

Nebraska Early Childhood Policy Study



*Approved
by the Nebraska State Board of Education
October 7, 2005*

**Nebraska Department of Education
301 Centennial Mall South, Sixth Floor
P.O. Box 94987
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4987
<http://www.nde.state.ne.us/>**

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

District #1

Mr. Robert Eynen
301 South 13th Street
Suite 500
Lincoln, NE 68522

District #2

Mrs. Ann Mactier
3811 North Post Road
Omaha, NE 68112-1209

District #3

Mr. Jim Scheer
P.O. Box 16
Norfolk, NE 68702

District #4

Ms. Carole Woods Harris
5404 Ellison Avenue
Omaha, NE 68104

District #5

Mrs. Patricia Timm
1020 North 21st Street
Beatrice, NE 68310

District #6

Mr. Fred Meyer
1580 Highway 281
St. Paul, NE 68873

District #7

Mrs. Kandy Imes
1850 20th Street
Gering, NE 69341

District #8

Mr. Joe Higgins
5067 South 107th Street
Omaha, NE 68127

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Commissioner of Education

Doug Christensen

Deputy Commissioner of Education

Polly Feis

*For information regarding this document,
contact:*

Marcia Corr
Administrator, Office of Early Childhood
(402) 471-0951
mcorr@nde.state.ne.us

Melody Hobson
Early Childhood Specialist
(402) 471-0263
melodyhobson@nde.state.ne.us

Susan Dahm
Program Associate
(402) 471-4829
sdahm@nde.state.ne.us

Table of Contents

Part I: The Development of the Early Childhood Policy Study	1
Section 1: Introduction	3
Creation of the Policy Study	3
The Early Childhood Policy Leadership Team	4
The Leadership Team’s Vision for Early Childhood in Nebraska	5
The Information-Gathering Process of the Policy Study.....	6
Emerging Themes, Priorities and Recommendations	8
Section 2: Foundation for the Recommended Course of Action	13
Factors Influencing Early Childhood Programs	13
Rationale for Early Childhood Programs and Services	19
Types of Programs and Services for Young Children	24
• Kindergarten	24
<i>In Nebraska: Kindergarten</i>	27
• Prekindergarten	28
<i>In Nebraska: Prekindergarten</i>	32
• Head Start.....	34
<i>In Nebraska: Head Start</i>	35
• Community Early Education and Care Programs	35
<i>In Nebraska: Community Early Education and Care Programs</i> ..	37
• Programs for Children with Disabilities	38
<i>In Nebraska: Programs for Children with Disabilities</i>	39
Section 3: Conclusion	41
Outcome–Priorities–Recommendations–From Study and Stakeholders ..	42
Part II: State Board of Education Policy Partner Forums	45
Section 1: Description of the Policy Partner Forums	47
Structure of the Policy Forums	47
Topics of the Policy Forums	48
The Policy Forum Process	49

Section 2: Discussions of the Policy Partner Forums	51
Full-Day Kindergarten	51
Prekindergarten.....	56
Best Practices for Kindergarten through Grade Three	61
Services for Children Birth through Age Three.....	63
Family Involvement	67
Section 3: Summary	71
References	73
Attachment A–Leadership Team Members.....	77
Attachment B–Forum Questions	79
Attachment C–Glossary of Acronyms	80

PART I:

THE DEVELOPMENT

of the

EARLY CHILDHOOD

POLICY STUDY

Section 1: Introduction

Origin of the Policy Study

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Office of Early Childhood, conducted an early childhood education/kindergarten policy study at the request of the State Board of Education. The study provided an opportunity to listen to the thoughts, ideas and concerns of Nebraskans to help determine the direction of early childhood policy in the state.

The policy study was an outgrowth of the State Board's essential education document, which outlines the following early childhood recommendations to schools:

The early childhood education program provides:

A foundation for learning and development in the areas of language, literacy, mathematical and scientific thinking, social-emotional and physical-motor development, and creative arts.

The school district:

- Provides every day full-day kindergarten for all age-eligible children.
- Communicates with families and with community prekindergarten programs to support young children in transitions across prekindergarten, kindergarten and primary level programs and services.
- Provides information to families about supporting the development and learning of young children from birth through kindergarten.
- Provides programs for young children in natural and least restrictive environments, beginning at the time a child's disability is verified.
- Establishes and maintains parent-school-community partnerships to support equity of access to early learning experiences and high-quality early childhood programs for all children in the community.

***Providing Equitable Opportunities for an
Essential Education for All Students
Nebraska State Board of Education, 2004***

The Early Childhood Policy Study Leadership Team

■ Members of the Leadership Team

The statewide leadership team was comprised of stakeholders who came together to give input and direction for the policy study. The members of the Leadership Team included stakeholders representing prekindergarten, kindergarten and elementary teachers; parents of young children, both typically developing and with disabilities; administrators of Head Start and community early childhood programs; and representatives from institutions of higher education, professional organizations, and state agencies from across Nebraska (Attachment A).

■ Initiating the Policy Study

The Leadership Team met initially on June 11, 2004. Using a variety of resources as the basis for discussion, the Leadership Team determined the desired outcome for the Early Childhood Policy Study based on the needs of Nebraskans for well-educated, productive members of society:

OUTCOME:

Provide high quality, inclusive early childhood services for all Nebraska children from birth through age eight.

■ Developing a Vision

With further discussion about the desired outcome, the Leadership Team developed a vision for early childhood care and education in Nebraska and defined characteristics for early childhood programs and services to guide the information-gathering phase of the policy study:

***LEADERSHIP TEAM'S VISION for
EARLY CHILDHOOD in NEBRASKA:***

For the good of all children now and in the future, Nebraska must put a priority on developing a collective will among all stakeholders – schools, parents and families, taxpayers, policymakers, business and industry, civic organizations and the general public – to value, commit to and establish a seamless continuum of early childhood care and education, from birth through eight years of age, which is characterized by:

- ▶ Consistent quality, time frames and access to a breadth of services and resources.
- ▶ Well-prepared, well-informed and valued providers of care and education, including parents and extended families, who are committed to all children and understand how they learn.
- ▶ Safety for all children.
- ▶ Education and community services that are ready and able to meet the range of diverse needs of all children.
- ▶ Stable, dedicated, equitable and sufficient public and private funding for staffing, training and other resources.
- ▶ Equity of services regardless of location and population characteristics.
- ▶ A welcoming learning environment that is responsive to the whole child and her/his strengths, regardless of life circumstances and challenges.
- ▶ Learning from and embracing diversity.
- ▶ Flexibility that responds to local community strengths and needs.
- ▶ Recognition of the impact of external pressures and local realities.
- ▶ Balance among literacy/academic goals, social/emotional development and playful, imaginative learning.
- ▶ Services that support healthy, efficient and intentional transitions from setting to setting with minimal frequency and high continuity.
- ▶ Clear expectations and practices based on research that relate well to strengths, needs, developmental benchmarks, and desired outcomes.
- ▶ Elimination of barriers to progress.
- ▶ Approaches that are child-centered and fully engage parents and families.
- ▶ Sustainability through collaboration that is visibly and structurally encouraged, supported with resources, and results oriented.

The Information-Gathering Process of the Policy Study

Following the initial meeting of the Leadership Team, a work group comprised of members of the Leadership Team met by conference call during June 2004 to finalize plans for discussion forums and focus groups. The work group created sets of open-ended questions to ask participants in the information-gathering phase. The questions were crafted to elicit candid responses and to allow participants to elaborate on their views (Attachment B). The questions asked participants to reflect on issues and identify priorities related to early childhood programs, including prekindergarten and kindergarten, as well as the provision of early childhood services in local communities and statewide. Questions also allowed participants to discuss ways to address the issues and priorities presented.

■ Discussion Forums

From July through November 2004, several discussion forums were held.

- July 14–Nebraska’s Annual Kindergarten Conference: Fifty-eight teachers of young children and administrators of programs serving young children participated.
- July 22–Planning retreat of the Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children (NeAEYC): Eighteen early childhood professionals provided input.
- August 4–Administrator’s Days in Kearney: Seventy public school administrators engaged in a forum.
- August 27–Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC): Forty Council members discussed the recommendations.
- September 13–Nebraska Department of Education staff discussed the priority areas and recommendations.
- September 23–Representatives of state funded early childhood grant programs participated in discussion.
- November 17– Nebraska Association of School Boards (NASB) and Nebraska Association of School Administrators (NASA): Board members and administrators of local Nebraska school districts provided input at their annual meeting.

Each of the discussion forums tended to be homogenous; each consisted of a majority of its participants sharing a similar type of role. The forums provided input from a larger number of participants who shared similar issues. Discussion forums were held with disparate types of groups to get a wide range of ideas.

■ Focus Groups

Four focus groups were held throughout Nebraska during the last two weeks of September 2004. Focus groups met in Alliance, Kearney, Lincoln, and Omaha. The focus groups differed from the discussion forums in distinct ways. The focus groups were conducted with a higher level of structure than the discussion forums. Also, a neutral facilitator guided the focus group participants through each question. The role of the facilitator was to ensure that each individual had multiple opportunities to express his/her views and elaborate on each answer. Each focus group had between 12 and 18 participants. These participants were individually invited and represented one of a diverse group of roles relating to services for children. A concerted effort to gain the participation of parents of young children both with and without disabilities throughout the state was undertaken for the focus groups. Additionally, practitioners who work with children of a variety of economic, cultural, and ability groups, as well as service providers from many aspects of the field, were included in each focus group.

In contrast to the discussion forums, the focus groups were smaller and each group contained participants from a wide variety of disciplines. The two types of groups used to gather information provided the policy study with a depth and breadth of information regarding stakeholder attitudes and knowledge throughout Nebraska.

Emerging Themes, Priorities and Recommendations

Throughout the information-gathering phase, several themes emerged regarding issues and concerns for Nebraska's young children:

- Access to services
- Quality/best practices
- Early childhood partnerships
- Community support
- Appropriate financing of early childhood education and care

Discussions around the themes continually showed the interrelated nature of the topics, which led the Leadership Team to define them as interrelated priorities. Using the input gathered from the discussion forums and focus groups as a guide, the Leadership Team developed 14 recommendations within the priority areas to achieve the target outcome.

