

NEBRASKA PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT



Bi-Monthly Newsletter - February 2021

Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan Goal 3: Collaboration—Communities coordinate a locally designed mixed-delivery system that provides continuous care and meets the needs of families.

This month's newsletter continues to focus on Nebraska's Early Childhood Strategic Plan by examining Goal 3 and the organizations who align well with it.

Goal 3 focuses on supporting local community leaders, early childhood providers, and school personnel to build relationships and their capacity to coordinate local resources for families and their children.

The strategic plan calls for developing a statewide infrastructure to help support coalition building within and across Nebraska's communities. Utilizing Nebraska's existing models of collaboration and coordination, organizations in the statewide early childhood system will work together to define how each can best support greater capacity in local systems and provide resources for communities to design and implement their own early childhood coordination plans. As each community, or group of communities in a region, creates more coordinated and integrated early childhood care and education systems, they will do so by building on the strengths and resources that are locally available to meet families' needs. When community leaders identify gaps in their local system, they may turn to other communities or to state-level organizations to seek information or resources to begin to fill those gaps. Ultimately, the more coordination and alignment at the state and community levels, the easier it will be for families to access the services they need for their child's healthy development.

Preschool Development Grant Renewal Application--Year 2

The team at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is working with the PDG Project Management Team on finalizing the Continuation Application for Year 2 of the three-year Preschool Development Grant (PDG). This was made possible thanks to the ongoing successful efforts funded by the PDG Renewal Grant. This application is an opportunity to showcase the accomplishments of the 24 PDG projects over the past year and highlight the upcoming activities for Year 2.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the projects in PDG were slightly delayed in their hiring processes as well as in implementation. However, the expertise of the PDG project leads and the ongoing collaboration with the Nebraska Leadership Team, partners, and stakeholders allowed for steadfast movement forward.

Many of the PDG projects leaders responded and creatively adapted to meet the needs of the children, families, and providers they served through virtual assessments, trainings, and guidance. DHHS is looking forward to continued advancements in meeting the goals of the

Preschool Development Grant. Please continue to follow the PDG Newsletter for updates on progress and achievements.

Strategic Plan Update

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is designed to create a more integrated system of early childhood services for children and their families so that families can access quality early care and education as well as other essential services to help their young children thrive. Success in building an integrated early care and education system that provides quality care to each child depends on coordination of community-level and statewide resources, requiring strong relationships and effective communication among stakeholders representing all sectors of the system.

One of the values that guides the strategic planning process is “Community Leadership and Collaboration.” Each community across Nebraska has a unique set of characteristics, strengths, and challenges. Community members and leaders are the experts in what is happening in and what will work for their people.

As stakeholder engagement continues in 2021, the team looks forward to talking with community leaders, including families and early childhood educators, to identify strategies and action plans that support the needs of children and families. Through these conversations, Nebraska communities will ensure that their priorities for improving access to quality early childhood services are reflected in the strategic plan.

In the end, creating an effective early childhood system is a shared responsibility. Everyone (parents, early childhood professionals, schools, businesses, community leaders, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and elected officials) has a vested interest in supporting the healthy development and learning of each child. Working together, a comprehensive strategic plan will be created that represents the diverse voices in communities across the state and provides Nebraska with shared goals and priorities for action.

[See the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan and other supporting materials.](#)

For questions about the Strategic Plan contact [Susan Sarver](#).

Needs Assessment Update

The Needs Assessment team is working to capture additional data about the needs and concerns of Nebraska's most underrepresented and underserved families. Currently, the groundwork is being laid to train facilitators to conduct a series of family focus groups. Partners have identified from community organizations to support identifying, recruiting, and facilitating focus groups with vulnerable families across Nebraska. Although delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the team is elated to be working with our community partners on this collaborative approach and coordinated effort to better understand families' perspectives



and improve access to high-quality early education and service for all Nebraska's children, birth to age five.

If you are interested in this opportunity or would like to refer someone else that you believe may be interested, please contact [Kimberly Norman-Collins](#).

