



## NEWS RELEASE

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### STEP UP TO QUALITY CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS

Step Up to Quality is celebrating its five-year anniversary this year, a milestone in Nebraska's commitment to quality early childhood education. High-quality child care and early childhood education is important for our state's future. As Nebraska's QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement System), Step Up to Quality supports early child care and education programs that go beyond state licensing requirements to better serve the needs of young children and their families, and to prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond.

"Five years of Step Up to Quality means we have a significant group of five-year-olds entering kindergarten throughout the entire state that are ready to learn," said Lauri Cimino, director of Step Up to Quality. "They're creative, confident, and curious learners. Quality early childhood education builds a solid, well-rounded foundation of skills that makes a lasting impact."

In the past five years, participating Step Up to Quality programs have cared for nearly 25,000 children. The number of programs enrolled continues to grow. In 2019, there are approximately 700 programs enrolled, up from just 84 in the initial year. Step Up to Quality serves all types of child care programs throughout the state including 14 preschools, 72 Head Start and public preschool programs, 270 family child care homes, and 344 child care centers.

Step Up to Quality takes its providers through a five-step process. No matter where the provider is in the process, they are making a commitment to quality care for their children. Five years into the program, Step Up to Quality has 20 providers at a Step 5. In addition, Step Up to Quality has awarded nearly \$160,000 in Quality Incentive Bonuses, 158 programs have received coaching, and 1,464 people have completed the Step Up to Quality orientation.

With 90 percent of brain development occurring before age five, high-quality early child care and education is essential to a child's future success. Early learning builds the foundation for skills needed in school, work, and life. Research shows that kids in quality early childhood education programs are more likely to reach developmental milestones early or on time, build emotional intelligence, show improved reading skills, have better math skills in elementary school, and be prepared for kindergarten and to become lifelong learners.

Step Up to Quality provides enrolled child care providers access to coaching and resources that enable any provider – big or small – to take quality to the next level. To learn more about Step Up to Quality, including a list of participating child care providers, visit <http://stepuptoquality.ne.gov/>.

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