■ Priority—Access to Programs and Services:

Participants of the discussion forums and focus groups made the point that availability of programs and services varies throughout Nebraska. Administrators who participated in the discussion forum at Administrator's Days in Kearney noted that in many areas parents either do not have money to send their children to preschool, or programs are not available for the children in their area. Participants at each focus group commented on lack of quality options for families of young children. Participants were concerned that there are few adequate services for children with special needs. Even in areas where early education options are present, one participant noted that children are "falling through the cracks".

● Recommendations:

- 1) Implement statewide full day/every day kindergarten.
- 2) Expand Nebraska Early Childhood Grant Program to increase availability of collaborative community based prekindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds.
- 3) Establish expectations for supporting best practices, which encompass class size and active learning environments in kindergarten through third grade.

- 4) Ensure access to high quality early childhood education and care services for all children birth to age three whose families would choose to access such services.
- 5) Establish a system for exchanging information with families about the development and learning of young children from birth through age eight.

■ **Priority–Quality/Best Practices:**

A concern expressed by stakeholders throughout the state related to the knowledge base of staff and administrators in programs and settings serving children from birth through age eight. Participants articulated that everyone from aides and paraprofessionals to administrators in public schools need a working knowledge of child development and best practices for children birth through age eight.

Participants in several focus groups were concerned about the perceived push-down curriculum from first grade into kindergarten and ultimately into prekindergarten. Discussions in numerous groups focused on the expectations that children achieve more in kindergarten so that they will not be behind when they start first grade. This point was often made in conjunction with the pressure to reduce or eliminate play in programs for young children. One participant in a focus group commented that as a state, Nebraska needs “developmentally appropriate standards for kindergarten; [and] assessments through child-centered activities.”

● **Recommendations:**

- 1) Strengthen state and local infrastructure to address all aspects of the early childhood system including: governance, accountability, and regulations/standards; staff preparation/professional development, compensation; and family information and support.
- 2) Require highly qualified staff with current knowledge to implement early childhood programs for children from infancy through third grade.
- 3) Ensure best practices are implemented in all settings across prekindergarten, kindergarten and primary level programs in areas including, but not limited to,

teaching, standards, curriculum, assessment, inclusion, diversity, transitions, and adult/child ratios.

■ **Priority–Partnerships:**

Participants in the discussion forums and focus groups articulated their support for partnerships at the local and state level as an avenue for increasing the availability and quality of early childhood programs in Nebraska. Participants identified time, financial resources and “turf” issues as potential challenges to creating and sustaining partnerships among service providers. Additionally, participants suggested that policies from state level agencies should encourage partnerships.

● **Recommendations:**

- 1) Coordinate and share resources to facilitate collaboration and partnerships at the state and local level to achieve high quality early childhood services that meet the unique needs of young children.
- 2) Encourage regional partnerships to establish Early Childhood Specialist positions within each regional area to provide technical assistance to local early childhood programs.

■ **Priority–Community Support:**

Throughout the state, participants recognized that members of the general public undervalue early childhood education and care. Throughout the discussion forums and focus groups participants consistently identified the need to educate the public and policy makers about early childhood issues. Specifically, participants expressed a need for a long-term, coordinated, strategic effort to inform Nebraskans about the needs of our youngest citizens.

● **Recommendations:**

- 1) Support and join the efforts of other state agencies and groups to create a common knowledge base throughout Nebraska of the importance of the early years and related issues regarding early education and care.

- 2) Create a statewide network to collect and disseminate information regarding early education and care issues.

■ **Priority–Financing:**

Many participants pointed out the integral role that financing plays in the development of a healthy early childhood infrastructure and the provision of high quality programs of all types. One participant in the NeAEYC forum stated “Funding is always an issue: research shows that quality costs; lack of resources keeps programs from moving to higher quality – not lack of desire”. A participant in one of the focus groups noted “Funding is required to create and sustain quality childcare; a volume of kids served allows survival (of a program) when pay is low, and that’s not necessarily the right way to go about it.”

Finally, a participant in one of the focus groups was more blunt. As an educational professional, her position was “Don’t make recommendations without money; otherwise, this is a waste of time. Don’t take services away from others. For example, don’t shift money, don’t mandate, don’t even talk about it without money.”

● **Recommendations:**

- 1) Develop an early childhood endowment fund to support the implementation of quality programming throughout Nebraska.
- 2) Identify public funding streams and maximize their use to provide quality services to all children including children birth through age eight.

Section 2: Foundation for the Recommended Course of Action

The Leadership Team arrived at their recommendations through discussion of topics articulated by policy study participants. A review of research, data, and professional literature related to the topics supported the Leadership Team's conclusions and provided the foundation for their recommended course of action. The review focused on three areas:

- ◆ Factors influencing early childhood programs
- ◆ Rationale for early childhood programs and services
- ◆ Types of early childhood programs and services

Factors Influencing Early Childhood Programs

Three factors have traditionally influenced policies impacting early childhood services:

- Changes in the American family
- Research in early childhood development and cognitive ability
- Academic achievement of American children.

Each of these factors are addressed in this section. Demographic information documents the changes in the American family as they relate to services for young children.

Scientific developments regarding early brain development and its subsequent effect on the abilities of children and adults are outlined, and the effects of early childhood programs and services are presented.

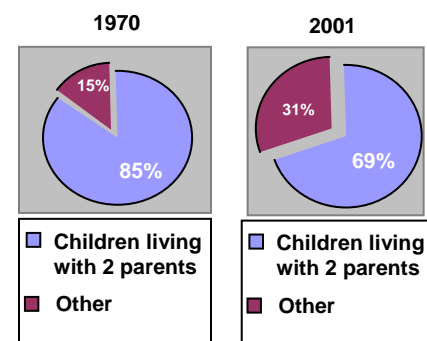
■ Changes in the American Family

Several trends of family life have an impact on policies regarding programs and services for young children. Among these, family structure, parental employment, and children living in poverty are three of the most important.

- **Family Structure**

The proportion of children living in two-parent families has changed in the past 35 years. In 1970, 85 % of children were living with two parents, by 2001 that proportion had dropped to 69% percent. Additionally, in 1970, 10% of families had four or more children. By 1990, this had decreased to 3%. Further, in 1970, 56% of American families included parents and their own children. By 2002, two parent nuclear families comprised less than half of American household groups (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004).

In spite of the decreasing proportion of American families with children, general population growth results in more children under age six than ever before. In 2002, there were more than 4 million births in the United States. According to *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth, 2003*, there were 23.3 million children under six years of age in the United States. By the year 2010, projections by the U.S Census Bureau indicate that there will be 25.6 million children in this age group in the United States. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004).



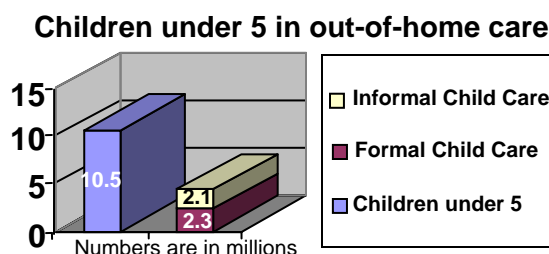
- **Parent Employment**

In 2001, 66% of children lived in families in which both parents, or the only resident parent, was in the work force. Fifty-seven percent of children in two parent families were living in families where both parents were employed. These percentages indicate that for millions of young children, care by someone other than their parents is a fact of life.

In reality, 22% of the 10.5 million children under five who have employed mothers attended some type of organized early childhood education and care facility (approximately 2,300,000 children under five years of age are in organized programs). Another 20% of these children received some other type of

non-familial care, including family child care homes and informal child care arrangements.

These percentages indicate that approximately 4.4 million American children, who are less than five years of age, are being cared for by someone other than their parents (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004).



● Poverty

Despite the large percentage of working parents, vast numbers of children live in poverty. In 1950, 40% of Americans in poverty were elderly and 10% were children; by 1990, the percentages were reversed. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2002, 18.5% of children under 6 lived in poverty (Proctor and Dalaker, 2003). The Nebraska Kids Count 2002 report showed similar numbers: 14% of children under 5 lived in poverty in Nebraska. In 2001, a family of one parent and two children with an annual income of \$14,630 or less was classified as living in poverty.

Research has shown that children in poverty often do not enter school with the same set of experiences and foundation skills that their more advantaged peers possess. This inequality leads to achievement gaps during school and may carry through to adulthood. According to their research, Betty Hart and Todd Risley estimate that by the time they are three years old, children in professional families have heard more than 30 million words, children in working-class families have heard approximately 20 million words, and children of families in poverty have heard about 10 million words (Hart and Risley, 1995). In essence, children from poverty have about one-third the amount of experience with language compared to children from more affluent, professional families. This difference can also be seen trans-generationally. In the same study, these researchers found that the 3-year-old

children of professional parents used vocabularies (1,116 different words) that were larger and richer than those of the *parents* (974 different words) of the children living in poverty (Hart and Risley).

■ Research in Early Childhood Development and Cognitive Ability

Scientific knowledge about the formation and function of the human brain has grown exponentially in the past two decades. New medical advances have increased the accuracy with which researchers can study the brain. It is now known that at birth the human brain is essentially unfinished. Infants are born with approximately 100 billion neurons. However, the neurons are not yet connected into highly coordinated networks. The job of the brain in the child's first years of life is to create these neural pathways. Experience stimulates electrical signals that create the neural connections. Repeated experiences form stronger, more permanent pathways. Pathways that are not used fade away (Shore, 1997).

Caregiving that is consistent and responsive to the needs of the child helps “build” the brain (Shore, 1997). Recent research in neuroscience has provided policy makers and educators a wealth of information regarding the development of the human brain. This knowledge has the potential to guide the wise investment of resources to ensure the greatest good for the children of the community and for society at large.

■ Academic Achievement of American Children

Evaluations from a wide variety of early childhood programs consistently indicate that high quality programs available to children during their preschool years can significantly increase their educational achievement during the elementary years of school. Research on the effectiveness of early childhood education has been completed for programs of many different types.

