

Elevating Nebraska's early childhood workforce^[1]

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Excerpted from the executive summary

The science of early childhood development makes clear that the early years, from birth through age 8, are a time of unparalleled human growth and development— and that healthy development during these pivotal early years requires reliable, positive, and consistent interactions between the developing child and familiar, caring adults. Because of today's economy, in which most parents of young children work outside the home, families often rely on early childhood professionals to provide positive interactions and experiences that young children need to thrive. Yet, despite what we know about the critical role of early childhood professionals in young children's development, the early childhood workforce in our nation and in our state is undervalued and underpaid—which makes it difficult to retain the highly qualified professionals currently in the workforce as well as recruit those needed to meet the growing demand for early care and education. In Nebraska, 75 percent of children under the age of 6 live in homes where all adults in their family work outside the home. Increasing the number of highly qualified early childhood professionals is essential if we are to meet the growing demand across the state for learning environments where children can thrive and begin to meet their potential—and where Nebraska's working parents can feel confident placing their children while they work and support their families. Viewed through the prism of the state's alarming shortage of 58,000 workers, the need for high-quality early care and education takes on additional urgency. If we are to meet Nebraska's workforce needs now and in the future, we must ensure all children and families in the state have equitable access to affordable, high-quality early care and education.

In 2017, the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission came together to address how best to strengthen and expand Nebraska's early childhood workforce. The commission was a collaborative group of more than 40 public- and private-sector leaders representing systems that influence the overall quality and delivery of early care and education—including those involved in professional preparation and learning, early care and education delivery, and policymaking, as well as local business, philanthropic, and community leaders. The commission worked for the past three years in collaboration with others from across the state to identify the strengths and challenges of Nebraska's early childhood workforce and examine the potential of early care and education in the state.

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