

NEBRASKA PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT



PDG Funding and Focus

Building on the success of the Preschool Development Planning Grant last year, which supported a comprehensive needs assessment and allowed for the creation of a statewide strategic plan, the National Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families awarded Nebraska DHHS \$8.9M over three years for the Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five (PDG) Renewal Grant to implement Nebraska's Early Childhood Strategic Plan.

The Preschool Development Grant (PDG) has allowed Nebraska to build on its strengths of strong community leadership, innovations in infant-toddler services, and collaboration through private/public partnerships to take significant strides forward in planning to improve availability and access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) for families of children from birth through

5 years. It is designed to improve the quality of early childhood services and expand access to the most vulnerable families while strengthening and streamlining state-level infrastructure.

Twenty-two projects will address gaps and align resources within the Early Childhood System in six targeted areas including:

- Statewide Needs Assessment Plan
- Statewide Strategic Plan
- Maximizing Parental Choice and Knowledge
- Sharing Best Practices and Professional Development for the Early Childhood Workforce
- Improving Overall Quality and Service Integration, Expanding Access and Developing New Programs, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Data Use for Continuous Improvement
- Meaningful Governance and Stakeholder Engagement.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

Understanding Nebraska's Early Childhood Resources and Needs

In 2019, Nebraska conducted a statewide early childhood needs assessment that engaged stakeholders from communities across the state. In addition to identifying and analyzing existing early childhood data and reports, the needs assessment team gathered state-level, regional, and local data by conducting surveys, focus groups, and interviews with stakeholders across Nebraska. These data collection efforts included the following:

- Statewide Surveys with Families and Early Childhood Care and Education Providers
- Focus Groups with Families
- Interviews and Surveys with Key Informants
- Stakeholder Meetings

These data collection and analysis efforts focused on understanding Nebraska's resources, characteristics, strengths, challenges, and needs related to all aspects of the state's early care and education system. Key findings related to (1) the population of young children and their families and (2) Nebraska's early childhood mixed delivery system are briefly summarized on the next page.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Nebraska's PDG work was guided by the vision of a system where community leaders work together to provide opportunities for quality early childhood care and education, starting at birth, and in coordination with the full suite of health, mental health, and social supports that families may need. The goal of this work is to align state systems to equip local communities to deliver services, resulting in parents and families choosing options that support their children's healthy development and learning.

Using the data gathered in the statewide needs assessment, the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan establishes a shared vision for a more integrated ECCE mixed delivery system in which children continuously experience quality ECCE services from birth through the transition to school.

- This strategic plan provides clear direction for how Nebraska will, through systems alignment and improved collaboration, increase the overall participation of children in quality ECCE services.
- By creating a more integrated mixed delivery system, more families and their young children and their families can access the quality ECCE services and the essential services they need to help their children thrive.

GOAL 1: Each child and their family can access the quality ECCE services and the essential services they need to support each child's healthy development.

The first goal of the strategic plan emphasizes the priority that quality ECCE services be available, that families can enroll their child in the quality care setting of their choice with minimal barriers, and that they can find and access quality ECCE services as well as essential services needed to support their child's healthy development.

GOAL 2: All ECCE settings provide quality experiences for children.

The second goal of this plan focuses on ensuring that the care provided to each child in the state is quality care, consistent with the new definition of quality crafted for Nebraska.

- Quality in ECCE is defined by each child's experience, when that experience is characterized by physical and emotional

safety in the context of frequent one-on-one interactions with a caring adult/s that are warm, language-rich, and educational. The environment in which quality care is experienced consists of a nested set of provisions designed to foster the child's healthy development and learning.

Goal 2 starts with an objective to expand the use of the new definition into as many contexts as possible so that the child's experience of quality is the focus of everyone's work. Other Goal 2 objectives address the promotion of quality care through several provisions: the workforce, family engagement, and the physical spaces in which care is provided. The state's quality rating and improvement system—Step Up to Quality—is also included in this goal as a key tool used to support providers in improving quality and tracking changes in the quality of care across the state.

GOAL 3: Communities coordinate a locally designed mixed delivery system that provides continuous care and meets the needs of families.

Success in building an integrated ECCE system that provides quality care to each child depends on developing a coordinated community-level infrastructure that builds relationships and increases communication across sectors. Goal 3 focuses on supporting local leaders, providers, and schools to build local capacity to coordinate local resources for families and their children.

GOAL 4: Statewide systems align to support communities in creating an integrated and comprehensive mixed delivery system for all children.

The fourth goal is to implement systems changes at the state level for better coordination and alignment across all levels of the ECCE system. Starting with an aligned vision for ECCE that will shape funding and policy decisions, this goal will promote the value and importance of ECCE to all Nebraskans and build the state's capacity to capture and use more integrated data to inform future decision making and improve access to quality ECCE services. Finally, this goal charges the state to continue to learn about the gaps in the system through ongoing needs assessment and to continue stakeholder-driven strategic planning.

For more information on the PDG grant, please visit www.nebraskapdg.org or contact Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal, PDG Project Manager at sboekstal@nebraskachildren.org

For more information on the Needs Assessment or Strategic Plan, please contact Susan Sarver at ssarver@nebraska.edu

PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT RENEWAL GRANT