● Oklahoma's Universal Prekindergarten Program

Georgetown University's Center for Research on Children in the United States evaluated the effects of Oklahoma's universal prekindergarten program in one Oklahoma city. Researchers found that participation in the Tulsa, Oklahoma,

prekindergarten program resulted in significant benefits for children in the areas of early literacy and math. The average gain for young children in the program was a 52% gain on the *Letter Word Identification* test score, a 27% gain in the *Spelling* test score, and a 21% gain in the *Applied Problems* test score when assessed at the end of the preschool year (Gormly, Gayer, Phillips, and Dawson, 2004). The authors reported that children from all ethnic and socioeconomic groups benefited from the Tulsa Prekindergarten program. However, the children who showed the greatest gains were children from families with low incomes (as determined by eligibility for free school lunch).

- **Michigan's School Readiness Program**

Michigan offers a state funded preschool program for children “at risk” for school failure. In 2002, Zaingping Xiang and Lawrence Schweinhart completed an evaluation of the Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP). The evaluation followed participants in the MSRP program until they were 10 years old. The researchers found that the children who participated in the prekindergarten program entered school better prepared than their counterparts who did not participate. Further, the academic advantage was evident even at the end of the participants’ fourth grade year when the evaluation was concluded. “Compared to their classmates of similar age and socioeconomic background who did not attend the program, 24% more MSRP participants passed the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) literacy test for grade four and 16% more passed the mathematics test.” In addition, 25% fewer participants were required to repeat a grade (Xiang and Schweinhart).

- **Georgia's State Funded Prekindergarten Program**

Georgia State University's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies released an evaluation of Georgia's State Funded Prekindergarten Program in August 2003. The researchers studied three different groups of preschool children. They studied 4-year-olds in private preschools, Head Start programs, and state funded prekindergarten programs. The researchers found that at the beginning of preschool, the majority of children scored below the national norm on three of four assessments of language

development and cognitive ability. At the beginning of the preschool year, the children in private preschools tended to outscore the other two groups of children. The children in Head Start tended to score lowest of all the groups of children (children in Head Start experienced more poverty and had a higher incidence of accompanying risk factors than either of the other two groups). By the end of the preschool year, children in all types of programs made academic gains. However, children who had attended one of the state funded prekindergarten programs scored proportionately better. The scores of children in Georgia's prekindergarten program caught up with those of the children in the private preschool program. The researchers determined that the state funded prekindergarten programs offered high quality services on a consistent basis. They also found that Georgia's prekindergarten program was especially effective for children from families who lived in poverty (Henry, Henderson, Ponder, Gordon, Mashburn, and Rickman, 2003).

- **Head Start**

Early childhood education benefits are not achieved exclusively by state funded prekindergarten programs. High quality Head Start and community child care programs also provide impressive outcomes. The Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) (Administration for Children and Families, 2003) used a random sample of Head Start programs throughout the country to determine program quality and to monitor program effectiveness as it related to child outcomes. FACES determined that children beginning Head Start programs had initial scores on standardized assessments that were significantly below those of the general population of preschool aged children. During the child's year in Head Start, the gap narrowed significantly. Children who began Head Start with lower skills made greater gains than preschoolers whose initial scores were higher (Administration for Children and Families). The FACES Study also found that Head Start classrooms were of good quality when measured by numerous indicators. Most classrooms scored within the parameters of the "good" quality range as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales –Revised.

● **Community Child Care Programs**

A study of child care programs from California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina found that, in programs of high quality, children had better language and math skills than children who participated in programs of low quality. Furthermore, skill differences persisted through the children's second grade year when the study concluded (Peiser-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Yazejian, and Culkin, et al., 1999).

Rationale for Early Childhood Programs and Services

Early childhood services have been linked to strategies for economic development and to positive benefits for society at large. The evidence used to make this argument is presented in this section.

■ **An Investment for Society**

Several noted economists have reviewed longitudinal evidence from high quality early childhood education and care programs. They have come to the conclusion that not only is early childhood education beneficial for the individual child, it a wise investment for society.

James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics and Senior Fellow of the American Bar Foundation, argues that programs for adults are more costly and less effective than programs targeted to young children. He has proposed that the United States should invest in high quality early education and care programs as well as programs to assist families increase their levels of positive family functioning in order to raise the skill level of workers in the U. S. workforce. Heckman (1999) notes:

Current policies regarding education and job training are based on fundamental misconceptions about the way socially useful skills embodied in persons are produced. They focus on cognitive skills as measured by achievement or I.Q. tests to the exclusion of social skills, self discipline, and a variety of non-cognitive skills that are known to determine success in life (p.4).

Further, Heckman states “the later in life we attempt to repair early deficits, the costlier the remediation becomes” (1999, p.5). Finally, he notes, that from an economic standpoint, “The returns to human capital investments are greatest for the young for two reasons: (a) younger persons have a longer horizon over which to recoup the fruit of their investments and (b) skill begets skill.” (p.39)

■ Economic Returns

Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis’ Senior Vice President and Director of Research Art Rolnick, and Regional Economic Analyst Rob Grunewald have come to the same conclusions as Heckman. Investing in early childhood development is “economic development with a high public return” (Rolnick and Grunewald, 2003 p.6) Rolnick and Grunewald contend that investing in publicly subsidized private business is “short-sighted and fundamentally flawed” (p. 6). These economists contend that business subsidies do not create jobs, they merely relocate jobs from one area of the country to another. A more economically beneficial strategy is to invest in programs for young children.

A report published by the Economic Policy Institute (Lynch, 2004) contends that investments in comprehensive high-quality early childhood development programs “consistently generate benefit-cost ratios exceeding 3-1, or more than \$3 return for every \$1 invested, well above the 1-to-1 ratio needed to justify such investment” (Lynch, 2004 Executive Summary p.vii). The benefits of high quality programs are not reaped overnight, but come to fruition over many years. The benefits are realized by children who have higher achievement in school, higher rates of high school graduation, lower rates of incarceration, and higher earnings from employment as adults than people who did not participate as children in high quality programs. Lynch (2004) compared benefit/cost ratios of four early childhood development programs. Each of these programs was evaluated by well-controlled longitudinal studies. Each study included experimental groups of participants and matched control groups of non-participants. The analysis of the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention, the Prenatal/Early Infancy Project, the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, and the Perry Preschool Project found benefit-cost

ratios that were between 3.78 to 1 and 8.74 to 1. This means that the benefits to society in measurable cost savings significantly outweigh the costs of providing the program.

A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and cited by the Economic Policy Institute reported that the annual rate of return for the Perry Preschool Project exceeded 16% when the participants were tracked through age 27. This is an excellent rate of return to all of society, not just the participating families. In fact, the same analysis compares the rate of return for the Perry Preschool Project to the rate of return on stock market investments between 1971 and 1988. As mentioned previously, the preschool program provided a return rate of more than 16% while the stock market provided a return rate of only 6.3%. In November 2004, the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation released initial data tracking the original participants in the Perry Preschool Study through age 40. This new data is striking. The researchers who calculated the return rate determined that the benefit accrued by the general public was \$12.90 for each \$1 invested in the program and the benefit accrued by each individual participant was \$4.17 for each \$1 invested. The total benefit generated was \$17.07 for each \$1 invested in the program (Schweinhart, 2004).

■ Research Studies Evaluating Benefit/Cost Ratio

Each of the programs evaluated in the benefit/cost ratio was considered to be of high quality. However, the programs did not mirror each other in terms of services offered. Multiple approaches have demonstrated results for young children and their families. Short synopses of the four programs follow.

● The Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention Project

The Abecedarian project studied 111 children at risk for lower social and intellectual development. The children were enrolled in the study between 6 and 12 weeks of age, and were randomly assigned to either an intervention or control group. Researchers considered preschool to be the time period from infancy to age five. During this time, the preschool intervention group received full-time, year-round child care with a stimulating curriculum, which was individualized for each child from the age of enrollment until the child was five years old. The control group received infant

formula and disposable diapers, but no educational intervention. At age five, all children were re-assigned to either a control group or a school-age intervention group. The school-age intervention group received enriched after school educational activities. Children in the school-age intervention received services until they were eight years of age. Children in each of the groups were followed until age 21. Children who received preschool had greater cognitive, reading and math achievement scores at age 15 (whether or not they had intervention services from age five to eight). Fewer preschool participants required special education services or had been retained in grade than their counterparts. By age 21, more preschool participants had graduated from high school and were enrolled in a four-year college. Other social benefits included a reduced rate of marijuana use and teen parenting for participants of the preschool intervention group (Masse and Barnett, 2002) (Lynch, 2004).

- **Prenatal/Early Infancy Project**

This study focused on outcomes for young children's families when the focus of the intervention was the mother. Four hundred first time mothers were enrolled in a program to test the effectiveness of intervention. Eighty-five percent of the women fit one or more of the following factors that put them and their children at high risk for poor outcomes: the mothers were under 19 years old, were unmarried, or were of low socioeconomic status. The women were enrolled in the program by their 30th week of pregnancy and were randomly divided into four groups including two control groups and two intervention groups with different levels of intensity of intervention. The group that received the most intensive service was compared against the others. The participants in this aggressive intervention received approximately nine home visits during pregnancy, and 23 home visits from the time the children were born until they were age two. Nurses taught the mothers about prenatal care, caring for infants, family planning, parenting, and employment/education issues. Women in the intervention group had babies whose birth weight was higher. Also, the mothers had better nutrition and smoked less. The children of the mothers who had intensive intervention had fewer trips to the emergency room. By the time the children were age 15, 54% of the children in the control group had experienced child abuse or neglect as opposed to 29% of the intervention group.

Twenty-four percent of the intervention group had been arrested, while 53% of the children in the control group had been arrested. Further, the mothers involved in the aggressive intervention received public assistance for less time, had lower rates of arrest, conviction, and incarceration and fewer instances of alcohol or drug related impairment than mothers in the control group (Lynch, 2004).

- **The Chicago Child-Parent Center Program**

This program represents a large sustained effort to provide half-day preschool services to 3-and 4-year-old children from low socioeconomic status. This intervention began in 1967 and is still serving children and their families. More than 5,000 children annually attend these centers. Some centers provide full-day or half-day kindergarten and/or educational services through third grade in addition to prekindergarten services. Each center also offers free breakfasts, lunches and health services. Like children in other intervention groups, participants in the child/parent centers have higher levels of achievement, lower ratios of grade retention and less need for special education services than non-participants. Participants in the centers experienced child abuse or neglect at a rate half that of “non-center” peers. Also, the participants had delinquency rates that were significantly lower than those of non-participants. Finally, by the time they were 18 years old, 17% of center children had been charged with serious criminal offenses as compared 25% of non-center children (Lynch, 2004).

