
Overview

Common Ground *More Now than Ever*

2018-2021

Collaboration and shared leadership in systems serving Nebraska's youngest children

The Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) was established in 2000 to advise and assist state agencies as required in the Early Intervention Act, Quality Child Care Act, and other state endeavors in early care and education.* It is comprised of parents, early childhood professionals, state agency leadership, as well as representatives from business, public health, higher education and community organizations.

The ECICC is focused on advancing Nebraska's future viability by addressing the needs of young children from the prenatal years through age 8. All children need nurturing experiences to succeed in learning and life. However, many young children face developmental delays, disabilities or socio-economic challenges to their potential for lifelong success. This wider range of challenges includes limited access to well-child healthcare, high-quality early care and learning opportunities and other multifaceted issues.

Nebraska has a long-standing commitment to develop its most precious resource — its children and their families.

Every biennium, the ECICC submits its report to the Governor on the status of early childhood in Nebraska according to the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council Act.

**Relevant statutes: (Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-3401 Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council; (Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-2501 to 43-2516) Early Intervention Act; (Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-2601 to 43-2625) Quality Child Care Act; and (Neb. Re. Stat. 79-1101 to 79-1104) Early Childhood Education Act.*



This report addresses five key areas related to early childhood care and education, highlights successes in each area and offers recommendations for the coming biennium. Additional data and highlights from specific programs can be found in the appendices.

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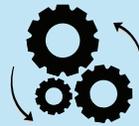
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Introduction

This 2018-20 Biennial Report is delayed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) was not able to meet quarterly during most of 2020 and early 2021. All but one meeting in those years was held virtually for 3-hour sessions instead of the typical full-day meeting. Also, our member vacancies continue to grow. At this writing, we have vacancies for four parent representatives (a critically important voice for the Council's business and networking) and eight other vacancies for representatives in various early childhood service and program areas such as, public health, development disabilities, public schools, child care centers, etc.

Missing meetings and low membership have been a challenge for staff, members, state agency administrators, and technical assistants and deters the process of networking and shared understanding. As a result, the ECICC presents a simplified Biennial Report by updating the previous 2016-18 Biennial Report, "Common Ground," and submits progress on recommendations. We expand the number of years in the 2018-20 Report to include 2021 in order to do our best to bring us up to date and because it is prudent to take a comprehensive view of what has occurred in the past two years of the pandemic. Perhaps the most salient information in this Report are those that speak to the effects of the pandemic on early childhood programs and services across Nebraska.

The Council learned much about the urgent needs and demands of coordination and collaboration. State agency administrators and key statewide and local partners were our heroes, working hours of overtime in mostly virtual communication and conditions less than optimal to find ways to appropriately and quickly disseminate federal pandemic relief funds. Their goal was to keep early childhood programs and services in operation, provide interventions in emergency situations, deploy added supports and resources whenever possible to address an unstable world.



Coordinated Systems Deliver Greater Efficiency

Early childhood programs are strongly encouraged to work closely together in developing and deploying services for young children.

Authentic collaboration typically reduces duplication of services, maximizes the use of available resources and creates greater accountability for public dollars.

These efficiencies also improve communities of practice for teachers, enhance parent networking and result in better outcomes for young children.

Instability in a young child's world is no small matter. Remarkable shifts in a child's expectations and predictability often create deteriorating mental health symptoms or behaviors. The adults who care for these children were also challenged by their own worry and concern. In particular, owners of family child care homes or centers were shaken regarding their economic survival. The constant "cheerleading" and shoring up of young, vulnerable children and their worried families creates an atmosphere of pronounced staff burnout. Fortunately, casualties due to the pandemic on programs and services were less damaging made possible by availability of additional federal funds and applying extreme supports and resources whenever necessary.

Nebraskans are resilient, steadfast, and hardworking.

While the consequences of a deadly and paralyzing global pandemic are without a doubt heartbreaking to many children and families across the state who have lost a loved one or suffered serious health conditions, or long term effects of the COVID-19 virus or its numerous variants, the ECICC has evidence that young children and families continue to make progress in their health, development, and cognitive achievements.

Leadership in state agencies, organizations, and local communities have met unspeakable challenges and continue to commit to the development of a multi-tiered system of support to meet the comprehensive needs of our youngest citizens.

“ Testimonial

Finding child care for children with special needs

Finding reliable, quality childcare is hard for all parents. Finding reliable childcare for a child with a disability or special healthcare need is almost impossible. There are few daycare centers and providers that are willing to accept children that may require more care during the day for fear of disruption of the “group”. These needs and behaviors that need to be addressed are often unknown at the time of enrollment and will change over time therefore causing parents much anxiety with enrolling in a program that is not willing to adapt as the child develops. Often centers and in home facilities are operating on a ratio system that allow for staff to child ratio that often our children’s need will not “fit in to”. Over time I believe that unintentional discrimination in child care has grown placing numerous barriers for our children to even consider attending a typical program or use a typical provider.

— **Lisa Hobza**

I. Quality

High quality early care and education programs and services afford better outcomes in all facets of a child’s development. Expansion of funding and partnerships in early childhood programs provides opportunities to enhance and expand quality initiatives across the state. Quality measures are used in public school early childhood programs, Sixpence infant-toddler programs and services, Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, Step Up to Quality in licensed child care and other early childhood settings. The federal DHHS Preschool Development Grant (PDG) creates systems of quality that are transferable across all of these and other programs and services.

What’s Working Well?

Focus on infants, toddlers and their families:

Infants and toddlers in Nebraska have greater access to quality programs through Sixpence, a public-private endeavor operated by public school districts. Federal Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships also offer increased access to quality programs and comprehensive services.

Public information is available on participation and quality rating of licensed child care programs across the state. Step Up to Quality legislation requires information and resources to be made available for parents and community members. The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) collaborate to administer the program statewide.

Fundamentally, child care programs in both centers and family child care homes provide basic safety and care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers through regulations in health and safety.

Access to higher quality programs has expanded as more providers complete training in the Early Learning Guidelines: Nebraska’s Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards and also participate in Step Up to Quality. Families who

are income eligible may apply for assistance in paying for licensed care while the parent works or attends training and education to better prepare for the workforce and support their families.

Children with Disabilities

According to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, providers of care for a child with a disability may charge in excess of the rates indicated on the Child Care Subsidy Rate chart [Source: Child Care for Children with Disabilities, Aged and Disabled Waiver Service. See Appendix, 392 Nebraska Administrative Code 000-203]. This depends on the type of provider and setting. The cost for child care for a child with disabilities is fluid and difficult to pinpoint in comparison to the rates for a typically developing child.

In calendar year 2021, there were 5,542 infants and toddlers that received early intervention services from the Early Development Network (Nebraska's Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act—IDEA). [Source: DHHS Early Development Network].

Approximately 40% of all preschool children being served by public schools have been verified for special education services.

Public School Programs

Nearly all of the Nebraska public school districts operate an early childhood program. These programs, regulated by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE, Rules 11, 51, 52), employ certificated teachers with endorsements in both early childhood education, early childhood special education or inclusive education.

