

You are receiving this email because of your interest in early childcare work in Nebraska.

# NEBRASKA PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT



Quarterly Newsletter - December 2019

## **Nebraska's vision is for families to have strong early childhood options to choose among, supported by strong community leadership, and a well-aligned state system.**

Nebraska's goal in the Preschool Development Grant - aligning state systems to equip local communities to deliver services, resulting in parents and families choosing options that support their child's healthy development - requires that the needs assessment address not only state-level data and infrastructure but also local and regional data.

To accomplish this, grant-funded activities include projects to support:

1. Needs Assessment
2. Statewide Strategic Plan
3. Maximizing Parental Choice and Knowledge
4. Sharing Best Practices to Strengthen the Early Childhood Workforce
5. Improving the Overall Quality of Early Childhood Care and Education

View updates from these projects below:

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**\$30 Million Preschool  
Development Grant**

**Needs Assessment and  
Strategic Plan Update**

# Renewal Application Submitted

by Eva Roberts, Director of Strategic Initiatives (Buffett Early Childhood Fund)

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services has submitted a three-year, \$30 million Preschool Development Grant Renewal proposal designed to improve the quality of early childhood services and expand access to the most vulnerable families while strengthening and streamlining state-level infrastructure.

The proposal builds on the accomplishments of the first year PDG grant, including the comprehensive needs assessment and statewide strategic plan.

[Read the full article here.](#)

[Click here to download the PDG renewal application overview.](#)



by Amy Mart, Buffett Early Childhood Institute

We are pleased to announce that the final PDG Needs Assessment report was completed and submitted to the federal government at the end of November. The team at BECI is deeply grateful to all our partners who participated in surveys and interviews, helped us connect with families and other stakeholders, and provided feedback on the data and report. Nebraska's Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) received an overview of findings from the report on November 15th. **The full Needs Assessment report (and appendices) are [available here](#), and we will disseminate a shorter, synthesized version in early 2020.**

Findings from the Needs Assessment have provided a strong foundation for the strategic planning process, which has progressed quickly in the past few months. A task force designated by the ECICC met on October 10th to establish processes and criteria for making decisions about the strategic plan. Stakeholders in Strategic Planning Advisory Team (SPAT) meetings in Bridgeport, Kearney, and Omaha participated on October 23-25. In these meetings, participants discussed key gaps and opportunities for improvement in Nebraska's early childhood system, and they shared recommendations for strategic actions to achieve desired outcomes. The BECI team reviewed feedback from the SPAT meetings, key findings from the Needs Assessment, and action plans from other statewide efforts to create a draft of proposed goals and strategies that will guide the strategic plan. The ECICC task force met again in a series of sessions November 13-19 to provide feedback on these goals and strategies and the tentative plan for stakeholder engagement.

A preliminary draft of the Strategic Plan is currently being reviewed by the PDG Nebraska Leadership Team and will be shared with the ECICC task force in advance of their next meeting on December 17th. A revised draft will be available for broader review and feedback in January, when we will launch a statewide stakeholder feedback campaign. We are especially interested in getting feedback from parents and families. **If you know of a parent group that might be interested in sharing thoughts about the strategic plan, please contact [Hallie Duke](#) as soon as possible. Also, please watch your inbox for an invitation to the next**

# Family Childcare Providers Report

by Abbie Raikes, Director of Global Early Childhood Development, College of Public Health (UNMC)

Family childcare comprises a notable portion of childcare within Nebraska. As part of Nebraska's Preschool Development Grant needs assessment, focus groups were conducted with family childcare providers throughout the state. Participants were asked to comment on their perceptions of their strengths and challenges as family childcare providers; their access to and participation in training and professional development programs, with emphasis on Step Up to Quality (SUTQ). Results indicated that providers view family childcare as providing a unique context for long-term relationships with children and families. Some family childcare providers reported high levels of stress in meeting the administrative demands and in engaging in ongoing professional development. Several suggestions for improvement to SUTQ were noted, including making coaches available to all providers participating in SUTQ; enhancing efforts to communicate the value of SUTQ to providers and community leaders; and investing in training and other supports for family childcare providers.

[Read the report here.](#)

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## Visualize and Use Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Data

round of SPAT meetings, which will be held in January via Zoom.