- **Perry Preschool Project**

One hundred and twenty-three African-American children from low-income families were randomly assigned to either a preschool group or a control group. The preschool group attended preschool daily for 2.5 hours per day. Children were in the preschool program for two years. Additionally, the mothers of children in the preschool group received weekly home visits lasting 1.5 hours. This study has documented numerous significant outcomes for the participants that have resulted from the intervention. By age 10, 17% of the participants had either repeated a grade or had been placed in special education compared to 30% of the control group. By the time the participants were 27, 71% had graduated from high school while only 54% of the control group

had completed high school. The employment and monthly earnings were significantly higher for the preschool participants than for the control group (Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart, 1993). Additionally, fewer members of the preschool group had been arrested. By age 40, 28% of the intervention group had been sentenced to prison as compared to 52% of the control group (Schweinhart, Mantie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield & Nores, 2005).

Types of Programs and Services for Young Children

Participants providing input into the Early Childhood Policy Study discussed different ways that young children are served in programs outside of the home before beginning compulsory school attendance. These included:

- Kindergarten
- Prekindergarten
- Head Start
- Community Early Education and Care Programs
- Programs for Children with Disabilities

The following section examines information and issues related to each type of program with an overview of the program in Nebraska.

■ Kindergarten

● Mandated vs. Voluntary Attendance

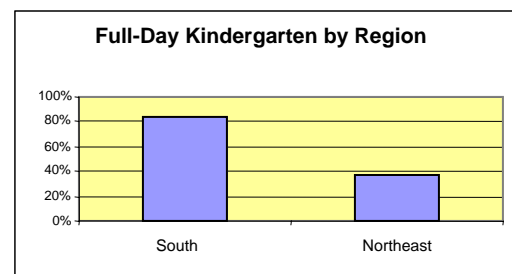
At the end of the 2002-2003 school year, Arkansas, Nevada, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and West Virginia mandated kindergarten enrollment. Additionally, eight states had a compulsory school attendance age of 5 years old. This compulsory school attendance age effectively requires kindergarten enrollment for children in those states (Education Commission of the States, 2005). For children in the remaining states, a year of kindergarten attendance is voluntary. However, in spite of this, 98% of young children in the United States attend kindergarten (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000).

- **Program Delivery**

The nature and delivery of kindergarten programs has changed since the first kindergarten began in the 1830's. Freidrich Froebel, a German educator, believed that young children should be allowed to experience self-directed activity, creativity, social participation, and motor expression. Indeed, within the past four decades, the length and purpose of kindergarten has changed dramatically in the United States. In 1973, 80% of children in kindergarten attended half-day kindergarten programs and 20% of kindergartners attended full-day programs. By 2003, the landscape was very different. In 2003, only 35% of the nation's kindergartners attended a half-day program and 65% of kindergarteners attended full-day programs (Shin, 2005).

- **Demographic Factors**

Certain demographic factors are correlated with the provision of either a full-day or a half-day kindergarten program. According to findings from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, class of 1998-99 (ELCS-K), the offering of either full-day or



part-day kindergarten is correlated with population density, geographic region, the level of poverty in the area, and/or the percentage of children from minority groups (Walston and West, 2004). Schools in which more than 50% of the students lived in families with low incomes offer full-day kindergarten at a higher rate than schools with a lower percentage of students from families with low incomes (69% and 48% respectively). Additionally, 76% of schools in which three quarters or more of the children enrolled are from minority groups offered full-day kindergarten, as opposed to 48% of public schools having fewer than 10% of their children from minority groups. Public schools in rural areas and large cities (63% and 64% respectively) provide full-day kindergarten at a higher proportion than schools in suburban areas (46%).

Finally, 84% of schools in the south offer full-day kindergarten. This region has the highest concentration of full-day kindergarten in the nation. This percentage

compares with the 37% of schools in the northeast who offer full-day kindergarten (2004).

● **Kindergarten Curriculum**

According to the ELCS-K, the vast majority of kindergarten teachers of both full-day and half-day classes report teaching language arts activities (97% and 96%) and mathematics activities (90% and 73%) daily. Teachers of full-day kindergarten classes more often spend time on science, social studies and other subjects than their counterparts in half-day classrooms. Additionally, teachers in full-day classes report spending approximately four hours per day in teacher directed activities and one hour per day in child-selected activities. Teachers who teach in half-day kindergarten classrooms report that their classes spend about two-and-one-half hours per day on teacher directed activities and thirty minutes per day on child selected activities. (Walston, and West, 2004). On average, students in full-day classes show greater achievement than students in half-day programs (Walston, and West, 2004), (Elicker, J., Mathur, S., 1997). A meta-analysis of multiple studies on full-day kindergarten report an overall positive relationship between participation in full-day kindergarten and later academic success (Fusaro, 1997). In addition, full-day kindergarten can offer social benefits for children (Cryan, et al., 1992).

● **Full-Day versus Half-Day Programs**

While full-day kindergarten is potentially a sound investment for schools in terms of cost/ benefits and positive learning outcomes for children, individuals providing input to the policy study noted some important considerations.

- The difference between half-day and full-day kindergarten should not be to do twice as much, but rather to give children time and support to strengthen and deepen their learning. With the current focus on standards, assessment, and accountability, kindergarten should remain a safe, secure place to grow and learn.
- Children coming to kindergarten represent a wide range of knowledge, skills, prior experience, development, behaviors, and overall sense of well-being. Teachers must be intentional about what they do to support learning for all

children—through multiple teaching strategies, activities, and effective classroom environments.

- Kindergarten and prekindergarten are critical times to increase learning across all domains, including language and literacy skills, to support children on the path toward becoming readers. No matter where children are in relation to literacy or math skills, problem-solving or knowledge of the world, kindergarten should keep them engaged and excited about learning.

The input from policy study participants is similar to research on adult attitudes regarding the implementation of full-day kindergarten. Researchers studied the introduction and implementation of full-day kindergarten in a school district (Elicker and Mathur, 1997). Attitudes of parents and teachers of children in the school district's traditional part-day kindergarten program were compared with attitudes of parents and teachers of children in the district's full-day kindergarten classes. Both the full-day and the half-day kindergarten programs in the study implemented curricula and teaching practices that are considered to be developmentally appropriate. Elicker and Mathur (1997) found that both teachers and parents of the children in full-day classes reported higher levels of satisfaction with the class, than did the teachers and parents of the children in part-day classes. The higher satisfaction rating of full-day programs was reported as adult satisfaction with the level of flexibility, and the time for creative, in-depth, and child-initiated activities that the extra time the full-day program allowed (1997).

In Nebraska: Kindergarten

Nebraska statute requires school districts to provide kindergarten for children who reach 5 years of age on or before October 15 of the school year. In recent years, many schools across the state have been expanding from half-day or alternate-day kindergarten programs to full-day, every-day kindergarten. This is consistent with the national trend toward full-day kindergarten.

- In Nebraska, 281 school districts (54.25% of all districts) provided full-day kindergarten in 2003-04. This number has increased sharply from only 14 (2.02%) districts offering full-day kindergarten in 1993-94. (NDE State of the Schools Report SOSR, 2003-2004)
- Of the 20,710 children enrolled in kindergarten in Nebraska public schools, a total of 13,970 children (67%) are enrolled in full-day kindergarten. (NDE Fall Membership Collection, 2003-2004)

■ Prekindergarten

● Program Delivery

According to the *State of Preschool: 2003 State of Preschool Yearbook* (NIEER, 2004), 40 states funded 45 preschool programs during the 2001-2002 school year. Many states provided targeted services to children fitting state criteria for need. Researchers from the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have each analyzed the prekindergarten programs of several states with larger than average enrollment. The data show that each prekindergarten program is operated differently. The following is an analysis of the programs of four states.

• Georgia

Georgia began state funded prekindergarten as a pilot project in 1992-1993. The program was created as a response to data that indicated high rates of students were repeating grades and were dropping out of school prior to graduation. Zell Miller, who was Georgia's governor at the time, championed the project, which expanded to serve 9,000 students during the 1993-1994 school year, and then expanded again to provide universal access for all 4-year-olds. The program is, and has always been, offered free of charge and participation is voluntary for families. The prekindergarten program is one of the education initiatives that is funded through the Georgia state lottery.

During the 2002-2003 school year, Georgia's prekindergarten program served 55% of the 4-year-olds in the state. The Office of School Readiness contracts with public schools, private early childhood education and care providers and Head Start grantees to deliver services. The prekindergarten program requires a 180-day program, which operates 6 hours per day.

Quality standards for the prekindergarten programs include a teacher/child ratio of 1-to-10 and a maximum group size of 20 children. Lead teachers were required to have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) or a Child Care Professional (CCP) credential. Beginning in 2001-2002 and continuing to the present, lead teachers are now required to have a two-year degree in Early Childhood Education and Care. Even though a four-year degree is not required, approximately 79% of lead teachers have a college degree. Fifty-eight percent of the lead teachers are certified in elementary or early childhood education.

In addition to the educational services offered to children, Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning operates a grant program for service providers to offer supportive services for families. The grant program is designed to provide resource coordination services. The resource coordinators attempt to involve parents in their child's education. The resource coordinator may help families access health services, literacy programs, General Education Development (GED) testing, or other community resources. The resources coordinator grants are provided to serve families whose children meet "at-risk" criteria in the state of Georgia (United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2004).

- **Oklahoma**

From 1980 to 1990, Oklahoma offered prekindergarten as a pilot program for 4-year-olds. In 1990, Oklahoma legislation allowed the program to grow to serve all children who were eligible for Head Start services. In 1988, the program expanded again. This time, any parent who lived in a district offering prekindergarten could enroll his/her 4-year-old. The prekindergarten program was, and remains, free to any family regardless of the family's income.