Coordination and collaboration among these public school programs with the Early Development Network (EDN), Head Start grantees, and other community programs and services is important to provide quality learning and development experiences for all children in inclusive settings. Children with disabilities, developmental delays, or other risk factors

benefit greatly when public schools work with other community programs and services. [See Part C of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Annual Performance Report found at: <https://bit.ly/NEPartC>

The national pandemic impact trend in early childhood program enrollment saw a reduction in numbers. The pandemic impacted enrollment in Nebraska public school pre-kindergarten programs with a 7.8% decrease from 2019 to 2020 (21,356 children in 2019 down to 19,842 in 2020). The most recent Nebraska Department of Education Early Childhood Programs Report may be found at: <https://bit.ly/EarlyChildhoodNE>



Head Start and Title I Funds

Revisions in the federal Department of Education's Every Student Succeeds Act requires public school districts receiving Title I funds, regardless of whether they operate a preschool program, to develop transition agreements with Head Start and, if feasible, other early childhood programs in the community [Section 1119(a)].

Children Served by Head Start and Early Head Start

Over 5,300 of Nebraska's young children living in poverty are served by federally funded programs: Head Start (17), Early Head Start (17) and Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships (3).

Programs have hundreds of formal agreements with public schools and other community agencies to support the delivery of comprehensive, inclusive services and developmentally appropriate school readiness learning experiences for children living in poverty, as well as support services for their families. This includes three American Indian Head Start and Early Head Start Programs administered by tribes on reservations in Macy, Santee Sioux, and Winnebago.

For Nebraska Head Start profile/map, visit: <https://bit.ly/NHSAstats>

**Public-Private Collaboration:
Sixpence Early Learning Fund**

The Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund, also known as Sixpence, has shifted the odds for infants and toddlers, birth through age three, at risk toward better developmental outcomes. An innovative collaboration and investment model, eleven (11) Sixpence programs (as of 2021) are funded through a unique public and private sector endeavor that provides funding to enhance the quality and efficiency of early learning and development services offered in communities statewide. Sixpence programs are administered by public school grant recipients and must meet both federal and state rigorous quality standards. Programs in Sixpence Child Care Partnerships must also participate in Nebraska's Step Up to Quality program.

Sixpence Early Learning Fund

In 2006, Nebraska policymakers and the voting public chose to make the early care and education of infants and toddlers a priority by laying the legislative and constitutional groundwork for the Sixpence Early Learning Fund.

This effort was driven by a growing recognition of two key issues:

- 1st** The well-being of our families, communities and state is fundamentally rooted in the healthy development of our youngest children, even from the earliest days of life.
- 2nd** Our state's public and private sectors have a common interest, and therefore complementary roles to play in cultivating the up-and-coming generation of young Nebraskans.

In the 2020-2021 program year, the Sixpence Early Learning Fund supported 51 school district grantees across the state. This was Sixpence's 13th year of serving young children in Nebraska. Sixpence grantees implemented one of the following models:

- Center-based care (4)
- Family engagement home-based services (24)
- Combination of family engagement home-based services and center-based care (3)

In 2015 Legislation enabled the use of existing federal dollars to fund school-child care Partnerships (CCP). These grants are a collaboration between school districts and local child care providers with the goal of improving the quality of early childhood programs serving infants and toddlers up to age three and their families. Participating Districts' prioritized the needs in the community for quality care, developed goals and strategies to create effective partnerships, and selected supportive services to provide to the local child care programs.

During the 2020-2021 program year, 55 child care programs participated in CCP.

- 27 sites were child care centers and 28 sites were family child care home providers. CCP was very successful in retaining sites in the program with 98% completing the program year.
- CCP child care programs reported the demographics for a total of 908 children. A goal of CCP is to partner with child care providers that serve children who face challenges that could lead to poor performance in school.
- All of the CCP sites are willing to enroll children who receive state child care subsidies. Currently, 75% of the sites have children who are receiving subsidized care.
- CCP providers are expected to enroll in Step Up To Quality (SU2Q) and to achieve a Step 3 within three years. Because of the many ways COVID-19 interrupted CCP coaching and training, programs will have a fourth year to reach Step 3.
- Programs have made progress in working through the SU2Q steps, with most (72%) reaching Step 3 or above by their third year in CCP.

Every year, Sixpence grantees participate in a rigorous, independent evaluation conducted by researchers at Munroe-Meyer Institute, UNMC.

The full evaluation report can be found at: singasongofsixpence.org/resources

A map of Sixpence grant recipients is located in the Appendix.

Key insights from the most recent (2020-21) evaluation are outlined below.

- A total of 1,016 children and 864 families were served in rural (42%), mid-sized (27%) and (31%) urban communities.
- The majority of participating children (70%) received home-based, family engagement services.
- Sixpence served 38% Hispanic, 36% White, 12% Multi-racial, 6% Native American, 6% African American and 2% other. slightly more males (51%) than females (49%). A total of 14% of the children received special education services through Nebraska's Early Development Network. The majority of the children (77%) were under the age of one at the time of entry into Sixpence.
- Nearly all Sixpence children (96%) live in low-income households, 47% are raised by a single parent, 40% have a parent with no high school diploma, 25% are children of teen parents and 34% have families where English is the second language.
- The majority (range of 93% to 98%) of participating children were meeting widely held expectations for physical, social-emotional, cognitive, linguistic, literacy, and early math skills development.

Find a map of existing programs in the Appendix and more at:
www.singasongofsixpence.org

For more information, contact Stefanni Renn,
srenn@nebraskachildren.org

Early Childhood Social-Emotional Development

Investments in the school readiness of Nebraska's youngest children have been shown to strengthen families, communities and the quality of life in Nebraska.

The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children applied in settings where young children spend a majority of their day fosters positive childhood development.

Rooted in Relationships, Nurturing Healthy Behaviors, and NeMTSS, under the Nebraska Department of Education work with community members, stakeholders, and school districts to implement Pyramid Model in private community based child care, public preschools, and Head Start programs, which ensures more children birth-5 are receiving support for their social emotional development. These programs are also engaged with the Pyramid State Leadership Team to scale up efforts statewide.

The pandemic has had and continues to have a tremendous impact on the social emotional health of young children and their families. Many families have faced instability, frequent changes in routines, and trauma. By continuing to use the Pyramid Model in early care and education settings, child care providers and teachers can help bring a sense of stability and calm to the lives of the children in their care.

For additional information, contact Lynne Brehm,
lbrehm@nebraskachildren.org.



Progress in Tribal Communities

The Omaha Tribe (American Indian Programs Branch, Region XII, Federal Head Start) opened their first Early Head Start program in Macy, NE, in 2018, with a cedar ceremony to bless the new center.

The grant provided funding for construction of a new building, startup expenses and operation costs. The center-based program provides full-day, comprehensive child development for 32 low-income infants and toddlers, and support services for their families and eligible pregnant women and their families.

