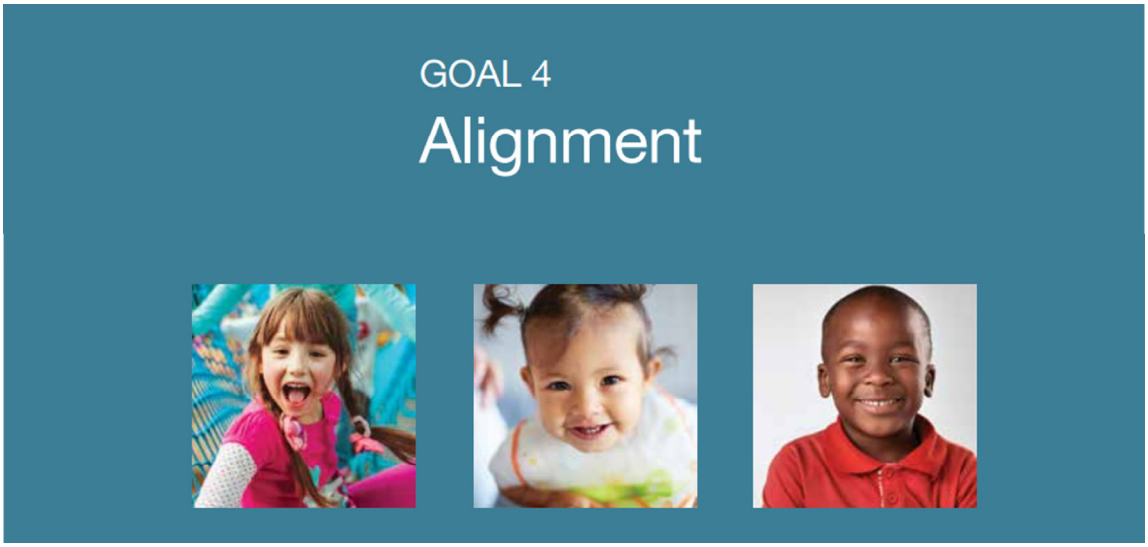



**Bi-Monthly Newsletter - April 2022**

## Nebraska's Strategic Plan Goal 4: Alignment

This month's focus is on alignment in Nebraska's Preschool Development Renewal Grant Birth to Five Years. For the coming year, issues of the newsletter will not only focus on the particular goals of the Strategic Plan, but also the major themes that the Plan addresses. This month's issue spotlights PDG initiatives that focus particularly on alignment.

The initiatives focused on Goal 4 seek "to create more alignment and integration of vision and planning across state-level organizations; promote the importance of early childhood and the value of quality early care and education to the community, state, and economy; expand the state's capacity to support coordination and alignment of early childhood programs and services through integrated data systems that track outcomes and support decision making at the state and community levels; and conduct ongoing needs assessment and strategic planning efforts to expand the knowledge gained and to continue to inform the efforts to transform the early childhood system."




## Strategic Plan Update

**SPEAQ Up! Nebraska** meetings (or Strategic Planning for Equitable Access to Quality early care and education) are underway. Facilitators across the state are bringing together families and early childhood professionals to identify strategies that will build the well-being of families and their young children.

Each **SPEAQ Up! Nebraska** session is being hosted by a member of the local community, who facilitates a community-specific conversation around the following questions.

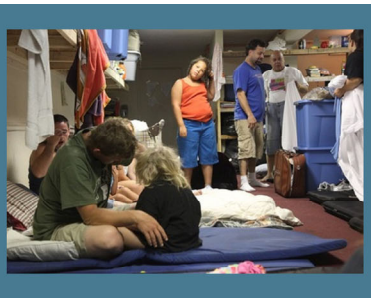
- What keeps families in our community from accessing the early childhood services to build their wellbeing?
- What keeps families from finding quality early care and education in our community?
- What opportunities exist for collaboration at local and regional levels to improve our community's access to quality early childhood services?
- What changes are needed in statewide early childhood systems, policies, and programs to support improved access to quality care in our community?

To ensure that your community's voice is represented in the 2023 Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan, become a **SPEAQ Up!** meeting facilitator. We will provide training for you as host and facilitator, all meeting materials, and a stipend for your efforts.