During the 2002-2003 school year 60% of Oklahoma's 4-year-olds were enrolled in public prekindergarten. School districts are not required to offer prekindergarten, but if the district chooses to provide prekindergarten, it is reimbursed through Oklahoma's school aid formula. Districts may offer programs for half-day or full-day for the entire academic year. The funding formula is "prorated" for the length of day the program is offered. Funding must go through public schools. However, schools are encouraged to collaborate with Head Start grantees, local child care programs and other community based organizations.

The state of Oklahoma has instituted the following quality measures for its public prekindergarten programs. The adult/child ratio is 1 to 10 with a maximum group size of 20 children. Additionally, Lead Teachers are required to have a four-year degree and hold an early childhood education teaching certificate. (NIEER, 2004)

- **New Jersey–Early Childhood Program Aid**

New Jersey operates two different prekindergarten programs. One is the Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) prekindergarten, which serves 4-year-olds in school districts that meet criteria for percentage of children in poverty.

The ECPA programs operate in 102 school districts (GAO, 2004). This equals 19% of New Jersey's school districts. The ECPA programs are open to any 4-year-old within the school district regardless of family income. Most ECPA prekindergarten programs operate half-days for the academic year. School districts have the option of providing full-day services, however, the districts receive no more money for full-day services than for half-day programs. Funding comes from the New Jersey state aid formula. Even though the programs are funded through the local school districts, schools can collaborate with community providers to operate the programs. About 11% of the children enrolled in the ECPA programs received services through a community provider.

ECPA programs require Lead Teachers to have a four-year degree with either certification in early childhood or elementary education. There is no limit on class size and no set adult/child ratio. In information provided to NIEER, class sizes ranged from 2 to 31, with most classes operating with between 15 and 20 children. No information was given regarding the number of adults present in the classes (NIEER, 2004).

- **New Jersey–Abbott Programs**

The second state funded prekindergarten program in New Jersey is the Abbott program. Abbott programs serve 3-and 4-year-olds in the 30 school districts with the highest concentrations of poverty.

Litigation resulted in a decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1998, that all 3-and 4-year-old children in New Jersey’s 30 school districts with the highest rates of poverty were entitled to receive high quality preschool education. These 30 school districts are called the Abbott districts. Abbott programs operate full-days for the academic year and have the option to operate half-days throughout the summer. Children who need additional care (up to ten hours per day) receive an extended program, which operates during both the academic year and during the summer. Funding for six hours per day (three hours per day during the summer) comes from the state aid formula for schools and is administered through the New Jersey Department of Education. The New Jersey Department of Human Services provides funding for the extended day and summer programming. Abbott programs provide comprehensive services with a large emphasis on community collaboration.

Community based providers served more than 70% of preschoolers attending public prekindergarten in Abbott Districts (GAO, 2004). In addition to preschool services, Abbott programs are required to have one family worker on staff for every 40 families served. The family worker is responsible for providing community service referrals, education referrals and family support to the families of children enrolled in Abbott prekindergarten programs.

Quality standards for Abbott programs are more rigorous than for ECPA programs. Lead Teachers must have a four-year degree and hold New Jersey certification in Early Childhood Education. Class sizes are mandated to be no more than 15 children per group. Further, the staff/child ratio for both 3- and 4-year-old children is 2:15 (NIEER, 2004).

In Nebraska: Prekindergarten

Nebraska's initial Early Childhood Act of 1990 enabled the funding of ten pilot early childhood projects in local communities. These programs were designed to serve children from birth to age 5. This Early Childhood Education (ECE) Grant Program was expanded by state legislation in 2001 to provide additional grants throughout the state. In 2003-04, funding was available to provide 28 grants to local school districts or Educational Service Units (ESUs). Grantees are required to collaborate with existing community early childhood programs and Head Start grantees in their service areas. State funding can reimburse a program for up to 50% of the cost of providing a prekindergarten program for 3- and 4-year-olds. The ECE grant programs served 3% of Nebraska 4-year-olds and 1% of Nebraska 3-year-olds in 2003-2004. Beginning in 2005-2006, new grants will prioritize programs serving at risk 4-year-olds before future expansion.

Money appropriated by the Nebraska Unicameral in 2005 will add \$1.66 million dollars to the early childhood education grant program. Projections indicate that this money will serve approximately 400 additional children throughout the state during the 2005-2006 school year. Legislation passed during the 2005 session will allow "at risk" four-year-old children to be included in school district calculations for reimbursements through the Nebraska state aid to schools formula. School districts will be able to count four-year-olds during the 2006-2007 school year and will be reimbursed for them beginning with the 2007-2008 school year.

Early Childhood Education grant programs are expected to be inclusive of children with disabilities, children of all socioeconomic backgrounds and diverse cultural and ethnic

backgrounds. In 2003-04, a majority of the 1,357 children served were from low-income families, as was reflected by the 66% of children that were eligible for free/reduced lunch. The majority of these programs served preschool children and their families. The programs served a very small number of children (4%) who were premature or low birth weight, which made them eligible for education services. Many children (32%) had a home language other than English and 16% had parents who were less than 18 years of age or were enrolled in high school.

The ECE Grant Program requires a staff/child ratio of 1:10 when serving either 3 or 4-year-old children. The maximum class size is 20 children. Teachers must have a valid Nebraska Teaching Certificate with an endorsement in Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Special Education, or Early Childhood Education Unified (NDE, 2003).

In the newest edition of *The State of Preschool: 2003 State of Preschool Yearbook* (NIEER, 2004), Nebraska is ranked 33rd in the nation in access for 4-year-olds to publicly funded prekindergarten programs. Nebraska is ranked 31st in the nation regarding public resources invested in prekindergarten.

● Comparison of State Prekindergarten Programs

Comparison of data for the 2001-2002 school year					
	Georgia	Oklahoma	New Jersey ECPA	New Jersey Abbott	Nebraska
Access	Universal	Universal	Targeted	Targeted	Targeted
% Served (4-year-olds)	53% (‘02-03)	56%	6%	15%	2%
Class size	20	20	No limit	15	20
Adult/Child Ratio	1:10	1:10	No limit	2:15	1:10 (3-yr-olds) 1:10 (4-yr-olds)
Teacher Qualifications	AA or Montessori Diploma	BA EC Certificate	BA EC or EE Certificate	BA EC Certificate	BA EC Certificate
Funding Source	Lottery	School Funding Formula	State Funds	State Funds	State Funds

National Institute for Early Education Research , The State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook

■ Head Start

● Program History

The U.S. Office of Economic Development began Head Start services as a summer program in 1965. Head Start was intended to break the cycle of poverty. Children from three years of age until school entry were served. The program was expanded to operate for the academic year. In 1969, Head Start was moved from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Child Development within the United States' Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Head Start is now a program of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Head Start operates in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S Territories. Grantees operate programs in both urban and rural areas.

Additionally, many tribes operate Head Start programs to serve the Native American population. (www.acf.hhs.gov retrieved 12-29-04). More than 900,000 children received Head Start Services throughout the United States during the 2003 fiscal year. Since its beginning, Head Start has served more than 18.5 million children (National Head Start Association www.nhsa.org retrieved 12-22-04).

● Program Delivery

Head Start is a comprehensive early education and family support program designed for children whose families live at or below 100% of the federal poverty level. Head Start includes preschool services, family contacts with a social service worker, health services (including vision and dental checks), nutrition services, and mental health services if needed. At least 10% of children served by local Head Start programs must be verified with a disability.

In Nebraska: Head Start

Head Start programs in Nebraska are operated at the local level by grantees. The grantees may be community action programs, school districts, or other community based entities. The funding and administration for Head Start programs comes directly to the local grantee from the Federal Government. Individual states have no authority to regulate Head Start programs.

Individual grantees must meet or exceed performance standards in areas such as classroom practices, staffing, health, and community services. Programs are also assessed on their adherence to performance standards relating to program and fiscal management. Compliance with performance standards is evaluated every three years through a systematic “peer review” process.

Nebraska Head Start Grantees served a total of 6,159 children during the 2002-2003 school year. A majority of the children (4,705) were 3-and 4-year-olds. Additionally, more than 13% of children served by Nebraska Head Start programs had identified disabilities. The preschool children in Head Start were served through 15 grantees, three tribal programs, one migrant and two delegate programs. The Head Start grantees offered numerous types of programs throughout the state. Services included full-day (at least 6 hours per day), part-day, home-based, combination (some classroom time and multiple family contacts), and collaborative programming in which Head Start and other local early childhood providers worked to serve a wide variety of children within the same classroom (PIR, 2004).

■ Community Early Education and Care Programs

● Program Delivery

Community early education and care programs include any early education and care programs for young children that is not operated by a Head Start grantee or a school district. Community programs include family child care homes, child care centers and preschools. The programs can be operated by a for-profit business, a non-profit organization, a faith community, or an individual.

Each state sets criteria for licensing of community programs. Licensing standards generally address health and safety issues. Education levels of staff, adult/child ratios, group sizes, and curricula expectations vary by state.

More than 2 million children attend some type of organized program prior to their entry into school. In 2001, 67% of mothers in the United States whose youngest child is of preschool age were in the workforce. Forty-eight percent of the mothers worked full-time (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

● **Quality Measures**

The quality of life for children in community programs is determined both by their families and by the early childhood program in which they are enrolled. Research indicates that the quality of the early childhood experience has long-range effects on the child's achievement and behavior. In a landmark study of child care centers, researchers used objective measures to assess the quality of child care in four states. In 1995, the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers report was released. This research found that “child care in the United States is poor to mediocre, with almost half of the infants and toddlers in rooms having less than minimal quality” (Helburn, Culkin, Morris, Mocan, Howes, Phillipsen, et.al., 1995, p.26). To be sure, there were pockets of high quality child care. Fourteen percent of the classrooms observed provided care that was rated good to excellent.

The researchers found that children in higher quality classrooms were more advanced in pre-math abilities and on language skills. Furthermore, among other socio-emotional outcomes, children in the high quality classrooms showed more creativity, more pro-social behavior toward other children and adults, as well as appearing to be happier. This study was continued until the children were in elementary school. Research found that the quality of the child care experience was related to the child's elementary achievement and social skills in grade school. Children who were in high quality child care were more social and had higher achievement than children who attended poor quality child care. Most striking about this information was the finding that children who were considered at risk for school difficulties were more affected

by the quality of care than children who were not considered at risk (Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kegan, et al., 1999).

