

NEBRASKA
PRESCHOOL
DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Renewal Year Three



Bi-Monthly Newsletter - April 2023

Endings and Beginnings

Good news, the 3-year Preschool Development Renewal Grant comes to an end in April! Good news because we have had 3 great years of developing quality, access, collaboration, and infrastructure initiatives for early childhood care and education in Nebraska. The better news, our work continues through additional grant funding. Nebraska has been awarded a \$4 million Preschool Development Birth through Five (PDG B-5) one-year planning grant from the Administration for Children and Families (see announcement below). Therefore, as we bring a grant cycle to a close, we see the beginnings of further work toward building quality early childhood services in the state. New Project Manager Jackie Farrell, who will work with co-lead Wende Baker, will take over from Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal. We wish Shannon luck in her new role at Sixpence and thank her for her work on PDG.

In honor of the hard work done over the last four years (including the initial planning grant), this issue of the PDG eNews will focus not only on initiative progress, but also on the personal impact PDG work has had on those in Nebraska communities. We celebrate all the people and organizations that have worked with the Preschool Development Grant over the last four years and congratulate you on the inroads you've made. We also wish the best of luck to those moving forward with the new grant cycle.

Nebraska Awarded \$4 Million Preschool Development Grant

On December 19, 2022, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) was one of 21 states/territories to receive an award notification of a \$4 million Preschool Development Birth through Five (PDG B-5) one-year planning grant from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The grant awarded funds to support early childhood services for children from birth to age five in the areas of needs assessment, strategic planning, family engagement, quality improvement, workforce compensation and supports, and services for young children.

The newly awarded planning grant will build on the important work the state has initiated through its PDG B-5 Initial and Renewal Grants over the past four years and will continue its focus on the state's most vulnerable populations, which in Nebraska includes children in many rural communities. The state is working hard to expand access to high-quality services families want and need.

Nebraska's implementation of the PDG B-5 has included a strong commitment to stakeholder engagement, one that will continue in the newly awarded planning grant. The state has the capacity and leadership needed to be successful with each PDG B-5 activity and is committed to detailed timelines and milestones aimed at strengthening the multi-delivery system, developing high-quality childcare programs, and increasing access while continuing to assess the needs of children and families across the state.

DHHS, in cooperation with statewide childcare partners, will work diligently in the delivery of PDG B-5 programming and services to take childcare to the next level for all Nebraska children and families.

If you have questions, please contact [Jeff Powell](#).

Learn More PDG Planning Grant

Grant Cycle Ends but New Work on the Way

Systems development work is never done. As the end of the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant Year 3 approaches in April, it's time to reflect on all that has been achieved and to envision a path for all the work that lies ahead. To prepare for the submission of the Annual Program Performance Report which recaps the activities of Year 3, the Nebraska Leadership Team has engaged in breakout sessions to explore key outcomes and achievements over the past year. Some highlights from these sessions include:

- Heightened awareness of Equity and the need for inclusion of diverse perspectives at all levels of the Early Childhood system;
- Recognition of the central role of families in the system development process. Family Voice has been elevated across projects and there are changing attitudes and beliefs;
- A first ever Family Leadership Conference was held;
- Local infrastructure continues to be built and resources leveraged to build early childhood capacity and create an economic multiplier effect in communities across the state;
- Expanded implementation of evidence-based practices such as Reflective Practice and Circle of Security trainings;
- Landmark development of a collaborative data sharing system to help drive investment and policy decision making;
- Enhanced capacity for evaluation and metrics reporting to demonstrate progress and outcomes at all levels.

The December 19, 2022, announcement by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services of a second one-year Planning Grant has refueled our efforts and provided opportunities to address Year 3 insights. Some of the key activities supported with the funding include:

- Taking the previous Strategic Planning work to the next level with development of an "Action Agenda" for implementation in future years;
- Continued investments in building local infrastructure and incorporation of services tailored to local needs;
- Exploration of Family Voice and leadership opportunities building on community infrastructures;
- Continued delivery of provider business supports to facilitate stability and growth in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector;

- Strategic development of workforce training to build capacity;
- First use and practice of the ECIDS data system and refinement of its operational use;

(Contributed by Wende Baker, PDG Project Co-lead)

For more information about the PDG Planning Grant activities contact [Jackie Farrell](#).

PDG Reaching Families

Jodi Benson and Elise Gurrola Are Getting Ready to Connect with Families



Jodi Benson, the principal of Bear Cub Preschool in Scottsbluff, asked a question of her staff at a recent teacher development day: “What is the one thing you want to make sure we focus on and talk about today?” The answer she got was surprising. The development day was part of a post-covid effort to bring parents back into environment of the school. The isolation of covid had kept parents out of the mix and the development session aimed to find ways to change that.

Conversations included talk of engaging with families at pick up and drop off, of sending emails. And then Jodi posed her question. The surprise was her staff’s desire to focus on parent-teacher conferences, which are usually seen as exhausting nights of dispensing information. But the energy on this day was different and one response stood out. Elise Gurrola, a head teacher at Bear Cub, said she had been energized by conferences rather than feeling drained. So what had

changed?