Home Visitation Services

Home visitation programs and services such as the Nebraska- Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (N-MIECHV) Program are community coalitions that coordinate resources and jointly plan and provide comprehensive support in a home-based approach.

The Nebraska DHHS, Division of Public Health, in the Lifespan Health Services Unit, has administered funding for Local Implementing Agencies since 2010. Evidence-based home visiting services assure quality, fidelity to an evidence-based model, and collect data on six constructs:

1) Maternal and newborn health; 2) child injuries, maltreatment, and emergency department visits; 3) school readiness and achievement; 4) reduction in crime and/or domestic violence; 5) family economic self-sufficiency; and 6) coordination and referrals for other community resources and supports. Every three years, NE DHHS must show improvement in four out of six of the benchmark areas, and have done so for over 10 years.

Since inception in 2010 through today, more than 2,200 families have participated in N-MIECHV programs. A partnership with the Division of Children and Family Services in 2019 expanded services utilizing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) funding. Seven program sites across the state are able to offer services in 34 counties, and community planning efforts are underway to potentially add four to five additional programs in 2022 – 2025.

[Source: dhhs.ne.gov/homevisiting]

Other programs such as Sixpence, Early Head Start and Head Start have the option to provide home-based services to families with young children to address their comprehensive needs and connect them to appropriate community resources.

For additional information, contact Jennifer Auman, NE DHHS at: Jennifer.Auman@nebraska.gov

LOOKING FORWARD: 2022 AND BEYOND

Recommendation: Continue to train professionals in all early childhood programs in the knowledge and support of young children's growth and development using the seven domains of the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines

- Distribute new Early Learning Guidelines to providers of home visiting, maternal/child health, and child care food programs to equip them with knowledge and resources.
- Work with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Child and Adult Care Food Program to disseminate materials and coordinate training among schools and child care provider networks.

Risk Factors Affecting Young Children

Greater risks exist for young children representing populations and geographical areas that are under-represented and under-served. The recent unprecedented issues with the pandemic created even more risk factors for young children and their families and those that serve them.

Additional developmental supports are often needed for children in high-stress, high-poverty and high-crime sectors.

- Minority populations based on race and ethnicity (such as American Indian families/communities)
- Families experiencing extreme poverty or homelessness
- Children in foster care or adoptive situations
- Children of families of refugee/immigrant status
- Children of migrant/seasonal agricultural workers
- Children of parents who are English Language Learners

In 2019, over 26% of Nebraska's 501,801 children were under the age of 5; and 21,827 of those little ones living in extreme poverty, at 50% of the Federal Poverty Line." (KidsCount, Voices for Children: www.kidscountnebraska.com)

NDE Office of Early Childhood created a training for early childhood professionals on "Working with Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness" to meet federal requirements. Over 150 professionals have completed the training.

II: Professional Development

The availability of a well-trained and educated early childhood professional directly correlates to quality of programs and services thereby increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes for young children. Increased access to college coursework and high-quality continuing education and training expands the knowledge and expertise of providers, teachers, and caregivers.

What's Working Well?

Strengthening our efforts to recruit, train and retain enough highly skilled early childhood professionals to meet statewide needs

- Nebraska's early childhood professionals have greater access to quality professional development and training than ever before. Over 8,000 professionals attended one or more of 486 training events. Various distance learning options are also available.

Early Learning Connections

The Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services jointly plan professional development and training for early childhood professionals. Efforts are largely coordinated by the Nebraska Department of Education's Early Childhood Training Center housed at Educational Service Unit 3 in LaVista. Regional Early Learning Connection (ELC) Coordinators are housed in Educational Service Units across the state. These are strategically located to maximize access to and availability of professional development among public schools, institutions of higher education, licensed child care programs, and Federal Head Start agencies. Planning Region Teams are also formal partners to focus on services and supports to young children with disabilities and their families.

Every year, ELCs collect and analyze training needs to inform priorities and plans for coordinating and conducting training for all early childhood professionals. The ELCs are anchored by the NDE Early Childhood Training Center to ensure access to appropriate curriculum, coaching supports, and media and library resources to support the transfer of learning for adults who work with young children.



School Readiness Tax Credits

In 2016, the Nebraska Legislature passed the School Readiness Tax Credit Act [LB889]. The legislation was designed to provide financial incentives for child care providers to continue their professional development and enhance the caliber of their services, thereby improving the developmental outcomes of the children in their programs. [Section 1119(a)].

In the 2019 Legislative Session, lawmakers worked on improvements to the School Readiness Tax Credit Act to make these incentives more available to Nebraska's early childhood professionals. Improvements to the School Readiness Tax Credit allowed for Family Childcare programs to participate which was the intent of the original legislation. There was significant increase in applications for tax years 2020 and 2021. Unfortunately, the Tax Credit had a sunset clause and appears it will not be reauthorized in 2022.

Regional Early Learning Connections Partnerships

There are seven Early Learning Connections (ELC) Partnerships housed in Educational Service Units strategically located across Nebraska. Please see https://bit.ly/NDE_ECmap for a map of the Regions and the ELC professionals that facilitate the work in their area.

Step Up to Quality

Step Up to Quality, Nebraska’s child care quality rating and improvement system (known as a QRIS) offers quality enhancements and tax incentives to participating programs. Standards and indicators in areas of professional development, environments, parent engagement, and health provide the framework for the five-step levels model.

These incentives and supports help stabilize the early childhood workforce, contribute to the local economy, and increase quality experiences for children through educated and well-trained professionals.

Reviewing/Revising Nebraska’s QRIS was a goal identified within the federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG). A stakeholder group of over 40 individuals met in 2019/2020 to address revisions to the 2014 model. Individuals represented, child care operators,

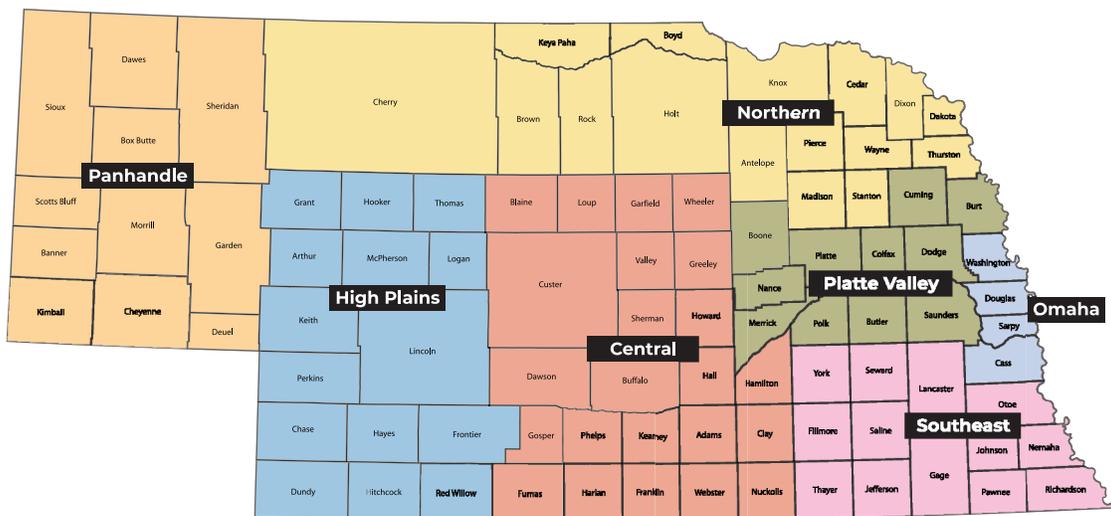
owners/directors, family child care providers, Head Start representatives, Public School Preschool program specialists, higher education, early childhood partners including the Buffett Institute, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative. Early Learning Coordinators, Coaches and Coach Consultants also provided input. Standards and indicators were reviewed including data from the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Records System. Step Up to Quality assessments, CLASS/Environmental Rating Scales and GO NAP SACC (a nutrition education and technical assistance program developed by University of Nebraska Extension).