The authors of the study also found the following characteristics to be correlated with higher quality care: higher ratios of staff to children, higher levels of education for staff, and administrators with higher levels of experience. Further, teacher wages were indicative of the level of care provided. Higher teacher salaries were correlated with higher quality care. On a large scale, the researchers found that states that had more demanding criteria for licensing had fewer centers that were of poor quality. Finally, the study found that centers that provided higher quality care also tended to have access to extra resources that could be used to improve quality (Helburn, et al., 1995)

In Nebraska: Community Education and Care Programs

Community programs serving four or more children must be licensed by the Nebraska Health and Human Services System (HHSS). Nebraska requires minimal education levels for staff. Additionally, licensing criteria do not include requirements about implementation of curriculum. Staff of community programs must participate in inservice training annually. Training is provided by Nebraska Early Childhood Regional Training Coalitions throughout the state and the Early Childhood Training Center (ECTC), as well as the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Cooperative Extension, social service agencies, hospitals and other organizations.

Nebraska has a higher percentage of working mothers than the national average. According to the 2002 Kids Count in Nebraska report, 73% of children under age six had working mothers. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services reported 4,337 licensed child care facilities (centers and family child care homes) with a capacity of 96,642 children in 2003.

Research by the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium (MCCRC) studied the quality of child care in centers and family child care homes in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. Their findings echo those of the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child

Care data. MCCRC data found that only about 34% of the child care in Nebraska is of good quality (MCCRC, 2004).

■ Programs for Children with Disabilities

● Legislation

In 1975, Public Law (PL) 94-142 established the right of children with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate public education. Subsequent reauthorizations of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) have affirmed the right of children to be educated in the least restrictive environment appropriate. Children with disabilities have the right to receive educational and other related services that are necessary for their development, in settings with their peers who do not have disabilities. In fact, legislation requires that justification be provided in the child's individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education plan (IEP) if a child with a disability is not participating in the same activities in which typically developing children participate. Federal law is matched by Nebraska legislation (79-1160) and regulation (Nebraska Rule 51) to ensure that all of Nebraska's children are educated in an environment that is integrated and supports the development of each child's abilities.

● Program Delivery

Providing early education and care programs and services in inclusive and natural environments, (where the child would be if the child **did not** have a disability) is supported by the Council for Exceptional Children /Division for Early Childhood (DEC) through their position statement (DEC, 2000). Research has provided a body of evidence indicating that these inclusive practices are beneficial for all children.

Research by Holahan and Costenbader (2000) compared the progress made by preschool children with developmental delays in inclusive classrooms and in self-contained early childhood special education classrooms. The results indicated that children with disabilities who functioned at a relatively lower level of social and emotional development made equivalent progress in either setting. However, children with disabilities who functioned at a higher level made significantly more progress in social and emotional areas of development in the inclusive setting than in the

segregated classroom for children with disabilities. Additionally, typically developing children who are receiving early education and care services in inclusive classrooms show greater understanding of disabilities, and are more empathetic and accepting of children different from themselves than children who are served in classrooms without children who have disabilities (Diamond and Stacey, 2000).

In Nebraska: Programs for Children with Disabilities

According to the Center for Disease Control, 25,924 children were born in Nebraska in 2003 (www.cdc/nchs/fastats). In 2004, there were 4,114 children with disabilities under the age of five receiving early childhood special education services (NDE- I.D.E.A. Part B and C Annual Data Reports).

In Nebraska, children with disabilities are served by school districts, in Head Start programs, and in numerous community programs. Research by the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium (MCCRC) revealed that more than one-third of child care providers in a four state area (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska) reported that they serve at least one child with a disability in their program (MCCRC, 2004).

Nebraska is committed to providing inclusive education for all young children. To assist early childhood special education practitioners and community child care personnel, several resources have become available in Nebraska. Two training programs prepare providers with knowledge and skills for successful inclusive practices that meet the needs of all children.

- Personal Development Facilitator Institutes (PDFI) sponsored by NDE focus on implementing evidence-based practices in supporting young children with disabilities, birth to age five, in natural and inclusive environments. To date, teams made up of more than 160 early childhood practitioners and administrators from across the state participated in this intensive training. Several hundred additional practitioners have participated in workshops to implement evidence-based practices in natural and inclusive environments (NDE 2004).

- SpecialCare is an eight-hour in-service training program offered through the Early Childhood Training Center (ECTC) to help early childhood teachers become comfortable with the idea of including children with disabilities into classes that have been serving typically developing children. SpecialCare training has been provided to 1,094 childcare and related service providers in Nebraska.

Section 3: Conclusion

The previous sections addressing the rationale and types of early childhood programs presented a synopsis of research about the effectiveness of early childhood programs for both academic achievement and increased social competence. The data presented detailed the analysis of the costs and benefits of high quality programs and showed that investment in early childhood education and care is a wise economic strategy. A variety of programs for young children were described and research documenting their effectiveness showed that participation in quality early childhood education and care is an effective way to narrow the achievement gap between children at risk for school failure and their more advantaged peers. Information about the status of early childhood programs and services in Nebraska was also reviewed.

After analyzing statewide input, the Leadership Team concluded that early childhood programs and services in Nebraska are indicative of a solid foundation on which to build an early childhood infrastructure. However, the Leadership Team also concluded that Nebraska can do better for its children.

To build on the strengths of current systems, and achieve the desired outcome, the Leadership Team outlined five interrelated supports as priorities necessary for achieving the outcome. Within each priority support area, the Leadership Team developed recommendations to reach the target outcome.

The recommendations developed by the Leadership Team were submitted to the State Board of Education in January 2005. The Board accepted the study draft and approved it for dissemination and discussion. The recommendations became the focus of Policy Partner Forums hosted by the Board during the spring of 2005. Part II of this report presents the information gained during the State Board of Education Policy Partner Forums.

<p style="text-align: center;">OUTCOME: Provide high quality, inclusive early childhood services for all Nebraska children from birth through age eight.</p>
--

Priorities

Recommendations

**From Study and
Stakeholders**

**ACCESS to
PROGRAMS
and
SERVICES:**

- 1) Implement statewide full day/every day kindergarten.
- 2) Expand Nebraska Early Childhood Grant Program to increase availability of collaborative community-based prekindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds.
- 3) Establish expectations for supporting best practices, which encompass class size and active learning environments in kindergarten through third grade.
- 4) Ensure access to high quality early childhood education and care services for all children birth to age three whose families would choose to access such services.
- 5) Establish a system for exchanging information with families about the development and learning of young children from birth through age eight.

"Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success just as early failure breeds later failure"
(Heckman, 1999, p.5)

"Working together, teachers, caregivers and parents can assure that every child is supported to reach his or her potential, and that the transition to kindergarten will continue to support a lifelong love of learning."
(Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages 3 to 5, NDE and HHSS, 2005 p. 3)

**QUALITY/
BEST
PRACTICE:**

- 6) Strengthen state and local infrastructure to address all aspects of the early childhood system including: governance, accountability, and regulations/ standards; staff preparation/professional development, compensation; and family information and support.
- 7) Require highly qualified staff with current knowledge to implement early childhood programs for children from infancy through third grade.

"Early care and nurture have a decisive, long-lasting impact on how people develop, their ability to learn, and their capacity to regulate their own emotions."
(Shore, 1997, p.27)

Priorities

Recommendations

From Study and Stakeholders

	8) Ensure best practices are implemented in all settings across prekindergarten, kindergarten and primary level programs in areas including, but not limited to, teaching, standards, curriculum, assessment, inclusion, diversity, transitions, and adult/child ratios.	<i>"Kids rise above challenges and thrive in a quality classroom with appropriate practices" (Participant at Omaha focus group, September 22, 2004)</i>
PARTNER-SHIPS:	9) Coordinate and share resources to facilitate collaboration and partnership at the state and local level to achieve high quality early childhood services that meet the unique needs of young children.	<i>"[We] need a better tie between pre-school and primary education: there is too much separation; we need more collaboration." (Participant at Alliance focus group, September 30, 2004).</i>
	10) Encourage regional partnerships to establish Early Childhood Specialist positions within each regional area to provide technical assistance to local early childhood programs.	
COMMUNITY SUPPORT:	11) Support and join the efforts of other state agencies and groups to create a common knowledge base throughout Nebraska of the importance of the early years and related issues regarding early education and care.	<i>"Policymakers must identify the educational investments that yield the highest public returns. Here the literature is clear: Dollars invested in ECD yield extra-ordinary public returns" (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003, p.7)</i>
	12) Create a statewide network to collect and disseminate information regarding early education and care issues.	
FINANCING:	13) Develop an early childhood endowment fund to support the implementation of quality programming throughout Nebraska.	<i>"Funding is always an issue; research shows that quality costs; lack of resources keeps programs from moving to higher quality – not lack of desire." (Participant at NeAEYC discussion forum, July 22, 2004)</i>
	14) Identify public funding streams and maximize their use to provide quality services to all children including children birth through age eight.	

Part II:
Nebraska
State Board of Education
Policy Partner Forums

Section 1: Description of the Policy Partner Forums

Structure of the Policy Partner Forums

The Nebraska State Board of Education hosted six Policy Partner Forums throughout the state during the spring of 2005. The forums were held in Lincoln, Norfolk, Omaha, Grand Island, Gering, and McCook. Parents, educators of children from birth through school age, representatives from higher education, and professionals from community service agencies attended the forums, as well as local school board and other interested community members. In total, 404 people attended the forums.

Participants sat at round tables, in groups of eight to ten, to encourage discussion. Assigned seating ensured that each table represented a variety of stakeholder groups. Facilitators from the Department of Education were assigned to every table with the charge to ensure that each participant was able to express him/herself freely so that all perspectives would be heard. In this way, topics could be examined from multiple perspectives.

Each table of participants then chose one challenge and one solution from each of the topic areas discussed to report to the entire policy forum. The participants found that the discussion was often so rich that the group did not have time to complete discussions in all five areas. In fact, many groups completed only two to three areas. The depth of the discussions led many of the participant groups to choose more than one challenge and solution on which to report. Section 2 provides an in-depth analysis of the input received during the forums.