Contact Sara Vetter to get involved. Visit NEearlychildhoodplan.org to learn more.

For questions about the Strategic Plan, please contact Susan Sarver.





## Needs Assessment Update

Through ongoing Needs Assessment work with providers and families, we are able to elevate their voices to system-level organizations by sharing their stories and highlighting their needs. In collaboration with several community and internal partners, the Needs Assessment team started the year by conducting a third COVID provider survey. Our intended goal for this study was to better understand how the coronavirus pandemic continues to impact the well-being of Nebraska's early care and education providers--physically, emotionally, and financially.

The Needs Assessment team is also pleased to report that we conducted family focus groups with community facilitators working within their own rural and urban communities. The groups were conducted to develop a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of families with children birth to age five. In addition, facilitators met with some families we have not had an opportunity to partner with. This includes Native American families, immigrant and refugee families, those living near the federal poverty level, and families without homes. The team will also be conducting focus groups with providers later this year.

To learn more, please get in touch with Traci Roberts.

# PDG Systems Alignment

## Performance Evaluation

The goals of the PDG B-5 Grant Performance Evaluation are to:

1. Assess the degree to which funded projects align with and advance the strategic plan goals.
2. Increase statewide capacity to evaluate early childhood efforts with a system lens.

To address Goal 1, the Performance Evaluation team gathers monthly data from projects about their progress and alignment with the Strategic Plan. In providing this data for the Grant Project Management team and working closely with other projects like the Needs Assessment and Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), our data systems related to grant projects are advancing such alignment efforts as: identifying facilitators and barriers across projects to foster discussions around how to achieve shared success; interviewing project and early childhood leaders; and developing an integrated logic model.

To address Goal 2, the Performance Evaluation team and partners at the Munroe-Meyer Institute are collaborating with state program stakeholders, funders, and evaluation stakeholders to increase understanding and capacity related to systems evaluation. Technical assistance for capacity building is provided to projects to develop evaluation plans and logic models. The Evaluation Network Team (ENT) continues to meet, joined by a newly-formed advisory council. Primary findings and efforts of the ENT and the advisory group are focused on developing equitable evaluation recommendations and practices.

An Equity Action Agenda is being refined in Year 2 and aims to include families and diverse stakeholders in the planning of programs and their evaluation. An online resource repository is being developed to support ongoing learning and implementation of equitable evaluations, statewide stakeholders are being trained in methods to elevate family and community voice, and equitable evaluation methods are being piloted in partnership with Little Priest Tribal College in Winnebago, Nebraska.

In the Year 3 of the grant, the performance evaluation team plans to leverage the enhanced capacity to learn about systems to shift Goal 1 from a project-based approach and focus on evaluating system shifts facilitated by the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) work.

To learn more about Performance Evaluation, please contact Kathleen Gallagher.

## ECIDS To Provide Crucial Data to Communities

The Nebraska Early Childhood Integrated Data System, or ECIDS (pronounced “e-kids”) represents a collaboration between state agencies, providers, organizations, and communities to collect, connect, integrate, and report information about the early childhood population and programs across Nebraska. ECIDS is designed to equip communities with the data and information necessary to deliver and coordinate early childhood services by informing decision making at the state, community, and program levels. This alignment of data across the mixed-delivery system allows stakeholders to answer questions that cannot be answered with any one program or data system and to take action from this information to ensure the system is working for the children and families it is intended to serve.




Considerable progress has been made towards a Nebraska ECIDS in the first years of the PDG. Three priority use cases were identified through a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process, including the ability to calculate a distinct, unduplicated count of children receiving

services across programs in the mixed-delivery system. To address these use cases, a detailed project plan was created to guide the development of the technology to securely integrate the data. Initial meetings occurred between leaders at partnering entities to discuss and formalize the governance structure and develop the necessary data sharing agreements. The ECIDS team is also partnering with the Nebraska Head Start State Collaboration Office, the Nebraska Head Start Association, and six local Head Start Grantees on a pilot project to allow Head Start leaders to access and use data for decision making, continuous improvement, and demonstration of program success. These activities set the stage for the successful development and implementation of ECIDS in the coming year. We look forward to continuing to work closely with our partners to ensure ECIDS meets the needs of early childhood stakeholders and supports the goals of the Nebraska Strategic Plan.

