**Definition of Quality Early Care and Education**

The following definition was presented to participants of SPEAQ Up! Nebraska meetings in support of Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan review process. The definition is based on early childhood development research and evidence-based practices that have been demonstrated to improve outcomes for young children. The definition was shared in eight SPEAQ Up! Nebraska meetings with parents and early childhood providers.

Quality in early care and education is defined in terms of each child’s experience.

A child experiences quality early care and education as physical and emotional safety in the context of frequent, warm, one-on-one interactions with a caring adult who engages the child in language-rich and educational activities.

To increase the likelihood that a child experiences quality, early care and education settings are structured to promote the well-being of early childhood professionals and to foster the child’s healthy development and learning. The delivery of quality care and education across settings is facilitated by policies and continuous quality improvement practices that prioritize the child’s experiences.

Adults in all settings promote quality experiences through:

* Sensitive and responsive interactions with each child
* Developmentally appropriate instruction that engages the whole child (physical, emotional, cognitive, social) and is individualized to each child’s unique skills and needs
* Engagement with families in the care and education of their children and in learning about their child’s development
* Inclusion of the families’ and children’s culture and language

Early childhood settings promote quality experiences through:

* Caregivers and teachers who have the qualifications and training they need to build positive relationships with the children and families they serve
* A professional environment that promotes the physical and mental well-being of caregivers and teachers by providing appropriate compensation and professional supports
* Learning resources and structures—such as classroom materials, routines, and teacher-student ratios—that are designed to meet the developmental needs of the children being served
* Facilities and equipment that are clean, safe, and designed to foster children’s healthy development and learning

Local, state, and federal agencies and organizations promote quality experiences through:

* Economic, social, regulatory, and funding policies designed to enable early care and education providers to cover the costs of quality programs delivered by qualified professionals
* Continuous quality improvement practices that include observations of the child’s experiences of quality in addition to observations of the structure and facilities of the care setting