

NEBRASKA
PRESCHOOL
DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Renewal Year Three



Bi-Monthly Newsletter - February 2023

Reaching Families

Our day-to-day work often involves data collection, analytics, surveys. We're busy writing grant proposals, creating focus groups, talking policy, building infrastructure. But when we use terms like "access" and "quality," it's important to remember the families that are the primary focus of the work we do. We, of course, keep the idea of families at the fore, but it is heartening when we see that the work the Preschool Development Grant funds has real-world impact on children and their families.

Our collaborations with parent advisors, our outreach in communities, our initiatives that assist families in finding the quality services they need, these are just some of the reminders that our work is making a real difference in the early childhood landscape. The faces we put to the changes we make remind not just the systems, community, and individual contributors to PDG work, but also the policy makers of the crucial nature of systems change in early childhood.

This issue of the PDG eNews focuses on work being done through the Preschool Development Grant and the impact it has on our most important community--families!

PDG Reaching Families

Following the Cardinal Rule



Denton Beacom, who is the recently appointed principal of Randolph Elementary in Cedar County, voices the situation of so many small towns across Nebraska when he says, “it’s hard to come back to small communities.” A decrease in rural populations, particularly in the 18-34 year-old age group, has become the rule rather than the exception, not just in Nebraska but across the United States. A University of New Hampshire study of Census trends revealed that for the first time in our country’s history, rural populations have shown a net decline over a decade. The 1990s and the 2000s showed rural



Denton Beacom



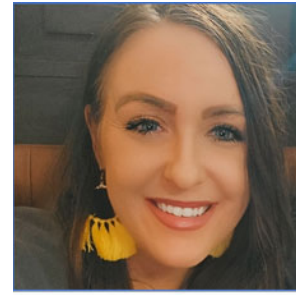
Erika Fink

increases, but the 2010-2020 period showed a net loss of just over 1%. While this may not seem like much, consider that metropolitan and suburban populations actually grew over the same period.

The unfortunate cycle this creates in small towns only worsens matters: fewer job opportunities leave young people seeking better job leads or moving away for higher education; local businesses struggle to find employees in the diminished labor pool and also to recruit exterior candidates because of lacking or underfunded infrastructures; and those who have left don’t return because of better opportunities in larger areas.

One area where this cycle has become evident is in early childhood care and education. Small towns too often lack the funding to sustain quality early childhood care and education programs; to staff them with qualified candidates; to provide the training, livable salaries, and benefits that would attract those candidates. In turn, local businesses struggle with recruiting young families because of the resultant lack of childcare. That was the case for Beacom when he was offered the position in Randolph. He said, “I went through it myself in taking the

principal's position. I needed childcare." For Beacom, the answer was not only easy but one of which he could be an integral part.



Jessica Lueth

The Cardinal Kids Learning Center is, according to Erika Fink who is the Northern Early Learning Coordinator for ESU#1, "the best kept secret of Northeast Nebraska." What makes it unique is its partnership with Randolph Elementary where the Learning Center is housed—yes, the same school where Beacom is principal.

[Read the full article.](#)

Mom Shares How Nebraska Program Helped Her Find Child Care for Her Daughter



Tosha Wright, an Omaha mom who works outside of her home while raising a 16-year-old and a 4-year-old, is familiar with the struggle of finding child care.

She applied for jobs to support her family and pay for child care—her youngest child loves school. But despite all her efforts, her child care search still wasn't panning out. A part-time job didn't pay enough. She ran into roadblocks when seeking state assistance.

"So, it was like I was getting hired, but I couldn't start because I will have to pay out of my pocket for child care fees, and I couldn't afford that," she says.

Wright was referred to the [Coordinated Enrollment Pilot Program](#), which assists Nebraska parents in accessing quality child care and connects them to additional resources. The program launched in 2020, is administered through the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, and funded by the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 (PDG B-5).

Coordinated Enrollment specialists work directly with parents, finding out what type of child care they need and educating them on what quality care and responsive caregiving looks like. Specialists also help families apply for resources like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and food pantry distribution.

The work of the Coordinated Enrollment Pilot Program is an effort to put Nebraska children and parents first when it comes to securing quality early child care. Seventy-six percent of mothers with children under the age of 6 are in the labor force in Nebraska, according to the 2021 American Community Survey.

“Child care is such a burden for so many of our families, and we talk about quality, and we talk about all these things, but at the end of the day, they just have to find a place where their kiddo can go so they can go to work, so that they can put food on the table, a roof over their head,” said Mary Lariviere, the director of Early Head Start at the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative.

(Article provided by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and written by Ashia Aubrey)

[Read the full article.](#)

Mis-sing the Mark: Misapprehensions and Misunderstandings about Infant Mental Health



Sami Bradley, who co-leads the board of the Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health (NAIMH) with Holly Hatton-Bowers, says that most people, when asked about infant mental health, “picture a baby on a couch with a therapist.” “But the field is much broader than that,” she adds. Her definition of infant mental health involves a child’s capacity to learn and grow, the development of their social and emotional skills, and, perhaps most important, the bonds they form with the nurturing adults who will model skills and support them in their development.

According to Zero to Three, a national organization whose mission is to “ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life,” infant mental health involves “the developing capacity of the child from birth to 5 years old to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn—all in the context of family, community, and culture.” The organization emphasizes the importance of the field by pointing out that roughly 10%-15% of children under 5 “experience emotional, relational, or behavioral disturbances,” particularly in families dealing with trauma, where substance abuse or mental illness are involved, or where one or both parents have been lost.