Topics of the Policy Forums

The Policy Partner Forums differed from earlier avenues for input to the Early Childhood Policy Study. As reported in the previous section, during the summer and fall of 2004, participants in the policy study focus groups and discussion forums were asked to share their thoughts and ideas regarding the needs of Nebraska's young children and their families. The draft recommendations were created based on that collective input.

In contrast, participants in the State Board of Education Policy Partner Forums conducted during the spring of 2005 were specifically asked to discuss the challenges that would likely be inherent in implementing the draft recommendations of the policy study Leadership Team related to the priority area of Programs and Services for young children and their families. Discussion focused on five areas of services for young children:

- Full-day kindergarten
- Prekindergarten
- Best practices for kindergarten through third grade
- Services for children birth through age three
- Family involvement

Participants in the policy forums were asked to discuss the five service areas in terms of the challenges inherent in each area and also to suggest solutions. Forum participants identified four main challenges:

- Program Implementation
- Public Awareness
- Curriculum
- Access

Notably, challenges of program implementation and public awareness were in each area of discussion. Curriculum issues were often mentioned in response to services for children in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and the primary grades (ages three through eight). Access was a prevalent theme of the areas of services for children who were birth

to kindergarten age. The following table illustrates the challenges identified by participants in each of the areas for services:

SERVICE AREA	CHALLENGES			
Full-Day Kindergarten	Program Implementation	Public Awareness	Curriculum	
Prekindergarten	Program Implementation	Public Awareness	Curriculum	Access
Best Practices K- grade 3	Program Implementation	Public Awareness	Curriculum	
Children Ages Birth – 3	Program Implementation	Public Awareness		Access
Family Involvement	Program Implementation	Public Awareness		

Section 2:

Discussions of the Policy Partner Forums

The discussions of the policy forum participants focused on issues pertaining to the identified challenges in each of areas of service for young children: full-day kindergarten, prekindergarten, best practices K-grade 3, services for children birth to age 3, and family involvement. The discussions are arranged by the area of service, followed by the challenges and underlying issues, and then by a summation of solutions suggested by the forum participants.

AREA OF SERVICE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:

Full-Day Kindergarten

■ Challenge: Full-Day Kindergarten—Program Implementation

● Issues

- **Staff quality**—The issue most often mentioned under program implementation was staff quality. Several tables of participants discussed the need for employing well-qualified teachers—those with a Nebraska Teaching Certificate in Early Childhood Education—as important considerations for implementing full-day every-day kindergarten statewide. Participants also spoke of the need to recruit teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds. It was also noted that all staff, including para-professionals, should have access to quality staff development opportunities to ensure that the adults working with kindergarteners have the knowledge to work effectively to meet the unique needs of young children. Several groups of participants specifically included administrators when discussing staff development. Participants articulated the need for school and district administration to understand the differences between the developmental level and learning needs of young children and those of students who are older.
- **Meeting the Needs of All Children**—The second issue policy forum participants noted in the challenge of implementing full-day kindergarten involved meeting

the needs of **all** children. Participants acknowledged the fact that children of different ages, developmental levels, ability levels, and range of background experience may all enter the same kindergarten class. The staff must use the kindergarten year to prepare the children to meet the challenges of first grade after leaving kindergarten. The participants in the forums were particularly vocal about the challenge of meeting the needs of children who are English language learners when teachers do not have the educational experience or background knowledge of the culture and language of the young children who are learning English.

- **Class Size and Adult/Child Ratios**—A related, but distinct concern about the issue of class size and adult/child ratios was raised by a number of policy forum groups. Research from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (Walston and West, 2004) indicates that throughout the United States, full-day every-day kindergarten classes are statistically larger than half-day kindergarten classes. Policy forum participants spoke of their concerns about expecting staff to individualize instruction to help each child learn, when either full or part-day classes are large.
- **Finances and Facilities**—Finances and facilities completed the remaining issues related to program implementation. A number of participants identified the ability of school districts to secure and access funds for start-up and first year operating expenses to be a significant challenge when districts implement full-day kindergarten. Districts strapped for money find hiring staff, equipping a classroom, and operating the program until the second program year (when state-aid is paid one year in arrears) makes the cost prohibitive for changing from part-day to full-day every-day kindergarten. This situation is exacerbated by state law, which limits school district spending increases to a percentage of the previous year's spending. It was reported that the initial start-up costs may be great enough to exceed the spending lid limitations in some districts. Finally, participants at several tables discussed situations in growing school districts where no classroom space is available for the additional classes needed by full-day kindergarten.

● Solutions

- **Staff quality**—Participants of the forums proposed a variety of ideas that could address staff development issues and ensure that the needs of all children are met. Possible solutions included initiatives to partner with institutions of higher learning to increase the access throughout the state to early childhood courses leading to certification, and to improve the state distance-learning infrastructure. Improvement of the distance-learning infrastructure would increase the opportunity of students from rural parts of the state to participate in early childhood teacher certification programs via distance learning. Additionally, providing more credit bearing courses through sustained training opportunities from the Early Childhood Training Center and Regional Training Coalitions would improve access to high quality training. Participants lauded the Natural Allies initiative, through which Nebraska two-year colleges have standardized their child development coursework. Credits in child development earned at any two-year institution in the state will now transfer to other two-year colleges in the state. Efforts are underway to facilitate transfer of course credits from two-year colleges to 4-year colleges and universities across the state. Participants also suggested that a course in early childhood education should become a mandatory requirement for a Nebraska administrative certificate.
- **Financing**—Participants who spoke of financial difficulties implementing full-day kindergarten proposed two possible solutions. The first solution would involve changing the state aid process to end the practice of reimbursing school districts the subsequent school year for expenses incurred during the current year. The second proposal was to exempt the first year costs of implementing full-day kindergarten from the spending lid for districts. Both of these solutions would require legislative action by the Nebraska Unicameral.

■ Challenge: Full-Day Kindergarten—Public Awareness

● Issues

A second set of issues reported by participants applied to public awareness of the learning and developmental needs of children. This was often mentioned as it related to curriculum issues. Participants articulated the need for administrators and school board members to understand the intellectual needs and capabilities of young children as well as the important link between social/emotional health of children and their educational success. Additionally, participants expressed a need for parents and community members to become aware of the expectations placed on children in kindergarten. Finally, a few participants felt that a small percentage of parents would not be willing to allow their children to attend kindergarten for a full school day every day.

● Solutions

Participants indicated that one strategy for informing parents and community members about the needs of kindergarten-aged children would be to partner with community early education and care programs. This partnership could plan transitions between the prekindergarten (preschool or childcare) program and the public school, as well as assist parents in understanding ways to help their own children learn.

To address the issue of parents who may be opposed to sending their children to kindergarten for the full school day, participants who had successfully implemented full-day kindergarten in their communities shared strategies that their school district employed to meet this challenge. They reported that their districts scheduled informational meetings for parents where research on the effectiveness of full-day kindergarten was presented and questions regarding the proposed program were answered. Some districts offered the option of either half-day or full-day kindergarten when the full-day program was first implemented.

■ Challenge: Full-Day Kindergarten—Curriculum

● Issues

Many policy forum groups identified the curriculum content of kindergarten as a challenge. Their concerns paralleled the program implementation concerns about staff development and meeting children's needs. Participants discussed the paradox of welcoming each child into kindergarten regardless of the child's abilities, exceptionalities and/or background experiences, on one hand; while on the other hand, expecting each child to attain a preset level of achievement by the end of kindergarten. While participants were adamant that schools and families should expect children to learn, numerous participants spoke of concerns about curricula that have become increasingly rigid, scripted, and focused on narrowly defined outcomes that hinder higher-order thinking skills. The term "push-down" curriculum was used often to describe the phenomena of expecting children to learn the same content in kindergarten that was expected of older children in previous years. Veterans of school districts spoke of instances when curriculum decisions for the kindergarten classes were being determined by the assessments children take in fourth grade. As a result of the increased expectations for kindergarten programs, participants articulated that many districts do not plan curriculum or schedule learning activities according to the developmental needs of the students.

● Solutions

At every forum, participants spoke of ensuring that developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are followed in kindergarten classes. The North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement outlines appropriate curriculum practices in the following way:

- a. The early childhood and early elementary grades curricula is broad in scope and provides for meeting the individual intellectual, emotional, physical and social needs of students.
 - It reflects individual differences and cultures in development, growth, ability, learning styles and interests.

- There are opportunities for students to actively explore and interact with the environment, other students, and adults.
- There is evidence of activities to develop language and literacy through real-life experiences.
- Learning about math, science, social studies, health, and other content areas is integrated into activities.
- Daily opportunities are provided for developing small and large-muscle skills, social skills, and aesthetic expression and appreciation (North Central Association, 2005, p. 57).

Finally, participants spoke of the importance of ensuring that district and building-wide practices reflect the alignment of the first grade through twelfth grade standards with the *Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages Three to Five*. In this way kindergarten will be anchored in research based practices that are appropriate for the children they serve.

■ **Challenge: Full-Day Kindergarten—Access**

There was widespread general support for full-day kindergarten. Many of the participants came from districts in which full-day kindergarten has already been implemented. Therefore, access to full-day kindergarten was not a major point of discussion.

AREA OF SERVICE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:

Prekindergarten

■ **Challenge: Prekindergarten—Program Implementation**

● **Issues**

- **Staffing and Salaries**—Issues related to staffing were most often discussed under the challenge of implementing prekindergarten programs. Forum participants discussed the dual dilemma of staffing. While specialized training in early childhood education has been correlated with higher quality early education and care programs (National Research Council, 2000), many community programs

have difficulty finding and keeping enough highly qualified teachers because programs cannot afford to pay salaries that allow professionals to live above poverty. At the same time, the supply of qualified early childhood teachers available to teach throughout the state is unsteady because students often do not choose to complete education in a field in which a living wage is difficult to achieve (NAEYC, 1990, reprint 1998).