After recommendations for improvement were completed, nearly 300 persons provided public input via webinars and website. An Updates page was created on the Step Up to Quality website to share the collective work.

<https://bit.ly/3uPEHqC>

A follow up survey was made available to collect additional feedback. Proposed changes were reviewed and approved by the Step Up to Quality steering committee representing Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) as well as the NDE Equity Officer. Due to pandemic interruptions, roll out of Step Up to Quality 2.0 is delayed until early 2023. Contact Lauri Cimino, Director, Step Up to Quality, for additional information; Lauri.cimino@nebraska.gov.

Early Learning Connections Partnership Regions



T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® NEBRASKA

In addition to participating Step Up to Quality programs/providers, other early childhood professionals seeking a degree in an approved higher education program of study may have access to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® program. T.E.A.C.H. is an evidence-based national strategy that has increased the availability of accessible, affordable college education and workforce supports for early childhood educators working with children in early childhood settings. It provides the structure for a comprehensive, sequenced program of early childhood higher education opportunities that recognizes the diverse educational backgrounds of early childhood teachers.

T.E.A.C.H. targets increased education, leading to credentials and degrees, increased compensation, and job and career retention.

Employer and employee dollars are combined with public and/or private funds in each state to support their early education workforce. With an eye toward student success, T.E.A.C.H. ensures that early educators are supported economically with tuition and book assistance, paid leave time, travel stipends and bonuses, and socially through the support of a scholarship counselor and an engaged employer.

Fiscal Year 2019 Data

154	scholarship recipients
15.7	average credits taken in AA degree
17.8	average credits taken in BA degree
1,585	credit hours completed
3.38	average GPA for AA degree
3.53	average GPA for BA degree
9%	average increase in earnings for AA scholars
10%	average increase in earnings for BA scholars
93%	average retention rate for AA scholars
100%	average retention rate for BA scholars

Fiscal Year 2020 Data

136	scholarship recipients
19.1	average credits taken in AA degree
20.45	average credits taken in BA degree
1,825	credit hours completed
3.47	average GPA for AA degree
3.69	average GPA for BA degree
7.6%	average increase in earnings for AA scholars
11%	average increase in earnings for BA scholars
95%	average retention rate for AA scholars
100%	average retention rate for BA scholars



Step Up to Quality: A Pathway for Continuous Improvement

At the end of year 2021, there are 1,174 child care centers and family home providers registered in the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System. Enrollment is the first phase of participation in the system. Providers are eligible to receive their quality ratings once they have fully completed the onboarding process. Providers

advance to higher quality ratings as they access supports offered through Step Up to Quality and demonstrate measurable progress in:

- Curriculum, learning environments and teacher-child interactions
- Child outcomes

- Professional development and training
- Family engagement and partnerships
- Program administration

As of the production of this report, 384 providers have been rated on the program's 5-step scale, and 103 programs have received a rating of Step 3 or higher.

Child Care WAGES® NEBRASKA

A lack of resources and an effort to maintain affordability for parents often make it difficult for individual childcare programs to pay teachers what they deserve. As a result, many teachers leave the field or never consider the profession as an option.

Child Care WAGES® was created in response to researched-based evidence that shows the quality of care children receive is lowered by high turnover rates and inadequate teacher education.

The program provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers, directors and family childcare providers working with children between the ages of birth-5 and is designed to provide children more stable relationships with better educated teachers by rewarding teacher education and continuity of care.

Child Care WAGES® NEBRASKA was started in 2019 with the first supplements awarded in 2020. The initial pilot for this project was focused on family child care providers in hopes that when additional funding is secured we can expand to offer the project to all childcare providers in the state.

Fiscal Year 2020 Data

18 salary supplement recipients

67% of active participants either had an Associate Degree in ECE or higher OR submitted education documentation to show progress in college

50% of WAGE\$ participants earned less than \$12 per hour
WAGE\$ recipients earned an average six-month supplement of \$1,088, or approximately \$2,176 more per year, as a result of their participation.

100% of WAGE\$ participants stayed in their early education programs.

Fiscal Year 2021 Data

29 salary supplement recipients

72% of active participants had an Associate Degree in ECE or higher OR submitted education documentation to show progress in college

93% of WAGE\$ participants earned less than \$15 per hour from their employers
WAGE\$ recipients earned an average six-month supplement of \$1,048, or approximately \$2,096 more per year, as a result of their participation.

97% of WAGE\$ participants stayed in their early education program



Early Childhood Workforce Commission

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute launched the Early Childhood Workforce Commission represented statewide by stakeholders from State Agencies and other regional and local programs, schools, and business communities.

Under the leadership of Dr. Susan Sarver, (ssarver@nebraska.edu) the Commission has identified needs for building a strong infrastructure and increasing availability of early childhood professionals to meet the demands, in particular, of those children most

vulnerable and at risk of learning, physical, and developmental delays.

The Commission is focused on partnerships with Nebraska's public and private institutions of higher education in early childhood degree preparation programs to support development of professional competencies and career pathways in early care and education.

See <https://bit.ly/3OILwb0>

Professional Development Through Coaching

Research conducted by the University of Nebraska Research Center for Children, Youth, and Families (CYFS) has shown the effectiveness of Early Childhood Coaching as an evidence-based model. Many programs now employ coaching as a best practice approach to improve the knowledge and skills of professionals thereby impacting positive outcomes for young children.

A Coach Collaborative Team works to develop: 1) standardized processes for coach training; 2) improved methods of communication among multiple coaches working in the same program; 3) identification of strategies for reducing coaching overload; and 4) alignment of coaching processes and practices. The Team's mission is to "encourage the optimal development of young children in Nebraska by supporting high-quality education and care." The Coach Development Team, a sub-group of the Coach Collaboration Team coordinates the development of initial and ongoing coach training and support.