To learn more about ECIDS, please contact Ben Baumfalk.



## Shared Leadership and Finance Task Force Draft Concept

Nebraska is committed to studying the management of its mixed delivery system to ensure that its governance structure is effective and that the needs of its stakeholders are met. Accordingly, in 2020 the state launched a task force to study the redesign of Nebraska's early childhood governance structure and relevant financing mechanisms to maximize efficiencies and eliminate barriers to optimal service delivery. The primary goal of the task force is to eliminate categorical barriers to offering full-day, year-round, high-quality affordable early childhood care and education for children 0-5 and their families, regardless of the setting/experiences that parents choose. Private funds have been leveraged to support the Task Force in Years 1 and 2. PDG funding will support proposed work in Year 3.

In Year 2, two work groups, Shared Leadership and Fiscal Strategies, continued the efforts of the Governance and Financing Task Force. The work groups put forward a recommendation to establish a new collaborative structure to lead the system for early childhood care and education. In this new shared leadership structure, state agencies would retain their legal and

fiscal obligations and authority for their respective programs but approach the entire system (not just the programs within their jurisdiction) in a shared manner.

A draft concept for this shared leadership approach was begun and a catalogue of ten funding streams for the early care and education system was compiled. A plan to engage stakeholders and collect feedback on the draft concept was developed and will begin implementation prior to the completion of Year 2 (pending funding). A synthesis document, capturing the work and decision points of the Task Force and both work groups has been drafted and, once vetted, will be submitted. An overview of the governance and financing work was presented to the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council, the advisory group for this PDG effort.

To learn more about Shared Leadership and Finance Task Force, please contact Amy Bornemeier.

## PDG Provider Alignment

## Step Up to Quality Provides Updates Page

Reviewing and revising Nebraska's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is a goal identified within our PDG Grant. The timing to revisit our process made sense as we had launched Step Up to Quality in July of 2014. We had a stakeholder group of over 40 individuals who met monthly (in person) for 8 months during the PDG planning year and year one. These individuals represented, child care operators, owners/directors, family child care providers, Head Start representatives, Public School Preschool program specialists, and higher education, early childhood partners that contract with NDE (including the Buffett Institute, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative).

Additionally, there was representation from our Early Learning Coordinators, Coaches, and Coach Consultants. With the assistance of an impartial facilitator, we collectively reviewed our standards and indicators as well as data from the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Records System. This included observation scores from the CLASS/ERS as well as points achieved from participation in the GO NAP SACC program. Our facilitator kept us on track collecting recommendations for improvements.

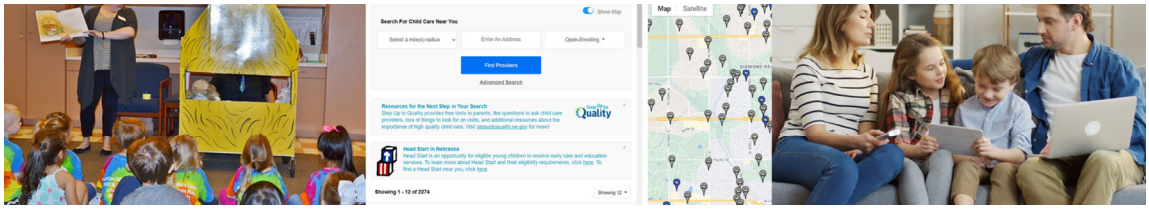


An Updates page was created on the Step Up to Quality website to share the collective work. Webinars were held for anyone interested in learning more about the proposed changes. Nearly 300 folks attended the webinars. Both participating and non-participating folks attended. We followed up with a survey. The results of the survey can be found on the updates page as well. Once we reviewed this additional feedback more detailed planning has been in the works. The proposed changes have also been reviewed and approved by the collective Step Up to Quality steering committee who represent both NDE and NDHHS. Our internal NDE Equity Officer has also reviewed our materials. The information has also been shared with BUILD (the national QRIS organization) to look at the items with equity and anti-bias in mind. Be looking forward to Step Up to Quality 2.0!

To learn more about Step Up to Quality, please contact Lauri Cimino.

