

Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PLAN

What are three things to know about the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan?

- The vision of the plan is to provide all Nebraska children and their families with access to quality early childhood services.
- In 2022, the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is being updated through a statewide, collaborative planning process.
- Equity is prioritized in the ongoing plan development and is designed to reach people in more communities across the state—including rural areas, people of color, indigenous people, families of children with disabilities, and more—to ensure their perspectives and priorities are included in the 2023 Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan.

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is called a “dynamic plan by and for all Nebraskans.”

What does that mean?

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan builds on a strong foundation of existing and expanding collaborative relationships and initiatives across Nebraska. Development of the plan began in 2019 with a comprehensive needs assessment. When the findings from the needs assessment were shared with stakeholders across the state, they gave recommendations for action to improve access to quality care. The goals, objectives, and strategies in the plan are based directly on those stakeholders' recommendations.

Strategic Planning for Equitable Access to Quality early childhood and education (or *SPEAQ Up! Nebraska*) is the statewide planning process working to reach all Nebraska communities. Families, early childhood professionals and providers, and other early childhood partners across the state are being asked to **speak up** and tell us what should be done to increase equitable access to quality early care and education in their communities. These recommendations will be used to update the strategic plan and reflect more communities and voices in it.

Who was involved in developing the 2020 Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan?

The 2020 Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative statewide process that builds on Nebraska's strengths. Thousands of Nebraska families, early care and education providers, and other professionals provided information through statewide surveys and interviews. Using that information, hundreds more Nebraskans participated in discussions to develop a strategic plan that provides a framework for how our state can improve early childhood services. While the current plan's goals and objectives provide a strong foundation, we know that many voices were not included in the development of the plan we have today.

Who is invited to participate in the current strategic planning process?

In 2022, all early childhood collaborators are invited to participate in *SPEAQ Up! Nebraska* meetings. These meetings will be hosted by community-based facilitators to identify the strategies and action

plans that will increase access to quality early care and education in their communities. Early childhood collaborators invited to participate in *SPEAQ Up! Nebraska* meetings include:

- Nebraska families, including parents and guardians of children birth to age 8 and other people in the community who are invested in quality early care and education.
- Early care and education professionals and providers, including those from home-, center-, and school-based settings.
- Community partners and leaders, including state and local leaders in government, business, and philanthropic sectors.
- Early childhood system partners and leaders, including the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, First Five Nebraska, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, and a wide range of other organizations and programs.

How have issues of equity been prioritized in the strategic planning process?

Four equity principles for the strategic plan project have been established.

- Ensure diverse representation: We will include diverse voices in each stage of the work to ensure that those diverse perspectives shape how we engage stakeholders and the language used in the plan.
- Implement a data-driven strategic planning process, with diverse populations represented in the data: Gathering recommendations for action from early childhood collaborators based on data and facts about **all** Nebraska children is necessary to ensure that the needs and barriers faced by all families and children are addressed in the strategic plan.
- Eliminate implicit bias: Implicit bias is an unconscious attitude or stereotype that affects how a person thinks, acts, and makes decisions. We are taking steps to identify and remove unconscious bias from the materials used in the strategic planning process. Our intention is to generate more authentic sharing by stakeholders in every community, leading to a more complete set of recommendations for the strategic plan. We believe that more stakeholders will feel more ownership of the work if they are engaged without bias, and if they ultimately see the voices of people like them reflected in the plan.
- Set measurable targets and hold ourselves accountable: To be able to take corrective action during the life of the project to ensure that we reach our goal of including diverse voices, we must track and share indicators about our process. If participation patterns indicate that any of these communities are not being reached, then we will recruit facilitators who can help us include these voices.

GETTING INVOLVED

How do I get involved?

In 2022, *SPEAQ Up! Nebraska* meetings are being hosted in communities across the state. You can get involved by hosting or facilitating a meeting in your community or by attending a local meeting. You may invite members of the strategic planning team to host a meeting at your organization. You may also participate in meetings hosted by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute.

- Please visit NEarlychildhoodplan.org and the events calendar to learn about upcoming meetings, events, and other opportunities to provide input.
- Contact Sara Vetter at svetter@nebraska.edu if you are interested in participating in a *SPEAQ Up! Nebraska* meeting.

- Facilitators will receive a stipend for their training and for leading up to four meetings.
- Participants will receive a gift card after the *SPEAQ Up! Nebraska* meeting.

My community is different than others. How will this plan respect our way of doing things?

- From the beginning of the strategic planning process, stakeholders emphasized the importance of listening to community voices and building on community resources, values, and priorities. The *SPEAQ Up! Nebraska* meetings are community-based meetings that focus on elevating community voices.
- By including many different communities’ perspectives in the development of the 2023 Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan, each community will be reflected in the plan. Once the plan is available, communities are invited to adapt the information and resources in it to support and implement the strategies that will meet local priority needs.