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## Step Up to Quality

by Lauri Cimino, Step Up to Quality Director (Nebraska Department of Education)

Improving the Overall Quality of Early Childhood Care and Education is identified as Activity 5 of the Preschool Development Grant. This includes a review of Step Up to Quality, the State's Quality Rating and Improvement System. While the system continues to see increased interest and participation rates, a review is crucial as we continue to grow the program. More than 700 childcare providers in Nebraska have enrolled their programs in Step Up to Quality, but there are hundreds more to reach. As we celebrate Step Up to Quality's five-year anniversary in Nebraska, we're taking a moment to recognize all the momentum our program has built: **over 25,000 children have been served in participating Step Up to Quality programs since 2014.** However, we have ambitious goals for the future of early childhood education in our state. Even for programs that have reached a Step 5, the highest step in our program, there are always enhancements that can be made. The best providers implement new strategies and follow current early childhood education research.

A group of stakeholders were convened initially in August, who represent Family Childcare Providers, Center Directors, higher education, state representatives, public school support staff, partner organizations, Head Start, coaches who support programs and policy experts. Meetings have occurred monthly to review and examine current standards and indicators and make recommendations for improving the process while considering equity for both family childcare and center-based programs. An extensive list of recommendations have been collected and will be the focus of the remaining three meetings. Our continued goal will be to identify priorities, as well as consider which recommended revisions are within our statutory authority and capacity. A completed list of recommended revisions will be presented to the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) for approval by the end of the grant year (February 2020).

by Dean Folkers, Information Systems Officer (Department of Education)

As part of PDG grant efforts in Nebraska, the creation of a tool that lays a foundation for visualizing and using data to inform policy, practice, and program progress has been affectionately known as the Community Assessment Tool or CAT. The name “CAT” may need to change to reflect its scope and intended usefulness, yet for purposes of describing these efforts we will use the original description.

Initially designed by folks in Utah, the “CAT” served as a prototype that brought disparate data sets together for visualization. In Nebraska, the tool will be an interactive resource designed to allow users to easily access and compare comprehensive data in one place. The tool will support early childhood providers, advocates, and state administrators with program planning and support the Birth to Five Preschool Development Grant (PDG), Pritzker Children’s Initiative Prenatal-to-Age-Three Grant (PCI PN-3), Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECCIC), and Early Childhood Data Coalition (ECDC) initiatives.

[Read the full article here.](#)

[Click here to learn more about Step Up to Quality.](#)



## Sharing Best Practices: Alignment and High-Quality Instructional Tools

by Melody Hobson, Administrator, Office of Early Childhood Education (Nebraska Department of Education)

Nebraska’s 2018 PDG grant includes a focus on improving quality by supporting children’s transition into kindergarten. Nebraska’s infrastructure to support transitions includes aligning expectations for children from preschool through Kindergarten. To do this, a close look at Nebraska’s aligned learning standards, from birth through grade 12 - focusing on the preschool/kindergarten years - was undertaken. This work is being completed by Dr. Kristi Feden and will be reviewed by staff at the Nebraska Department of Education. The gap analysis began with the identification of what Nebraska currently expects preschoolers to know and be able to do by the conclusion of their preschool years (as identified in the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework), followed by outlining where Nebraska expects children to be by the end of their Kindergarten year (Nebraska Content Area Standards). Next, a determination of whether the developmental progression appropriately grew in complexity from the current state (end of preschool) to the desired

future state (end of Kindergarten) was completed. Identified gaps represent areas where the standards progression was either not robust enough to sustain an appropriate trajectory to achieve the desired future state at the conclusion of the Kindergarten year, or content areas where the trajectory initiated in preschool was not intentionally and explicitly continued in Kindergarten Content Area Standards. The full report on alignment will be placed on the Nebraska Department of Education's Office of Early Childhood website.

At the same time that Dr. Feden has been working on the standards alignment, the Nebraska Multi-Tiered System of Support (NeMTSS) is creating tools to determine whether the curriculum (instructional program) being used is of high quality. A program comparison document has been created to assist teachers, administrators, and other educational personnel in determining whether instructional materials can be expected to be effective if implemented appropriately. The program comparison chart can be found [at this link](#).

Learn More About PDG

**Please forward this email to others who may be interested in learning more about Nebraska's Preschool Development Grant work.**

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## **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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