Coach Consultants have been hired and placed with the Early Learning Connection (ELCs) regional professional development system, housed in Educational Service Units, to support the partnerships, effective coaching models, processes, and practices necessary to support professionals and programs in various settings across the state.

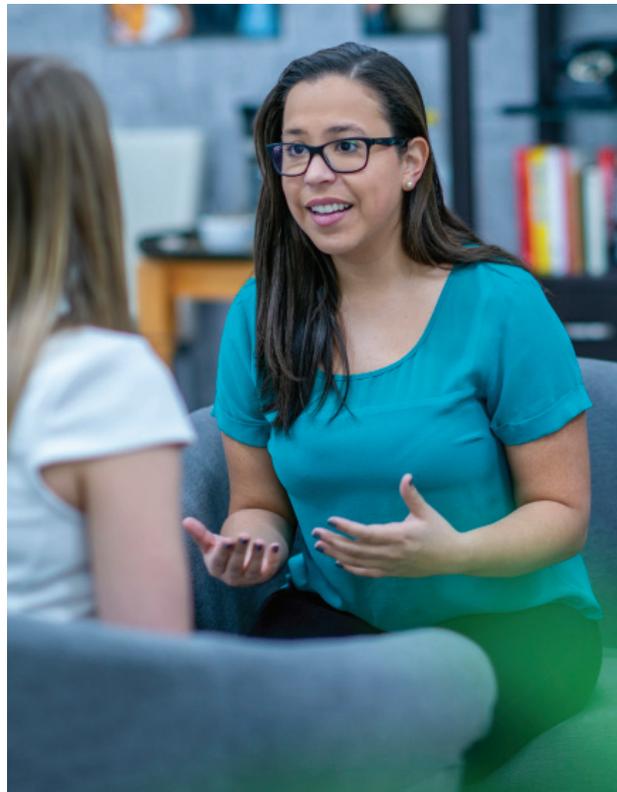
Contact Tracy.Went@nebraska.gov for information on Nebraska's coaching model, the coach collaborative effort, and location and role of coach consultants across the state.

A map of Nebraska's Coach Consultants can be found in the Appendix.

LOOKING FORWARD: 2022 AND BEYOND

Recommendation: Expand efforts of the Coach Collaborative Team to engage more programs and providers in the early childhood coach model.

- Offer expanded access to coach training in collaboration with higher education and the Early Learning Connection Coordinators.
- Increase capacity for coaching by utilizing coach consultants within ESU and ELC efforts.
- Provide additional financial support for early childhood initiatives that use coaching, such as Step Up to Quality, as a tool to increase effective early childhood teaching.



III: Early Learning Standards

Well-defined standards guide early childhood professionals in their practice. Teachers and caregivers benefit from consistent benchmarks and indicators and offer a way to communicate with their peers. Measuring progress of children's outcomes is more valid and reliable when assessed within a framework of complementary and aligned standards.

What's Working Well?

Setting expectations for professional knowledge of providers working with young children and their families

Nebraska's revised Early Learning Guidelines are used broadly in various early childhood programs and services. Early Learning Guidelines: Nebraska's Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards, provide an easily accessible resource outlining what children birth to kindergarten should typically know and be able to do.

Early childhood teachers and caregivers access training and materials through the Nebraska Department of Education Early Childhood Training Center. Professionals and institutions of higher education utilize these standards in preservice and in-service activities to build a common language and knowledge base across the various types of programs and services and to help prepare new teachers in the field.

Nebraska's Early Learning and Development Standards align with:

- Child Care Licensing Regulations
- Step Up to Quality Standards
- Nebraska's Core Competencies for early childhood professionals
- Federal Head Start Program Performance Standards

LOOKING FORWARD: 2022 AND BEYOND

Recommendation: Support the use of the revised Early Learning Standards more widely in all early childhood programs and services.

- Offer Early Learning Guidelines training and resources to all home visitation program providers.
- Ensure all higher education early childhood degree faculty have access to updated materials for use in college curriculum coursework.



Nebraska's Early Learning Guidelines

The revised Early Learning Guidelines are available on the Nebraska Department of Education website at: <https://bit.ly/3rCECEI>

The Early Learning Guidelines training and other professional development opportunities are accessed through the Early Learning Connections.

Early Learning Guidelines Training

With the onset of the pandemic, nearly all training, including the Early Learning Guidelines, virtual training became the norm. Trainers conducting virtual training events received additional technical assistance and training to ensure the virtual format was successful. Total training events including Early Learning Guidelines: 1,392 in 2019; then diminished to 925 in 2020; and rebounded with more virtual offerings to 1,109 in 2021. Participants attending Early Learning Guidelines training showed a dramatic increase with virtual format. There were 1,126 attending in 2019; growing to 7,111 in 2020, and 7,834 in 2021.

[Note: this number includes potential duplication due to various sessions for which professionals attended. Source: erecords.education.ne.gov].

IV: Early Childhood Data

Credible data resources are an integral part of a well-coordinated, viable early childhood infrastructure. Data assets are necessary to:

- Strengthen accountability for public dollars invested in services targeting our state's youngest children and their families
- Increase efficiency by allowing program administrators to better track how families access and children benefit from early care and learning services.
- Better organize and develop state and local resources to address the most urgent needs of young children and their families.
- Ensure fidelity in program evaluation and guide strategies for implementing more effective service models.
- Help public schools follow children's developmental progress in their first five years and build upon early developmental gains as they transition into the K-12 environment.

What's Working Well?

Continued development of Nebraska's Early Childhood Integrated Data System

The Nebraska Early Childhood Data Coalition has articulated a long-term goal focused on an early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS) in Nebraska. The Nebraska ECIDS will answer key questions about publicly funded early childhood services, provide greater accountability for public investments in services for young children, and inform future investments in early care and education.

It is known that Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) connect, integrate, secure, maintain, store, and report information from a variety of Early Childhood (EC) programs and services. States with fully functioning ECIDS are able to horizontally integrate data across agencies as well as vertically integrate data from EC programs to K-12 state longitudinal

data systems. In doing so, states are able to provide distinct counts of children and/or families to more succinctly address important questions related to services received by children and families. For more information, contact Ben Baumfalk at Ben.baumfalk@nebraska.gov.

Nebraska Child Care Referral Network

The Nebraska Child Care Referral Network (CCRN) was developed in response to the difficulties many providers and families had at the start of the pandemic. Many families had changing needs for child care and many child care providers lost some of the children in their care and were looking to fill spots. This mismatch was exacerbated by the lack of a single place where parents could go to find child care in their area that had openings. The CCRN (www.nechildcarereferral.org) was developed collaboratively with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCF), NDHHS, NDE, First Five Nebraska (FFN), Buffett Early Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska Extension, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative (NECC), and numerous other state and local partners. The CCRN is currently housed at NCF and is continuing to be developed to better serve parents and child care providers.

Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System (NECPRS)

The Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System (NECPRS) database is part of Nebraska's early childhood integrated data system. NECPRS tracks enrollment and progress for enrolled programs in Nebraska Step Up to Quality.