The Strategic Plan at Work



Parents in the Process

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska has the privilege of facilitating six PDG activities, including Activity 3e, the “Parent Education Campaign.” Principal investigators are Erin Owen and Renee Wessels, and the campaign has been conceptualized as a broad collaborative effort of the Buffett Institute and ECCE stakeholders across the state.

This activity is one of six projects within Activity 3, which has as its overall charge to maximize parental knowledge to inform choices that support each child's healthy development. One focus of PDG is to ensure families are provided information about the quality and variety of early childhood education programs.

The Parent Education Campaign will draw from and be informed by the PDG Needs Assessment, the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan, and other communications research and findings. The goal for the Campaign is to build support for quality early childhood care and education.

While parents are a principal focus of the Campaign, efforts will also reach those within the early care and education system, including providers and other members of the early childhood workforce, as well as community and opinion leaders, elected officials, and others whose support is essential to supporting and sustaining the investments needed for a quality early care and education system. An evaluation plan will assess the Campaign's progress and effectiveness.

Year 1 milestones to date include assembling planning teams with partners, including Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the Nebraska Early Childhood Communications

Roundtable, and the Buffett Institute PDG Steering Committee; producing a strategy brief; developing an annual work plan; hiring staff; presenting progress updates to stakeholders; launching communications research; undertaking the development of a logic model; and projecting the Year 2 scope of work. A draft Campaign outline will be produced by April 30.

For more information about the Parent Education Campaign, contact [Erin Owen](#) or [Renee Wessels](#).

Communities Align through C4K+

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation's Communities for Kids Plus (C4K+) project began contracts in October 2020 to give 27 communities funding to hire local Early Childhood Community Coordinators (ECCC's), with some communities splitting up their funding to hire multiple people. There are now less than a quarter of the 33 coordinator slots left to fill, showing us that communities have pushed hard to prioritize a dedicated staff person who can coordinate the many elements of making a deep impact on their early childhood landscapes.

The coordinators will also be managing the other pieces of the C4K+ funds will be headed out to communities soon for: Early Learning Scholarships, which will help bridge the gap for vulnerable families who do not qualify for subsidy but cannot afford quality care; and Quality and Capacity Building funding, which will significantly boost local efforts toward quality enhancement and needed capacity increases. Community coordinators will also work to invite leaders across their communities to the table, showing them the importance of early childhood efforts and why they should be involved.

Twice a month, the coordinators are gathering to learn from one another (demonstrating not just local but statewide collaboration), contribute to evaluation efforts, and receive technical assistance as they get started in their roles. C4K+ has also partnered with [Mission Matters](#) to lead half of these coordinator gatherings on learning leadership and collaboration pieces; Mission Matters has brought a great sense of interactivity and excitement even though the pandemic has halted any in-person meetings. The Nebraska Children team has found this to be such an exciting journey and continues to pour all efforts into alignment with the Strategic Plan to make Nebraska the best place in the country to be a child.

For more information about C4K+, contact [Marti Beard](#).

NAESP Brings Schools and Providers Together through Leadership Academy

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Office of Early Childhood has been excited to partner with the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) to bring Nebraska's NAESP Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy to elementary principals, early childhood instructional leaders, and community childcare and Head Start directors across the state through the support of the PDG Renewal Grant.

While the initial plan had been to begin the 2nd cohort of Nebraska's NAESP Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy during the first year of the PDG renewal grant, the pandemic has allowed additional time for advertising and marketing of the upcoming cohort, as well as for revision of the course content for the Leadership Academy. One of the primary revisions to



community and encourage them to participate in the academy together in order to strengthen transitions across settings at the local level.

The NDE, Office of Early Childhood is looking forward to the second cohort and the impact on continuity between early childhood settings that the

the course content is informed by the NAESP publication, "Leading Learning Communities: A Principal's Guide to Early Learning and the Early Grades." This publication will be released later this year. Furthermore, additional work has been done to make the course content more up-to-date and include relevant information to support early childhood leaders, regardless of their title or location.

