**TALKING POINTS**

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is a dynamic plan by and for all Nebraskans that seeks to ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood services.

1. **Importance of Quality in Early Childhood Services** — Ensuring access to quality early childhood services for each child in Nebraska is at the heart of the strategic plan. This focus is driven by the understanding of the unparalleled growth and development that occurs between birth and age 8.

* **Statewide need.** Nebraska has more than 235,000 children birth through age 8, and currently, many children and their families experience significant disparities in access and availability of quality early childhood services.
* **Benefits to children.** Science provides overwhelming evidence of the beneficial impact of quality early care and education on children’s development. Quality early care and education is defined in terms of what each child experiences and is characterized by positive and consistent interactions between the developing child and familiar, caring adults—no matter the setting.
* **Economic benefits**. Recent evidence demonstrates the return on the investment in quality early care and education; every dollar spent on quality early care and education yields an average return of $4, and in circumstances where children face multiple challenges in their health, home, and community, the return can be as high as $13.

1. **Dynamic Plan by and for All Nebraskans** — The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative statewide process that builds on Nebraska’s strengths.

* **Needs-based framework.** Development of the plan began in 2019 with a comprehensive needs assessment, followed by conversations with early childhood collaborators across the state. Those conversations led directly to the plan’s goals and objectives that provide a clear framework and targets for the shared work ahead.
* **Ongoing and collaborative process.** In 2022, Nebraskans are engaged to further develop the plan, with a focus on identifying strategies and action plans for accomplishing the goals. Early childhood collaborators are invited to participate in conversations to ensure the plan addresses the priorities and needs of Nebraskans in communities across the state.
* **Equity Focus**. We are committed to hearing the voices of people across the state—including rural areas, people of color, indigenous people, families of children with disabilities, and more—and to including their perspectives and priorities in the 2023 Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan.
* **Results-oriented focus.** Conversations with collaborators will include questions about what success looks like and how changes can be measured, helping to ensure that Nebraska has the capacity to evaluate progress and make data-informed decisions about how to improve early childhood services.
* **Sustainable change.** This integrated and collaborative approach to needs assessment, strategic planning, and performance evaluation will help ensure that Nebraska creates sustainable change at the community and state levels.

1. **Vision** — The overarching vision of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is that all Nebraska children and their families have access to quality early childhood services that support children’s healthy development from birth through age 8.
2. **Four Goals** — The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic plan defines four interrelated goals, each with corresponding objectives. Together, these goals are intended to create a more integrated early childhood system—work on any one of the goals will impact and inform the other goals.

* **Access Goal.** Each child and their family can access the quality early childhood care, education, and other essential services they need to support each child’s healthy development.
* **Quality Goal.** All early care and education settings provide quality experiences for children.
* **Collaboration Goal.** Communities coordinate a locally designed mixed-delivery system that provides continuous care and meets the needs of families.
* **Alignment Goal.** Statewide systems align to support communities in creating an integrated and comprehensive mixed-delivery system for all children.

1. **Focused Conversations** — As the strategic planning process continues, several areas of focus will be central to the development of the plan’s strategies and action steps.

* **Ensuring Equitable Access to Services** — The next stage of strategic planning will include a special focus on listening to community voices to ensure that, no matter where a family lives or what challenges they face, each child in Nebraska can access quality early childhood education and other essential services.
* **Defining Quality in Early Care and Education** — A top priority in the planning process is to achieve a shared understanding across Nebraska of what quality means in early care and education settings and to infuse that definition into every aspect of early childhood systems.
* **Collaborating with Communities** — We will focus on collaborating with community leaders, families, and early childhood educators to identify strategies and action plans that leverage local strengths and resources to support the needs of children and families within specific communities.
* **Aligning Statewide Systems** — Conversations with collaborators will also highlight changes that are needed to ensure that statewide policies and processes align with the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan. By facilitating more coordinated resources and creating a more integrated early childhood system, the strategic plan aims to provide seamless access to the services that support children’s development and well-being.

1. **Learn More and Get Involved** — Informational materials, including an executive summary of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan and an instructional video about the plan, are available on the plan’s website.

SPEAQ Up! Nebraska is a series of community-based conversations designed to capture the perspectives and priorities of diverse communities and collaborators across the state. SPEAQ Up! Nebraska meetings will be hosted by community members who will invite parents and guardians of young children, coworkers, peers, partners, and more to conversations about what achieving the vision looks like, which actions are needed to reach the goals, and how to address the significant disparities that exist across the state.

**Learn more and get involved at NEearlychildhoodplan.org.**

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