QUALITY

What is meant by “quality” early care and education?

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.

In the *SPEAQ Up! Nebraska* meetings, stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide input on this definition.

How has this definition evolved? How has “quality” been thought about in the past?

Historically, quality early care and education has been defined primarily in terms of safety, curriculum, and clean spaces. The definition of quality has now broadened to focus on what a child experiences.

The science of early childhood development makes clear that quality in early care and education is best defined in terms of each child’s experience—and that early childhood professionals shape the experiences of the children they serve. The impact of these experiences shapes the child’s growing brain and emotional well-being, influencing their lifelong learning, relationships, and success.

As we develop strategies to increase the likelihood that each child will experience quality no matter where they live or what type of setting their family chooses for them, we seek to achieve a shared understanding across Nebraska of what quality means in early care and education settings and to infuse the new child-centered definition into every aspect of our work to transform Nebraska’s early childhood system.

RESULTS

Why do we need this plan?

The science of early childhood development makes clear that providing quality early care and education is essential not only for the healthy development of our children and families but also for the economic vitality of our communities, our state, and our nation. Yet in communities across Nebraska, many families lack access to quality early childhood services. As Nebraskans, we seek to close this gap between what we know is good for our children, families, and communities and what we currently

provide. Ensuring access to quality early childhood services for every child in Nebraska is at the heart of the strategic plan.

What is the plan intended to achieve?

The overarching vision of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is to provide all Nebraska children and their families with access to quality early childhood services that support children’s healthy development from birth through age 8.

The plan defines four interrelated goals, each with corresponding objectives. Ensuring **ACCESS** for children and families to **QUALITY** experiences in every setting requires **COLLABORATION** across every community and **ALIGNMENT** of systems across the state.

These goals are intended to create a more integrated early childhood system—work on any one of the goals will impact and inform the work on the other goals.

What will be different for children and families as a result of the plan?

Together, we are striving to ensure that each child and family in Nebraska will be able to access quality early childhood education and other essential services in their community, no matter where they live or what challenges they face. This means working collaboratively to ensure that every community has enough early care and education options available—in terms of capacity, quality, and types of services—to meet the needs of families living in the community.

In addition, the plan identifies strategies to reduce barriers to accessing quality care, including those related to cost, transportation, or flexibility of hours as well as systemic barriers related to race, ethnicity, gender, language of origin, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic.

What will be different for early childhood providers as a result of the plan?

Together, we seek to transform Nebraska’s early childhood system to ensure that early childhood professionals have access to a supportive professional environment that assists and empowers them to provide quality care and education for children and families—throughout their career and no matter where they work. This involves improving wages, benefits, access to education, and other professional supports that contribute to the physical and mental well-being of individual members of the early childhood workforce.

In addition, we are striving to improve alignment of economic, social, regulatory, and funding policies to streamline business operations and reduce the administrative burden on early childhood providers. The intention of these efforts is to allow them to not only cover the costs of providing quality programs but also run a profitable business.

Does the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan align with recommendations of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission?

Yes. Thanks to the focus on statewide collaboration in both the strategic planning efforts and the work of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan aligns with and complements the recommendations of the commission ([*Elevating Nebraska’s Early Childhood Workforce: Report and Recommendations of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission*](#)).

FUNDING

How will the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan be funded?

Strategic planning efforts have been made possible through grants from the federal and state government and have been augmented by state and local organizations working on behalf of young children and their families. Significant support for strategic planning is provided by the [Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative](#) (PDG).

Funding from multiple sources, including public and private funds, will be required to implement strategies and action plans to meet the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. Nebraska early childhood partners and collaborators at the state level are exploring options for identifying financing strategies to meet these goals and for leading sustainable change at the community and state levels.

LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESS

Who “owns” the plan? Who is in charge of the plan? Is this an official plan of the Nebraska state government?

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is designed to be a plan by and for all Nebraskans—it is an intentionally inclusive and collaborative effort involving early childhood system partners and stakeholders across the state.

The work is currently supported by the [Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative](#) (PDG), which was submitted through the Governor’s Office and awarded to Nebraska by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The PDG Nebraska Leadership Team is led by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services in close partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education. The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation provides essential support and works with an array of organizations to accomplish various objectives. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska is collaborating with these organizations to support assessment, planning, and evaluation efforts. The work is grounded in a commitment to build on existing knowledge and resources across the state, including the many other partners and stakeholders who are actively engaged at the state, regional, and local levels.

The strategic planning process is designed to build capacity so that implementation efforts are sustainable without ongoing federal support. To that end, a task force is working to develop Nebraska-specific shared leadership structures that will support oversight of the strategic plan’s implementation and sustained coordination of Nebraska’s early childhood system.

Facilitation of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is provided by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska as part of a broad collaborative effort of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, First Five Nebraska, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, and a number of other organizations and programs.

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