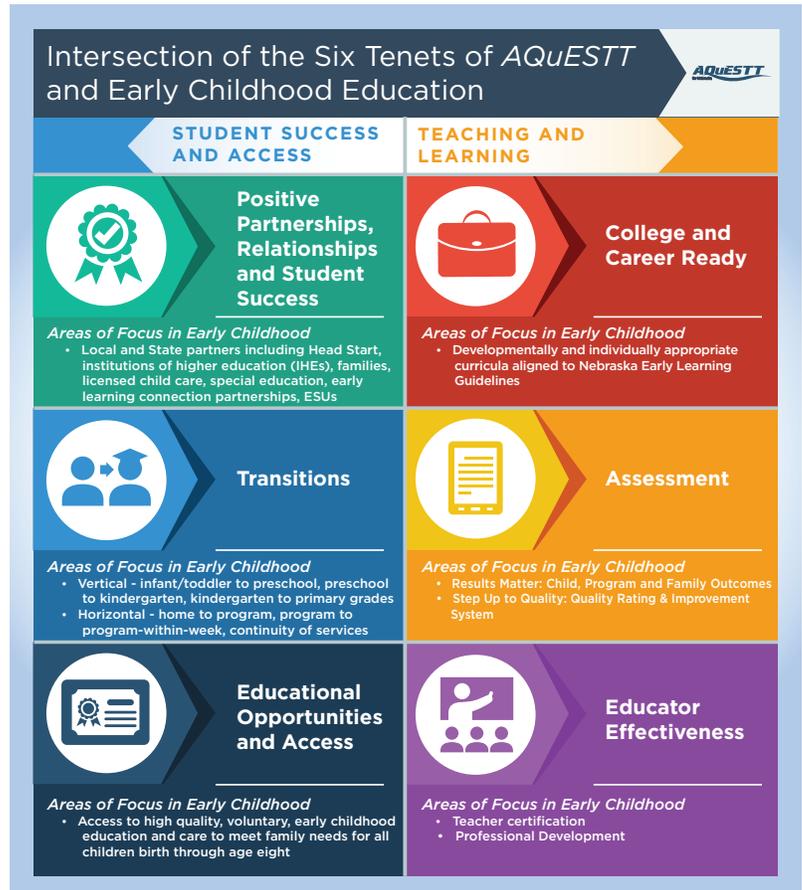
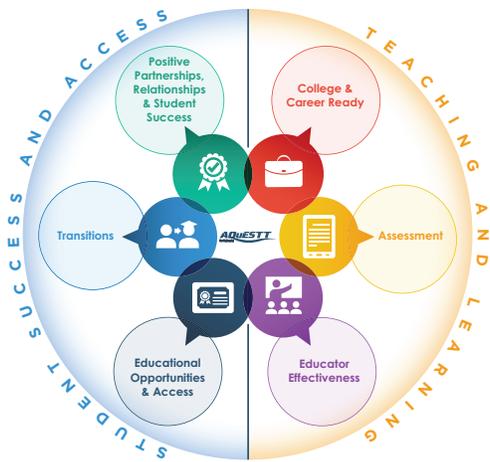
- [2014 edition of the biennial Report to the Governor from the Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council](#)
- [The 2013-2014 Early Childhood Report](#)
- [The Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for children birth to age three](#)
- [The Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for children ages 3 to 5](#)
- [Nebraska's Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals](#)

Second, the committee heard from community partners regarding advocacy efforts and philanthropic activities and needs.

- Jennifer Goettemoeller and Ben Anderson from First Five Nebraska provided information from an advocacy perspective regarding their goals for legislation in the 2015 Nebraska Unicameral. First Five Nebraska representatives discussed the projected need for an appropriately trained workforce to provide education and care to meet the needs of all children placed at risk who are from birth to age three.
- Dr. Sam Meisels met with the Committee to discuss early childhood education and care and the initial work the Buffett Early Childhood Institute (BECI). BECI is working with the superintendents of the Learning Community to implement a birth through third grade plan designed to improve the learning trajectories of children placed at risk in the Omaha metropolitan area. BECI, through the work of Dr. Susan Sarver, is taking stock of the supply of appropriately prepared educators to meet the current and future needs for early childhood professionals in Nebraska.

- Sharon Katt, Administrator of the NDE Adult Programs and Services team joined the Committee to provide expertise around the programs of study in Nebraska institutes of higher education. She provided insight into the process of revising endorsements for Nebraska teachers.

Third, the Committee delved into the connections of the Accountability for a Quality Education System Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT) and early childhood education and care. A graphic was created to represent the ways that AQuESTT can be embedded into the early childhood system.



Finally, the Committee reviewed the proposed revisions to *Nebraska Department of Education Rule 11: Regulations for the Approval of Prekindergarten programs established by School Boards and Educational Service Units and for the Issuance of Early Childhood Education Grants*. Revisions included the addition of a section on Home-Based programs and a section on serving infants and toddlers in a Center-based program. A guide to the changes in the proposed rule may be found at www.education.ne.gov/OEC/rule11.html.

The Committee recommended that the State Board of Education approve a hearing draft of Rule 11. The hearing draft was approved and a public hearing was held on June 2, 2015 at 1:30 pm in the State Board of Education room on the 6th floor of the Nebraska State Office Building. Following the public hearing, the State Board approved and forwarded Rule 11 to the Nebraska Attorney General's office for approval and ultimately to the Governor for his signature.

Recommendations

The Committee Reflected on the information presented and topics discussed throughout the study, the Committee created the following recommendations:

- The Nebraska Department of Education should continue to partner with Buffett Early Childhood Institute and First Five Nebraska to identify ways to increase the number, diversity, and preparedness of professionals entering the early childhood education and care workforce in Nebraska.
- The Nebraska State Board of Education and the Nebraska Department of Education should work with the Governor, the Nebraska Legislature, and community partners to prioritize the growth and sustainability of programs and services that improve outcomes for children placed at risk from birth to kindergarten entrance, including:
 - The Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program - ages 3 to 5
 - The Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program - Birth to age 3 (Sixpence)
 - Nebraska Step Up to Quality: Nebraska's Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System
 - The Early Learning Connection Partnerships; Nebraska's professional development system for early education and care professionals.
- As AQuESTT is implemented, NDE should work with school districts and Educational Service Units to continue to embed early childhood into the AQuESTT framework.
- The Nebraska Department of Education staff should work with members of the Legislature's Education Committee to discuss the needs of children who are slightly younger or slightly older than the age cut-off for kindergarten eligibility.