Benson has spent 32 years working in the school district, 18 of which have been as an administrator, and oversees all early childhood programs, including 8 preschool classrooms, a Head Start partnership, and a Sixpence Home Visit program. She had attended a Getting Ready webinar, a program housed at UNL in the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools. She liked the research-based, systematic approach and brought the Getting Ready video to her staff, asking for volunteers to start the training.

Bear Cub Preschool is a Scottsbluff public school program housed at Roosevelt Elementary School with another location

between the middle school and high school. In the five years that Benson has been principal, she has seen the preschool double in size. Last year, the school added 2 new classrooms thanks to a Nebraska Department of Education expansion grant, and current enrollment is 170 students, 46 of whom are Head Start students. But for all its growth the school had been impacted by covid. “Their had not been a lot of contact with families during covid lockdown,” Benson said. So it was clear to her when she joined a PreK-3 Leadership Cadre that the Capstone project she would undertake would be focused on improving family engagement.

[Read the full article.](#)

Marti Spitz Takes Five Steps Towards Quality



Marti Spitz knows what it means to need quality childcare. She was working as a nurse 22 years ago when she had her youngest child and could not find any childcare for him. Instead, she decided to be a stay-at-home mom, but quickly found that she “had too much time on her hands” and needed more challenge. A friend, who was also a nurse, had a 3-year-old son that experienced grand mal seizures and felt it was important for her child to be around other children. She contacted Marti, who said “bring him to me.” After only two weeks another parent contacted her and then another. She decided to license her home as a childcare facility and within 2 months had a waiting list. Demand was high so she and her husband discussed expansion and purchased a building where they opened Beginnings Early Development Center. A year later the center had a waiting list.

This is so often the case in areas where childcare is lacking, particularly when quality care is not always available. Marti said that she had “always focused on quality, had tried really hard to provide it.” The problem comes in how to convey to potential families that “quality” actually means a quality experience. That was when Marti learned about Nebraska’s Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) program.

Beginnings had partnered with Head Start’s Infant and Toddler initiative and their coach knew of the Center’s focus on providing quality care and education for their children. She encouraged Marti to participate in SUTQ. SUTQ is a five-step system that provides coaching, training, and professional



Marti Spitz.

development to in-home and center-based early childhood professionals who are focused on providing quality care and education. The program also offers other incentives depending on the step achieved, including the potential for an increase in subsidy reimbursements and bonuses

that can be used for materials or development.

[Read the full article.](#)

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Launches a Survey to Hear from Parents, Caregivers, and Young People Ages 13-24

ACF is committed to improving the behavioral health (mental health and substance use) of children, youth, individuals, and families. The goal of this survey is to hear from parents, caregivers, and young people to inform the development of several behavioral health-related activities and resources for young adults and families.

We look forward to continuing to develop resources with and for young people, parents, and caregivers, and we want to ensure we capture a diverse set of perspectives. Organizations and initiatives are encouraged to let parents, caregivers, and young adults know about this great feedback opportunity. The survey is available in both English and Spanish.

For questions concerning the survey, please contact [Lauren Behsudi](#).

[Go to the Survey](#)

First Steps Parent and Provider Quarterly

The Winter issue of *First Steps* is now available. *First Steps* provides information important to parents and early childhood professionals and links them to resources from Preschool Development Grant initiatives, early childhood partners around the state, and to vital national sources. To see the Winter issue or to sign up for *First Steps* click the button below.

[Learn More about First Steps](#)

PDG Brief Reports

Nebraska Child Care Referral Network

The Nebraska Child Care Referral Network continues to experience great success in finding an audience of parents and caregivers who are looking for childcare that will meet their needs. In recent months more than 3,000 Nebraska users were accessing the site each month to look for childcare or better understand the childcare landscape in Nebraska. Users are split about evenly between urban and rural areas of the state, with 57% of users in February accessing the site from

Lincoln and Omaha, while 43% were outside of those population centers. [**Visit today!**](#)

For more information on the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network, please contact [**Nikki Roseberry**](#).



Performance Evaluation

To assess the degree to which the funded projects are aligned with and advancing the goals of the state strategic plan (Goal 1) the PE Team:

- Convened and facilitated two progress walks with stakeholders, with a lens on using data to inform our progress;
- Interviewed key informants in Nebraska's ECE system, with a lens on how investments in the system are realizing progress toward the strategic plan goals; and
- Continued to gather data from projects on strategic plan alignment, as well as evaluation capacity and logic model utilization.

To build state and community capacity to evaluate efforts using an equitable systems lens (Goal 2) the PE Team:

- Hosted Photovoice trainings to help projects elevate community and stakeholder voice;
- Built modules for an equitable evaluation resource repository (April launch);
- Piloted equity action agendas with Little Priest Tribal College in Winnebago;
- Convened an Evaluation Network Team Advisory Council to advise equitable evaluation resources and processes.

For more information on Performance Evaluation, please contact [**Kathleen Gallagher**](#).



Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)

The development of Nebraska's Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) continues to progress. The underlying cloud-based infrastructure and architecture has been built and configured, which forms the foundation of ECIDS to integrate data from various sources and provides the data needed for the dashboards, visualizations, and reports.