In Nebraska, the field of infant mental health is burgeoning even while demand in the state suggests a growing crisis. Bradley says, “there has been tremendous growth over the last 5 years, lots of building of infrastructure.” But, she points out, burnout is high. There are just not enough practitioners in the field to meet demand and most are focused in Lincoln and Omaha. Bradley, who had a family therapy practice herself in Holdrege, says that some families drove more than 2 hours to see her because care was not available where they lived.

Nebraska needs, according to Bradley, more therapists who have experience with young children, more home visitors with training in the field, and more systems to help those already working in the field cope with stress. She is quick to point out that there are “really good supports trying to help with this (stress)—Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators (CHIME), Circle of Security Classroom (COSC) and Reflective Practice.” But, she explains, these programs don’t have enough facilitators to cover the state’s need and without more funding and workforce capacity they can’t hire more.

[Read the full article.](#)

We Care for Kids

We Care for Kids is a statewide effort to build support for quality early childhood education for all Nebraska families. Quality early childhood education supports Nebraska’s kids and families—and its future. We Care for Kids connects Nebraskans to resources that help families find quality early childhood education in their community, understand how quality early childhood teachers help families prepare children for success in school and life, and know what to look for in a quality program.

Early childhood educators are essential to helping Nebraska thrive, bringing out the best in children, preparing them for school and life. We Care for Kids is listening to and lifting up the stories of early childhood educators so Nebraskans can appreciate this essential workforce.

[Early childhood teachers are invited to share their stories with We Care for Kids.](#)

What goes into helping children and families thrive, what are your challenges as a professional, what do you need to stay in the profession—and what do you want people to know about the



Quality Early Childhood Education
For All Nebraska Families

power of your work?

When we care about bringing quality early childhood education to all Nebraska families, we ensure that Nebraska thrives.

Visit We Care for Kids

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

NAESP Leadership Academy

Nebraska's NAESP (National Association of Elementary School Principals) Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy is currently in its 3rd cohort. Cohort three includes more than 25 leaders from across the state, including Head Start, Public School District and Educational Service Units. Within the year-long academy, leaders have built a better understanding of what it takes to be a Pre-K-3rd grade leader, connecting to the competencies from the publication, *Leading Learning Communities: A Principal's Guide to Early Learning and the Early Grades*, and culminating in a capstone project that demonstrates their learning. Through the initial two cohorts, more than 40 leaders have earned a certificate from NAESP in Pre-K-3rd Grade Leadership.

Learn more.

For more information on NAESP Leadership , please contact **Melody Hobson** or **Kristine Luebbe**.

Communities for Kids

The Communities for Kids Plus project continues to make waves across Nebraska in PDG Year 3. The team has been busy providing technical assistance to communities as they build up their early childhood infrastructure, and part of that is done by helping community leads reframe common pain points.

- “We don’t even know what we are doing” = Our efforts have been inconsistent, making progress feel unrealistic.
- “No one supports us or cares!” = There is a devalued understanding for the importance of early childhood care and education.
- “We do not have money!” = The allocation of resources does not match our stated values.

For more information on Communities for Kids, please contact [**Marti Beard.**](#)



Transitions Committee

The Transition Committee continues to support the continuity of quality care for children making transitions across early care and education systems in Nebraska. Embarking on these efforts, the [**Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide**](#) was created to help support parents and educators in assisting children in the next step in their educational journey to Kindergarten.

Recently, Alyssa Anson and Monica Wells from the Buffett Early Childhood Institute were featured on [**The Good Life EDU podcast**](#) discussing the toolkit and the importance of supporting a child’s transition to kindergarten. Institute staff also collaborated with the University of Kearney at its Early Childhood Conference in October 2022 on the breakout session, “Facilitating Smooth Transitions for Young Children.” Chelsea Bartling, Holly Hickson, Marisa Macy, and Monica Wells presented at the 2022 Nebraska Young Child Institute Conference breakout session, “A Conversation About Transition Planning Across Programs and Settings.”

The transition toolkit pamphlets have been shared with educators and professionals across Nebraska and have also been shared at the Omaha Region Early Childhood Community Meeting as well as an array of Nebraska early childhood conferences.

For more on the Transitions Committee, please contact [**Monica Wells.**](#)



Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health (NAIMH)

The Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health (NAIMH) is happy to announce that over the last year they have endorsed 12 new individuals in Infant Mental Health. Professionals from across the state and a variety of disciplines (childcare, mental health, home visitors, university faculty) have begun to apply and receive endorsement if they meet the required competencies.

Scholarships have been given to over 15 childcare providers to support their membership and application, and they are in varying stages of completing the process. Natalie Hanna, a home-based provider from Kearney stated, regarding her endorsement, "This is such an honor and privilege to be acknowledged for the experience and not just a formal education. Thank you again for this opportunity and valuing the early learning profession!"

To learn more about NAIMH, please contact [**Sami Bradley.**](#)

Black History in Nebraska Schools



Learn More about Nebraska's African-American History

History Nebraska offers a range of readings on African-American culture in the state. Of particular interest is David J. Peavler Trowbridge's article "A Double Mixture": Equality and Economy in the Integration of Nebraska Schools, 1858-1883" which addresses how the integration of Lincoln schools was driven by economic necessity rather than fairness. The article covers the history of segregated schools in Nebraska and how the "financial burden" of operating separate schools led to integration.

[Access the article.](#)

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Get Answers to Your Questions



PDG 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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