NECPRS is also a registry for early childhood professionals in the state who choose to keep electronic records of their collective professional training as well as their educational and employment history. In 2020, 968 records were added and in 2021 an additional 1,174 records in the database.

IDEA Data Toolkit

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) technical assistance center focused on early childhood data (DaSy) offers information, resources, and support to states regarding data systems developments. A DaSy toolkit helps state agencies and stakeholder groups related to young children with disabilities to understand their role in building state early childhood integrated data systems. [Source: dasycenter.org].



Why NECPRS Matters to Government Efficiency

As of the 2019 Legislative Session, state lawmakers considered proposals to leverage the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System (NECPRS) for greater efficiency in the child care licensing process.

Every year, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services verifies that licensed child care staff meet the training and professional education requirements for licensed status. This process requires DHHS personnel to conduct in-person visits to child care programs statewide to collect and record hard copy documentation on the educators employed there.

As an online resource, NECPRS can be used to capture and record much of the same information currently being collected manually for child care licensing. This has the potential to greatly streamline a necessary, but burdensome and inefficient process for both state agency personnel as well as child care professional.

LOOKING FORWARD: 2022 AND BEYOND

Recommendation: Support integration of data from multiple early childhood data systems to create meaningful tools to better inform early childhood systems, services and policies in Nebraska.

- Support legislation to create a data governance body to oversee policies and procedures related to integrating and using early childhood data from multiple agencies currently storing early childhood data.
- Support the capacity building efforts of state agencies to use linked early childhood administrative data.
- Support a project-based strategy to build a fully functional and sustainable early childhood integrated data system in Nebraska.

V: Coordination and Collaboration

Collaboration in early care and education helps build systems at the state, regional, and local levels. Working together generally results in higher quality and more efficient child and family-centered programs and services leading to better outcomes for young children and families. Nebraska's federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) is a major effort to actually realize authentic collaboration by addressing multi-tiered systems of support across all domains of early care and education.

Preschool Development Grant (PDG)

PDG, (Birth-Five), is a three-year federal award (April 30, 2020-April 29, 2023) to Nebraska by the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to implement a strategic plan developed during the prior year. Through a competitive process, Nebraska's receipt of this award, provides an opportunity to focus on a number of challenges identified in the 2018-2020 ECICC Biennial report.

Among those challenges, collaboration and coordination among Early Childhood programs to deliver greater efficiency in developing and deploying services for young children is a core outcome and benefit. PDG efforts continue to build on system strengths, address gaps, and increase access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services and programs through ongoing coordination and collaboration.

Using a Collective Impact approach, the grant funds assist Nebraska to support and enhance a true partnership of state agencies, the state's university system, private and philanthropic partners, and community leaders. The current PDG renewal grant (after completion of the planning grant) makes it possible for the state to continue building community-level leadership and improve upon quality of services for all Nebraska's families especially those experiencing more challenges.

Reaching all children and families across Nebraska's broad geographic areas, in communities having varied economic strengths and challenges, life experiences, resources, and diversity among culture and primary language spoken in the household poses unique challenges and opportunities. It requires input and leadership from those we seek to serve, sensitivity to local needs, and flexible approach. One size cannot fit all and local leadership is supported through state systems working together to reduce unintended barriers, streamline access to resources, support quality care and education wherever the child spends their day, and efficiently manage statewide resources.

PDG supports ongoing strategies to assess ongoing needs within the strategic plan to offer a road map for collective effort, and continues to implement recommendations of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, (<https://bit.ly/3vulVnJ>) and is continuously improving upon evaluation of efforts across systems. Additionally, outreach efforts to reach families evolves through focus groups, attendance on planning teams, a parent led conference, and translation of materials in various languages. Outreach to family, friend, and neighbors providing childcare occurs through bilingual specialists to assist with understanding good practice, child development, licensing regulations, and general business practices. There is a recognition that providing opportunities for everyone requires intentionality, a willingness to listen to everyone's ideas, an appreciation for diverse life experiences, and responding together with mutual respect.

All areas described in the ECICC Biennial Report fit within the framework of Nebraska's PDG Strategic Plan (SP): <https://bit.ly/3JQa0G9>. As ECICC is the advisory council to the PDG effort, a more detailed ECICC report on PDG will be available at the beginning of 2023.

What's Working Well?

Engaging and Collaborating with Nebraska's Families, and Public and Private Sector Stakeholders

Engaging Parents and Community

Parents are children's first teachers and the most important partners in ensuring their health and development. High-quality programs provide daily communication and special opportunities to engage families in building knowledge and understanding of their child's developmental needs. Opportunities for families to network together may be formally included in a program, such as Head Start, Sixpence and public school programs.

Coordination Between State Agencies and Local Partners

State agencies know the value of coordination. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the Nebraska Department of Education work together to address quality improvement strategies in professional development and in programs.

The Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) is a vehicle for state agencies and other representative organizations and disciplines working together to network and to keep up to date on the status of programs and services. Many local programs enter into formal interagency agreements with public and private schools and other community agencies to enhance services, accountability for use of resources, and build shared leadership.

Events and Conferences

Coordination in planning events and conferences such as the successful Nebraska Young Child Institute. The NYCI event brings together professionals from across disciplines to better understand the early childhood landscape and support the needs of young children and families living in Nebraska.

This type of collaborative event informs stakeholders of policies, or other critical strategies, and developments in the realm of early care and education and family support, involving law enforcement, educators, court and justice officials, health and disabilities professionals, parents and community leaders.



For more information about this important event, contact Cassie Maher; cmaher3@unl.edu with the Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children.

Looking Forward: 2022 and beyond

Recommendation: Enhance, align and sustain strategies for a mixed-delivery system in early care and education across Nebraska

- With ECICC leadership, engage local stakeholders to inform efficiencies in state and local partnership efforts.
- Continue to focus on developing public/private partnerships at state and local levels.
- Explore innovative strategies to assist families' access to affordable, high-quality early childhood programs.