We are excited for the limited release of ECIDS 1.0, a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) that will be available for key stakeholders to test, review, and provide feedback on. Over the next few weeks, several User Acceptance Testing (UAT) working sessions will be held to ensure the dashboard is functioning correctly and addressing the intended use cases.

For more on ECIDS Nebraska, please contact out [**Ben Baumfalk**](#) or [**Jared Stevens**](#).

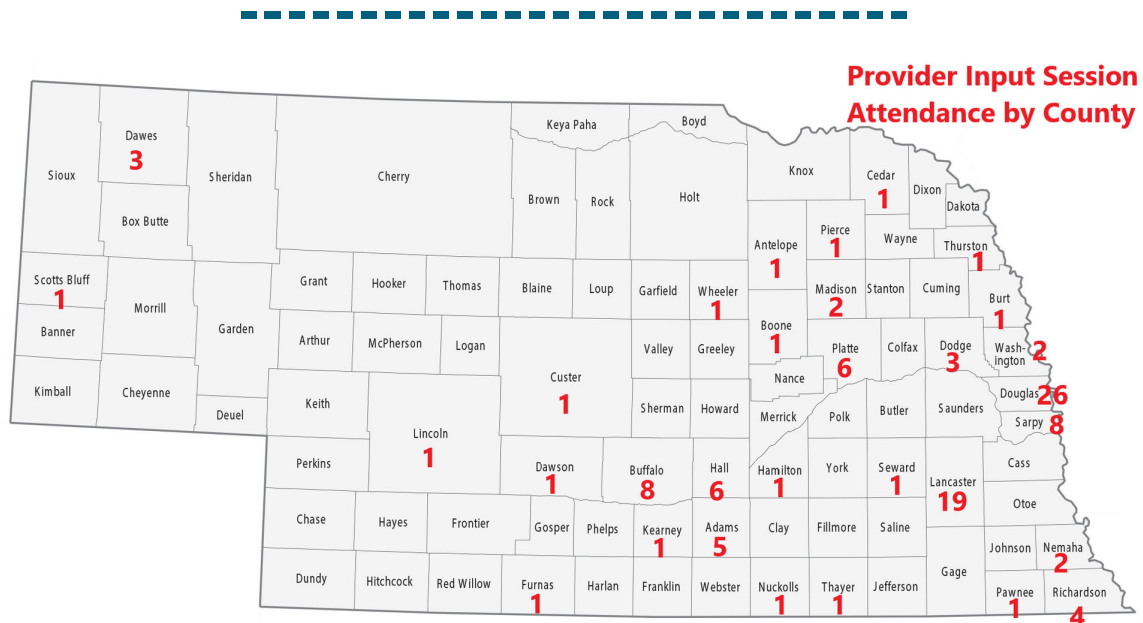


Step Up to Quality (SUTQ)

Step Up to Quality 2.0 successfully launched March 1, 2023. Participation and engagement in Nebraska's Quality Rating and Improvement system continues to grow, with 728 rated programs across the state and more children benefitting from high quality environments and positive interactions with their teachers and caregivers! Here are some of the changes that have been made in the system to accommodate the improvements:

- Adjusted the order of the Standard areas
- Earlier Coaching available
- Reduced training hours for Step 2
- Added the Special Care Training
- Separate Rating Requests by program type
- A Step-3-only option for programs wishing to request a rating with no on-sight observation using CLASS or ERS
- Added more indicators for more flexibility
- Programs select only one observation tool ERS or CLAS
- Less complex scoring system for ERS/CLASS observations
- An easily [searchable website](#) for parents searching for quality programs
- Podcast (launched in the fall of 2022) to celebrate providers
- Subsidy increases at Step 3

To learn more about Step Up to Quality, please contact [Lauri Cimino](#).



Shared Leadership and Financing

One of the projects stemming from the Shared Leadership and Financing Task Force and Workgroups is the development of Nebraska's childcare cost model to estimate the true cost of providing childcare that meets licensing standards and higher standards such as Step Up to Quality.

To inform this cost model, our partners at Prenatal-to-Five Fiscal Strategies held 12 childcare provider input sessions virtually in February and March 2023: 8 in English and 4 in Spanish. 113 providers from 31 counties participated, of which 54% represented family childcare homes and 42% represented centers.

A Cost Modeling Advisory Workgroup is being formed to advise on the development of the cost model. This workgroup will meet twice in April to review the key costs related to meeting licensing standards and Step Up to Quality requirements, share insight into the reality of providing childcare in Nebraska, and provide expertise related to assumptions in the cost model. The workgroup will meet again later in the Spring to review preliminary outputs and finalize the cost model.

To learn more about Shared Leadership and Financing, please contact [Amy Bornemeier](#).

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PDG Partners

Nebraska's PDG work is led by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) under the authority of Governor Jim Pillen, in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the University of Nebraska system, and many other partners.

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For questions or comments regarding the Preschool Development Grant, please contact:

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For more information or to subscribe to the enewsletter, visit **Preschool Development Grant**.

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