



ACTION AGENDA FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and the Nebraska Leadership Team for Preschool Development

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About Center for Early Learning Funding Equity

Center for Early Learning Funding Equity (CELFE) builds capacity for assessing adequacy and equity in early learning funding systems through research and transformative partnerships. We create innovative approaches and funding mechanisms that support the diverse needs of children and families. We bring decades of experience in developing and implementing early learning systems at the state and local levels and are driven by our deep belief in the power of early experiences to shape the trajectory of children's lives.

To learn more about CELFE, please visit celfe.org

Like most states across the country, Nebraska's Early Childhood sector is facing a decisive moment because the COVID-19 relief funds are winding down while the sector continues to struggle for survival. At the same time, Nebraska has embarked upon an ambitious goal to strengthen, integrate, and eliminate inequities in its early childhood system so that all Nebraska children and their families have better access to quality early childhood services. That goal will take several years and durable leadership to achieve. As a result, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), in partnership with the Nebraska Children and Families Fund (NCFE), committed to build upon the previous work done to operationalize a shared vision and long-term goals—represented most clearly in the [Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan](#) (updated in 2023) and Nebraska's Preschool Development Grant: [Needs Assessment Report](#) (2019). This Action Agenda represents the next iteration of the work—digging deeper to establish *actionable* priorities capable of moving the needle for children ages 0-5 across Nebraska.




Established through a twelve-month results-based stakeholder engagement process, over 80 stakeholders curated this Action Agenda to help accelerate Nebraska’s momentum toward a more longer-term vision aimed at greater equity across the state’s early childhood sector, while identifying ownership, timelines, and progress as well as additional resources needed for success. The recommendations in it are bold and will require leadership by elected officials as well as the larger Early Childhood Education (ECE) community, which is diverse, rich with passion, committed to data, brings years of experience and knowledge, and consistently holds children and families at the center. The work will require an ongoing commitment to elevate parent and provider voices, to use data to inform policy, to budget and to decision-making for program administration, and will most assuredly require additional financial investment to realize a high-quality ECE system that all Nebraska children and families can access.

To date, Nebraska has received \$22M in federal funding through the Preschool Development Birth to Five (PDG B-5) grant that has laid the foundation for achieving this ambitious vision. The work leading to and including this Action Agenda is made possible through those grants to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as the state’s lead Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) agency. In partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Nebraska now has the blueprint to better align strategies and coordinate resources across state agencies to elevate the needs of Nebraska’s youngest learners. The Action Agenda and preceding work elevate best practices and lessons learned through existing programs. Potential challenges were also identified, including multiple funding streams administered by multiple agencies. Nebraska’s ECE community is now taking bold action because anything less falls short of meeting the early learning and developmental needs of young children, misses the mark to prepare students for school success, fails the working parents who need and rely on early learning programs so they can work—and ultimately, shortchanges the larger Nebraska economy in the short- and the long-term.

As we look ahead, and with future investments and increased coordination, this Action Agenda elevates the five most strategic priorities that usher in greater equity for Nebraska's early childhood programming and provides a detailed road map for reaching them. These priorities are:

 <p>PRIORITY 1</p>	<p>ACCESS</p> <p>More equitably address service gaps for Nebraska's working families based on parent needs and preferences, while simultaneously meeting the developmental needs of children 0-5 years old by expanding funding sources that pay providers for the full cost of quality care, including the expansion of child care subsidy, other public funds, and public/private endowments.</p>
 <p>PRIORITY 2</p>	<p>WORKFORCE</p> <p>Address the early childhood workforce crisis in early childhood by effective, innovative, and sustainable solutions that align to the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan's definition of quality and Nebraska Early Learning Standards.</p>
 <p>PRIORITY 3</p>	<p>DATA</p> <p>Ensure data-driven decisions at all levels by continuing to build data and analytic capacity across all early childhood stakeholders, including parents and community members.</p>
 <p>PRIORITY 4</p>	<p>COORDINATED GOVERNANCE</p> <p>Strengthen government coordination to operationalize a fully funded and aligned system to ensure access to full-day, year-round, high-quality early care and education for children regardless of the setting and experiences parents choose.</p>
 <p>PRIORITY 5</p>	<p>PARENT VOICE & COMMUNITY COLLABORATION</p> <p>Elevate parent, provider, and community voice through well-resourced community collaboratives to inform both local and system-wide decision making by examining both quantitative and qualitative data.</p>


Instead of having a separate priority related to targeting families and children with the greatest need, all priorities above include a commitment to equity and inclusion. In a special section of this Action Agenda, Commitment to Equity & Inclusion, we call out the ways that each priority above identifies priority populations composed of children and families with the greatest need and the least access to inclusive, quality early childhood programming, especially children with developmental delays or disabilities and English Language Learners.

Those are designated throughout the Action Agenda using the following symbol: 

This Action Agenda goes beyond making high-level recommendations—it details concrete activities that will begin in 2024. It is written as a blueprint for Nebraska’s transformative journey ahead. In fact, it has already been leveraged by Nebraska’s early childhood leaders to inform the use of the \$860,000 in recent Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG) supplemental funding beginning in 2023 with two strategic initiatives related to priorities #3: workforce and #5: community collaboration.

Specifically, the funding will be used to upgrade Nebraska’s workforce registry as a central resource for professionals to build their credentials, a critical data hub for researchers and policymakers to identify pay inequities, and for ECE providers to proactively manage recruitment and retention strategies. Additionally, the funding will also support Nebraska’s community collaboratives through a comprehensive landscape scan of regional intermediaries to identify strengths and gaps of the current systems for supporting parent and family choice, funding sources, services, and care available to children with special needs. Both investments are critical in launching this Action Agenda and setting up Nebraska’s ECE system for more equitable impact.

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In all of these efforts, we must acknowledge the strengths of Nebraska’s existing early childhood workforce and seek to build on those strengths.

Buffett Early Childhood Institute,
Elevating Nebraska’s Early Childhood Workforce, 2020