## PDG Family Alignment






The Nebraska Child Care Referral Network (CCRN) is a website that provides parents the opportunity to find childcare in their area that meets their unique needs. On the front end, a seamless interface allows parents to see locations mapped and descriptions of the licensed childcare providers in their community.

On the back end, however, systems are more complex. The CCRN relies on data from the Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Department of Education, and childcare providers to create the interface that parents see when they access the site. Collaborations across systems have been vital to the success and ongoing development of the CCRN. It took numerous partners countless hours to get the initial system off the ground, and now a work group of nearly 40 people representing both statewide and community level systems advises on the development and ongoing support of the system.

Data integration with DHHS has been key to giving parents the most up-to-date and accurate information possible about their childcare options at a base level. Providers are encouraged to create an account on the CCRN, which allows them to provide even more information that is relevant to parents looking for care. Additional opportunities to integrate relevant data that will grow the usefulness of the CCRN continue to be developed.

To learn more about the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network, please contact Nikki Roseberry.

## Spotlight on PDG



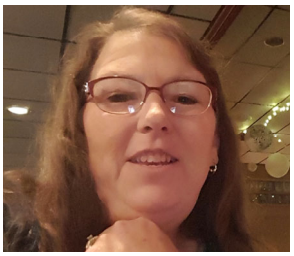

## "No More Band-aids": Community Partnerships Build Better Early Childhood Systems

There may be truth to the old adage, “it takes a village,” when it comes to developing quality early childhood care systems. After all, the National Institute for Children’s Health Quality concluded that the coordinated systems needed to impact families’ health needs “require community-based partnerships that can better respond to real needs and build off existing infrastructure.” There is no cookie cutter approach to improving early childhood care and education in individual communities: local systems know their needs and know the gaps that need to be addressed; funding sources and initiatives that are not supported internally are likely to wither; and outside solutions that don’t speak to the unique needs of the community are often seen as band-aids for systemic issues that need more than temporary patches.

Villages, however, often need additional support to fulfill their visions of quality early childhood systems. The Childtrends.org study, “Building our Future: Supporting Community-Based Early Childhood Initiatives” noted in its examination of three successful community-state endeavors, “Sustainability requires aligning the effort with broader goals of the community, city, county, region, or state. It also requires building a coalition of leaders, partners, businesses, and families to guide the work and communicate its importance.” Partnerships between community members vested in change and larger organizations that have means and established systems are vital then to creating sustainable early childhood systems that speak to local needs.

Communities for Kids Early Childhood Community Coordinators (ECCCs) have become the bridges between state/regional organizations and communities looking to build thriving early childhood systems. Funded in part by the Preschool Development Grant, ECCCs are embedded in the communities in which they work, know issues the area faces, and often have longstanding connections with the infrastructure of leaders, providers, and families. To speak to them is to understand the investment they have in positive change that lasts, change that helps their communities thrive. As Melissa Polinoski, the ECCC of Holt County said of her vision for local work, “No more band-aids! We need a secure, sustainable childcare infrastructure.” The following profiles demonstrate the commitment these local representatives have to the communities in which they work and how partnership between the state and the local can make the difference toward building high-quality childcare systems.

[Read the full article.]



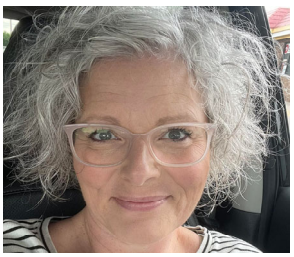
Sonia Coates



Amanda Smith



Kathy Moller



Melissa Polinoski

View the PDG Events Calendar

**The PDG Events Calendar is live. To see what's happening or to submit an event, please visit our Calendar of Events Page.**

## Family Engagement

## Family Engagement Conference

The Family Engagement group continues to work on the "Conference for Family and Parents of Young Children: Collaboration, Learning, Support and Leadership." The conference will be virtual on Saturday, October 22nd, 2022. The conference will be offered in English and Spanish.

Please feel free to share the information with your network. To find updates on the conference or other related topics, please visit the Family Engagement webpage.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Mariana Schell.

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## Do You Have Questions?

If you have questions about newsletter content, PDG-related activities, or partner organizations, fill out the form at the bottom of our "PDG Progress" page, and we'll 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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For questions or comments regarding the Preschool Development Grant, please contact:

Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal, Assistant Vice President Preschool Development

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

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