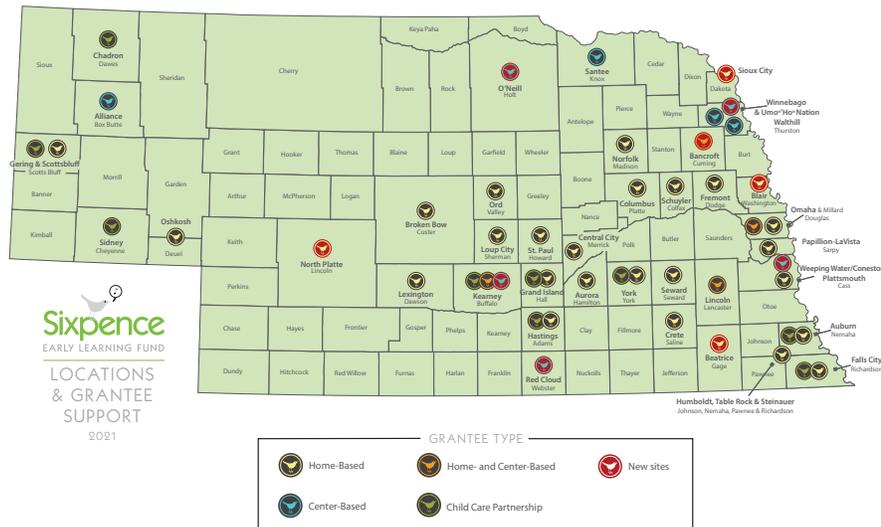
The ECICC's Role in Coordination and Collaboration

State Agencies	Service Providers
Michelle Nunemaker—DHHS, Mental Health	Vacant—EC Mental Health
John Marinovich—Department of Insurance	Susan Borcher—Social Services
Amy Bunnell—NDE, Early Intervention	Gwendolyn Easter—Family Child Care
Jessica Anthony—DHHS, Medicaid	Vacant—Head Start
Melody Hobson—NDE, Early Childhood/Preschool	Vacant—Center-Based Child Care
Ken Howard—NDE, Homeless Education	Vacant—Public Schools Early Childhood
Nicole Vint—DHHS, Child Care	Vacant—Developmental Disabilities
Allison Wilson—DHHS, Child Abuse Prevention	Vacant—Public Health
Heather Ottoson—NDE, Special Education/Preschool	Parent Representatives
Head Start Collaboration Office	Amber Jara—Lincoln
Steph Knust	Krynn Larsen—Columbus
Social Service Organizations	Vacant
Vacant—Head Start-Tribal	Vacant
Other Education Stakeholders	Vacant
Nora Robinson—Educational Service Units	Vacant
Paula Thompson (ECICC Vice-Chair)—Higher Education	Other Stakeholders
	Allison Freeny—Professional Development
	Carol Bowen—Business
	Karla Lester—Physician

Appendix I: Selected Program Highlights

Sixpence Early Learning Fund Grantees

Srenn@nebraskachildren.org | Stephanni Renn | singasongofsixpence.org



Communities for Kids

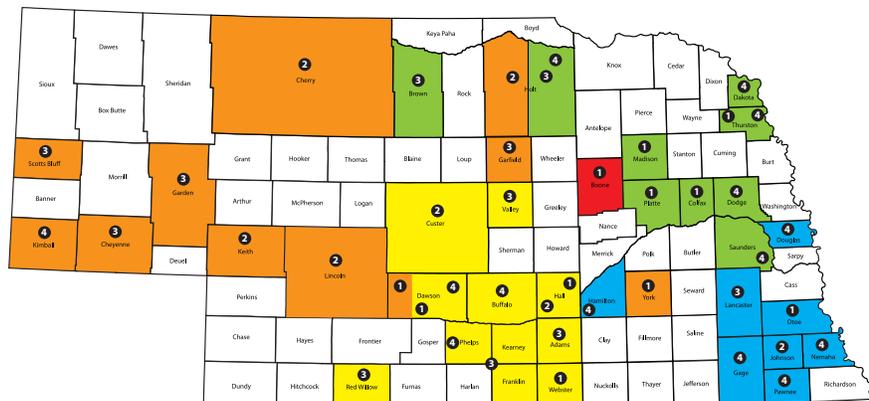
Mbeard@nebraskachildren.org | Marti Beard | communitiesforkids.org

Communities for Kids is an initiative of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. Created in 2017, this work addresses requests from communities to assist in developing solutions to increase local child care capacity and enhance quality. Communities for Kids works to heighten awareness of early childhood infrastructure from the perspective of economic development, workforce and community growth and vitality.

Communities for Kids leverages Nebraska Children and Families Foundation’s Collective Impact Model to engage stakeholders, Utilize data and conduct a child care landscape study and connect peer communities and available resources to deliver realistic, sustainable and locally driven solutions.

Communities for Kids actively works with 41 communities statewide. Future plans include additional communities joining the initiative, new funding opportunities for community teams through the APRA funding and specific sustainability workshops and supports.

Communities for Kids Growth Map



Rooted in Relationships

lbrehm@nebraskachildren.org | Lynne Brehm | rootedinrelationships.org

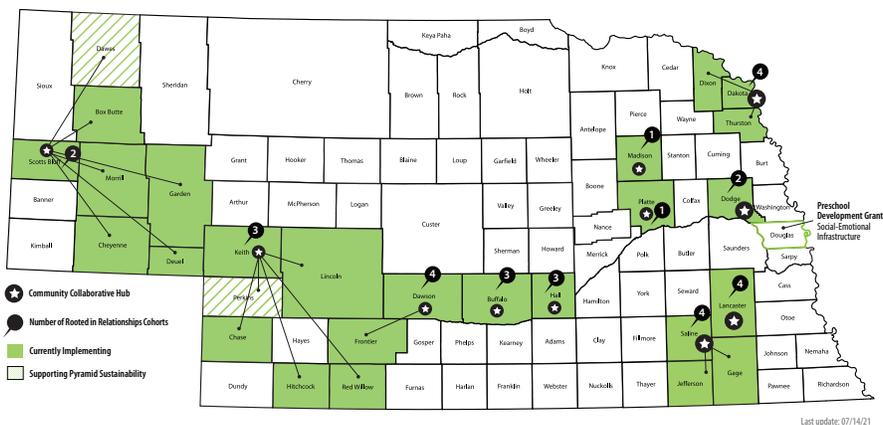
Rooted in Relationships (RiR) is an initiative of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation focused on enhancing children’s social-emotional development from birth through age 8. The work of this initiative includes helping communities implement the Pyramid Model, an evidence-based framework to promote social, emotional, and behavioral competence in young children. Rooted in Relationships also helps communities develop and implement long range plans to improve their early childhood systems of care. In 2021, the initiative supported twelve collaborative hubs across the state serving child care programs in 28 counties.

In 2021, 49 coaches supported 286 Center and home-based providers to implement the Pyramid Model in 152 programs impacting over 2,700 children. 79% of providers work in centers and 21% are in home-based child care settings. 15% of children qualified for child care subsidy and 10% spoke a primary language other than English.

Rooted in Relationships coaches and community stakeholder groups had to rethink how to support providers through the pandemic as the need for support for both providers, families, and children was great. Phone calls, email, and video communication platforms, such as Zoom, became essential to ensuring that participating programs continued to have access to the encouragement and resources provided by their coach.