In the initial cohort, only elementary school principals participated. The upcoming cohort will be expanded to include and prioritize principals, community childcare, and Head Start directors from the same

Leadership Academy will have for its participants.

For more information about the NAESP Leadership Academy, contact [Melody Hobson](#) or [Kristine Luebbe](#).



Transition Committee Strengthens Provider and Public School Collaborations

The statewide Needs Assessment of early childhood care and education recently revealed that two of the most common transition practices in the state include visiting a kindergarten classroom and attending a spring kindergarten orientation. Based on such crucial data drawn from the assessment, the newly formed Transition Committee aims to document sources of important data in order to provide insight into transition experiences for children, families, and educators, one of several aims set forth in this project supported by PDG funds. Furthermore, building community capacity to support continuity across early education contexts, especially as children enter Kindergarten, is a Committee objective aligned with the state Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan.

The Committee begins convening in March and April and will hold quarterly meetings over the next two years. Members are drawn from those with expertise in early education transitional processes. Members embody a cross-section of Nebraska leaders, including elementary educators, providers, Early Childhood Specialists, Early Learning Coordinators, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educators, Head Start, and higher education, and who represent Chadron, Omaha, McCook, Kearney, Norfolk, Wakefield, Lincoln, Sidney, Ogallala, and Concord in forming this truly statewide committee.

The Transitions Committee is a PDG project intended to increase parent and provider understanding of transition processes, strengthen collaboration among ECCE providers and public schools, build knowledge among professionals in ECCE and schools, and align standards and curricula. Our work began by identifying exemplary state and national transition resources for a resource library from which an online repository is being created. Books and materials will be available statewide later this year through the Nebraska Department of Education, [Early Childhood Training Center Media Center](#).

Year two of the grant will focus on development of transition toolkits for Nebraska families, community providers, and schools. Statewide implementation of the toolkits is the primary objective of the third and final year of the grant cycle.

For more information on the Transitions Committee, please contact [Amanda Garrett](#).



Beautiful Moments in Collaboration

You might say it started with a beautiful moment. Steph Renn, Vice President of Early Childhood/Sixpence Administrator at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and Dr. Lisa Knoche, Research Associate Professor and principal investigator of the Getting Ready Preschool Development Grant at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools shared core principles of quality home-visitation practices in a breakout room at October's Nebraska Leadership Team meeting.

The two had known of each other for some time, and Renn recalled, when she had been a home visitor, admiring Knoche's work. She said that she had wished at the time she had gone through Getting Ready's training program. The training Getting Ready offers to home visitors, according to Knoche, is a bidirectional process that recognizes that "the parent is the expert on their child." The program gives parents an active voice in the process of providers and families collaboratively building toward developmental milestones.



Part of Getting Ready's process echoed in Renn's and Sixpence's own philosophies. Home visitors are trained to recognize and reinforce parental competencies by reflecting them back to parents so as to build confidence. Renn tells the story of her early training under Kansas City mental health professional Alice Eberhart-Wright, who called such moments of reflection, "Beautiful Moments." Renn remembered working with a young mother who was engaging in parallel talk with her child, and Renn captured it on her phone. The young woman later said she understood "parallel talk" but didn't know how to do it. The moment when Renn showed her the video of the mother actually engaging in the process was transformative.

Subsequently, Renn says she began to ask as a home visitor and continues to ask in her professional life to this day, "where are the



beautiful moments here" that define a quality home visit, and in the discussion between Knoche and Renn they discovered overlaps in their visions of quality. That's where the collaboration started—with a sense of connection and an attempt to find points of overlap between the two organizations.



[Read full article.](#)

Do You Have Questions?

If you have questions about newsletter content, PDG-related activities, or partner organizations, we want to help you find answers. To receive information regarding your questions, please submit an online query by filling out the form at the bottom of our "PDG Progress" page, and we'll do our best to find you answers.

[Get Answers to Your Questions](#)



PDG Partners

Nebraska's PDG work is led by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) under the authority of Governor Pete Ricketts, 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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