- 65% of Rooted coaches reported that at least one of the centers they supported closed temporarily due to the pandemic
- Many coaches contacted their providers more frequently than they had before to provide additional support
- 94% of coaches emphasized the importance of self-care for providers and 67% reported concerns about their providers mental health and provided resources/referrals to address the concerns
- Many community-based stakeholder groups took new, creative approaches to supporting providers and families, including helping them locate and pay for personal protective equipment, providing self-care materials, and encouraging strategies to help young children cope.
- Coaches reported that they relied on the training they had received through RiR on Reflective Practice to support providers, parents and themselves during this stressful time

Rooted in Relationships Growth Map (Current)



Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children

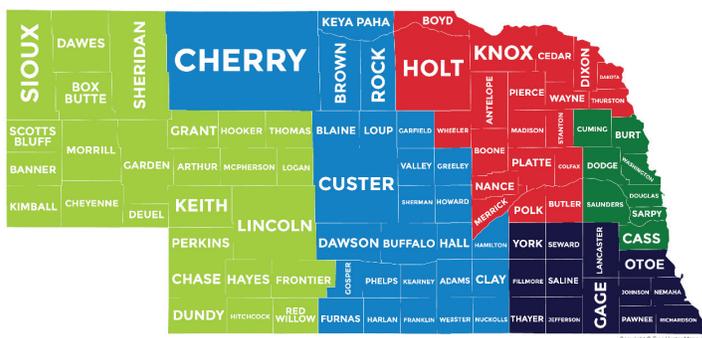
khauptman@unl.edu | Kelli Hauptman | nebraskababies.com

The Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children (NRPVYC) at the UNL- Center on Children, Families and the Law focuses on improving outcomes for maltreated and at-risk young children in Nebraska through its three primary areas of Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH), Reflective Practice, and Court Infusion.

NRPVYC manages two evidence-based ECMH training programs – Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (IoWA-PCIT) – and has trained 163 clinicians in CPP and 28 clinicians in IoWA-PCIT. Watch NRPVYC’s video about ECMH services in Nebraska or participate in its free on-demand classroom to learn more about ECMH. NRPVYC also provides ECMH outreach and training to other professionals working with young children, and has trained over 600 professionals in 2021 on ECMH issues. NRPVYC also supports ECMH clinicians in Nebraska through a Community of Practice with booster trainings, reflective consultation, Community Cafés, listservs and other activities.

NRPVYC’s Nebraska Center on Reflective Practice (NCRP) provides reflective practice training, consultation and outreach to child welfare, early childhood and other professionals to help them better manage daily stressors and improve interactions with others. The NCRP partners with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Department of Education, UNL-Extension and UNMC-Munroe Meyer Institute to help support early childhood professionals who experience high levels of vicarious trauma, stress and burnout. In 2021, the NCRP supported 309 professionals participating in the 8-month training program, which utilizes the Erikson Institute FAN model of reflective practice. Over 250 professionals have completed FAN training, and receive ongoing support by the NCRP through its Community of Practice. Over 200 professionals participate in ongoing reflective consultation being led by one of over 20 NCRP facilitators.

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November 2021

Appendix II(a): Child Care Licensing*

SFY 2019	Number of Programs	License Capacity	Routine Inspections	Licensed Complaints	Unlicensed Complaints	Applications Received	Licenses Issued	Licenses Revoked
Family Child Care Home I	1,349	13,314	1,685	65				
Family Child Care Home II	600	7,059	781	51				
Child Care Center	734	64,934	1,962	343				
School Age Only Center	287	34,961	683	7				
Preschool	143	3,767	210	0				
TOTAL	3,113	124,035	5,321	466	65	DNA	501	10

SFY 2020	Number of Programs	License Capacity	Routine Inspections	Licensed Complaints	Unlicensed Complaints	Applications Received	Licenses Issued	Licenses Revoked
Family Child Care Home I	1,275	12,728	1,246	68				
Family Child Care Home II	576	6,765	525	30				
Child Care Center	719	64,842	1,834	263				
School Age Only Center	304	37,517	677	0				
Preschool	131	3,533	168	1				
TOTAL	3,005	125,385	4,450	362	48	DNA	369	22

SFY 2021	Number of Programs	License Capacity	Routine Inspections	Licensed Complaints	Unlicensed Complaints	Applications Received	Licenses Issued	Licenses Revoked
Family Child Care Home I	1,230	12,151	1,344	75				
Family Child Care Home II	573	6,719	666	36				
Child Care Center	725	65,402	1,550	305				
School Age Only Center	303	37,393	592	7				
Preschool	128	3,454	137	0				
TOTAL	2,959	125,119	4,289	423	55	DNA	445	7

Appendix II(b): Child Care Development Fund

Using Federal Dollars to Promote Quality Services

The Federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) was reauthorized by Congress in 2014. The reauthorization of the grant has resulted in some changes to state regulations. This has provided an opportunity to revise programs and services in Nebraska's Child Care Development Fund State Plan.

These regulations promote higher quality in licensed early childhood education and care programs through specific training requirements, greater collaboration at the community and state level and increased parent support.

Child Care Subsidy Updates

Regulation changes for, NAC Title 392 – Child Care Subsidy, was passed in September 2020. Regulation changes align with the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) reauthorization. These changes also strengthen the continuity of care children receive from providers by reducing disruptions to subsidy authorizations during the 12-month eligibility period. With these changes, child care subsidy providers are now able to bill up to 5 absent days per month per child.

LB 485 was signed by Governor Pete Ricketts on May 24, 2021. LB 485 will be a pilot program from August 28, 2021 through September 30, 2023 that will increase the initial child care subsidy Federal Poverty Level (FPL) from 130% to 185% and increase the redetermination FPL from 185% to 200%. Once a family is approved for initial child care subsidy, they will be eligible at each subsequent 12-18 month redetermination as long as they do not surpass 200% FPL. DHHS is collaborating with First Five Nebraska for an independent evaluation of the income eligibility changes made in this bill. This evaluation will be completed by December 15, 2023.

CCDF COVID Relief Funds

Nicole Vint, CCDF Administrator | Nicole.vint@nebraska.gov | nebraskababies.com

CARES

DHHS collaborated with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation to award over \$17M dollars for child care programs and school-age programs state wide as stabilization grants and incentive to reopen grants. CARES funds were also used to support the Nebraska Child Care Resource and Referral Network and innovative school-age initiatives.

CRRSA and ARPA

A spend plan to use CRRSA and ARPA funds was approved by the Governor. Funds will be used to increase statewide child care capacity, support child care businesses and workforce, and offer resources for families and children through an array of initiatives. Work has started with partners and various agencies.

Child Care Stabilization Grants

DHHS received approximately \$140 million from the American Rescue Act Plan (ARPA) for Stabilization Grants for child care providers. The Nebraska Child Care Stabilization Grant was first launched October 25, 2021 and ran through November 24, 2021.

1,996 child care providers were awarded a total of \$90,879,500 from the ARPA Stabilization grant opportunity. These funds were dispersed in two payments sent to providers in December 2021 and March 2022.

The application will open up again for providers who did not previously apply. Interactive grant map at: <https://coronavirus.nebraska.gov/childcare>

Acknowledgements:

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Jennifer Auman, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Lindsay Braddock, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Lynne Brehm, Nebraska Children & Families Foundation
Lauri Cimino, Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood
Beckie Cromer, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Adam Feser, First Five Nebraska
Melissa Greedy, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Cole Johnson, Nebraska Department of Education
Stephanni Renn, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
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