- **Financing**—Staffing issues overlapped with many other comments regarding financing of early childhood education and care programs. Participants indicated that early education and care programs are expensive to provide, independent of whether school districts, Head Start grantees, or community providers operate the programs. Early childhood education and care providers who operate full-day programs and who contract with Health and Human Services to provide service to low income families receiving child care assistance are limited in the amount of reimbursement received per child. The amount of reimbursement a provider receives does not cover the cost of providing care (NAEYC 1990, reprint 1998).
- **Quality Programs**—Another implementation issue is ensuring quality. Several different authorities govern the wide range of prekindergarten programs operating in Nebraska. Community early childhood programs must meet licensing standards designed to safeguard the health and safety of children. They include minimal qualifications for staff, but do not address the learning environment. Head Start grantees must meet federal performance standards in numerous areas including early childhood development and health services, child nutrition, family and community partnerships, and program governance (Administration for Children and Families, 45 CFR Part 1304). Programs operated by school districts must meet Nebraska Rule 11 and Nebraska Rule 51. Rule 11 sets standards for staff qualifications, hours of operation, curriculum requirements and child and program assessment in early childhood programs. Rule 51 defines federal and state regulations governing the provision of services for children with disabilities. In Nebraska, the responsibility of ensuring quality is divided among several regulatory agencies.

● **Solutions**

Staff development solutions for prekindergarten are similar to those presented for kindergarten. These include increasing the availability of early childhood endorsement programs at colleges throughout the state and through distance learning. Acknowledging that creating and maintaining high quality early education and care programs is costly, participants spoke about the need for state funds to be channeled into program operation. Participants also mentioned the need to increase the availability of early childhood program grants so that more local areas can collaborate with Head Start and community programs to provide prekindergarten to increased numbers of three-and four-year-old children.

Participants also suggested encouraging planners of new public buildings to include space suitable for an early childhood program. In this way communities would have safe, appropriate facilities.

Participants suggested collaboration between state agencies and local programs as a way to manage the discrepancies between the various regulations programs must meet. Aligning Nebraska Department of Education Rule 11 and Health and Human Services System licensing regulations was another suggestion. Participants were interested in increasing the quality of all programs and recommended choosing the highest quality criteria in each set of regulations for programs to follow.

■ **Challenge: Prekindergarten—Public Awareness**

● **Issues**

The public awareness issues related to prekindergarten consisted of two different areas. First, participants reported that community members, including funders and public policy makers, often do not understand the issues and needs of young children and their families. Along with this, participants felt that many members of the public do not understand the vital role that early education and care plays in the development of a child; consequently, parents and professionals who work with young children are not valued by society.

This is supported by a statement in *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine:

“The time is long overdue for society to recognize the significance of out-of-home relationships for young children, to esteem those who care for them when their parents are not available, and to compensate them adequately as a means of supporting stability and quality in these relationships for all children, regardless of their family’s income and irrespective of their developmental needs (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 7).”

Underestimating the importance of experiences during the early years translates into a lack of support for parents and early childhood professionals and a lack of financial support for early childhood programs. First, the public lacks an understanding of the needs of young children, which often translates into inappropriate expectations for “readiness” of children before entrance to school and exacerbates the problem of inflated curricular expectations. Second, families and communities are often uninformed regarding the components of a high quality early childhood setting. Therefore, where families have a choice of programs, there is a dearth of objective information on which to choose the program of highest quality.

● **Solutions**

Forum participants proposed a variety of strategies to increase awareness. One group of participants indicated that a campaign of public service announcements could be used to provide information to the general public. Another group of participants suggested providing information to public policy makers and the business community about the economic benefits of high quality early childhood programs. Still others suggested working with individual employers to provide information about child development and related issues at the employers’ job sites.

■ Challenge: Prekindergarten—Curriculum

● Issues

Like the discussion about implementing full-day kindergarten, the majority of input during the policy forums regarding curriculum for prekindergarten focused on participants' concerns about inappropriate performance expectations for young children. Several groups of participants agreed that a high priority is ensuring that programs for preschool aged children are developmentally appropriate and provide rich learning experiences. Participants also discussed the need for preschool and public school standards to be aligned so that programs for children from three to five years of age provide the foundation for later learning. However, participants cautioned that children should not be expected to meet standards that are not founded on research-based knowledge of child development. Finally, one group of participants discussed the desirability of ensuring that the “joyful climate” of preschool is preserved.

● Solutions

Forum participants identified anchoring prekindergarten expectations to the *Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages Three to Five* as a way to ensure that curricular expectations are research based and appropriate for three-to-five-year-old children in early education and care settings. Also, participants suggested that ensuring prekindergarten expectations are appropriate should be a part of a state level regulatory authority for oversight of early childhood programs.

■ Challenge: Prekindergarten—Access

● Issues

Overwhelmingly, participants noted that the lack of access to high quality early childhood programs is an issue related to prekindergarten. Three reasons were stated to account for the lack of access. First, in some rural areas there are no licensed early childhood programs. Second, in most areas, programs that are accredited have lengthy waiting lists. Third, many children do not fall within the criteria for inclusion into

existing categorical programs, yet their families do not make a sufficient income to be able to pay the fees charged to attend early childhood development programs.

● **Solutions**

Participants identified a lack of resources as a primary cause restricting access to high quality programs. Collaboration among programs partnering together to maximize funds was identified as one way to meet this need. A second way would be to designate additional public and private funds to be used for the creation of new programs and the ongoing operation of high quality programs. Finally, funds should be made available to families to assist them in purchasing high quality services for their preschool aged children.

AREA OF SERVICE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:

Best Practices for Kindergarten through Grade Three (K-3)

■ Challenge: Best Practice K-3—Program Implementation

● **Issues**

Like program implementation issues in the areas of full-day kindergarten and prekindergarten, most of the issues in program implementation for best practices in kindergarten through third grade are related to staffing. Personnel preparation is an issue that numerous groups reported as their most important concern. Issues most noted were:

- Difficulty in providing pre-service training in classrooms that mirrors the high poverty, diverse classrooms in which growing numbers of teachers are needed;
- Ensuring that inservice kindergarten and primary grade teachers have current knowledge regarding the needs of children below age nine, and;
- Requiring administrators to have knowledge of the needs of young children in this age range.

Other concerns expressed by forum participants were class sizes and student/ teacher ratios that are not conducive to individualized instruction and classroom experiences that are developmentally appropriate and educationally sound. Maintaining quality and availability of facilities and materials was another concern for some districts.

● **Solutions**

Forum participants noted the importance of leadership in schools. Requiring administrators to take at least one course in early childhood development in order to receive or renew an administrative certificate was suggested as a solution in this area, as well as in the full-day kindergarten solutions. Other solutions presented included: regularly scheduling time for primary teachers to meet to discuss implementation of best practices within the classroom and school; increased funding to maintain small class sizes and low student/teacher ratios; and providing in-service training specifically geared to primary teachers.

■ **Challenge: Best Practice K-3—Public Awareness**

● **Issues**

Several aspects of public awareness were identified in previous sections. Two additional issues were discussed in this section. Forum participants identified a need to create a shared understanding of “Best Practices” in the community. Also, participants spoke of a need to foster parental awareness regarding the vital role they play in their child’s education by communication with their child’s elementary school.

● **Solutions**

Participants recommended creating and disseminating brochures, approaching media outlets about producing and airing public service announcements and utilizing local public access channels as avenues to educate the community on research of best practices for children and the educational system that serves them. Another suggested strategy to increase public awareness is to ensure that parent representatives participate on school district committees alongside district staff. In this way, the same information given to professionals would be available to families.

■ Best Practice K-3—Curriculum

● Issues

Curriculum issues for the primary grades included the concern that there are inappropriate expectations for curriculum and pressure for students to perform to standards. This concern was also articulated as a difficulty to effectively individualize instruction for children of all ability levels in some classrooms and schools. Related to these is a concern about a lack of continuity between prekindergarten programs and the kindergarten and primary grades. Participants spoke about a sudden shift to a “text book” mentality once children reach school age. This shift disregards children’s learning styles and makes transitions difficult for both children and their families.

● Solutions

Groups of forum participants discussed the importance of aligning grade-level standards to best practices and linking assessment to the classroom instruction. Participants also suggested creating transition plans for all children. These plans would partner the child’s family, the school, and the child’s early education and care provider. The transition plans would ease the transition from the early childhood setting into kindergarten, and then from kindergarten into the primary grades. The transition plans would also help staff at each level become aware of the expectations at the other program levels.

AREA OF SERVICE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:

Services for Children Birth through Age Three (Ages B-3)

■ Challenge: Services for Children Ages B-3—Program Implementation

● Issues

Many program implementation issues for children birth through age three are similar to those of prekindergarten. In addition, two program implementation issues were discussed for the first time: 1) providing resources to families and early education

and care providers regarding ways to support the development of healthy and emotionally secure young children; and 2) ensuring that infants and toddlers with special needs are identified as early as possible.

Funding and maintaining programs for children of teen parents was also noted as a concern, because not only must the needs of the infants and toddlers be met, but also the educational needs of parents who have not yet completed high school.

● **Solutions**

Participants identified three ways to meet these issues of services for children ages B-3:

- Provide statewide home visitation services to all families who would choose to access the service. The purpose of the home visit would be to disseminate information and strategies for parents to help them create the emotionally secure environment that will foster brain growth to help maximize the child's potential.
- Reduce the caseloads of services coordinators who work with families of infants and toddlers who have disabilities, which would allow the families to receive more information and build stronger relationships with services providers. This would, in turn, increase the ability of the family to function and to provide for the needs of the child with disabilities.
- Increase the number of on-site child care centers for the children of teen parents in high schools throughout the state and provide multigenerational programming for the young children and their parents. These centers support the growth and development of young children and encourage higher levels of education and better life chances for the teen parents.

■ **Challenge: Services for Children Ages B-3—Public Awareness**

● **Issues**

An important issue, which surfaced in the area of service for children ages birth-3 as well as in the prekindergarten area, is the lack of parental awareness of the elements that constitute quality care. Related to that concern is the absence of a statewide

system that reports on the quality of care offered in early childhood settings. A license to operate by the Nebraska Health and Human Services System simply allows a program to operate legally; it is not proof of a high quality program. Accreditation, on the other hand, is highly correlated with high quality practices. Early childhood programs can be accredited through one of several accrediting bodies (most often either the NAEYC Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation or the National Family Child Care Association). However, information about accreditation is not universally known within the early childhood education and care community or among the general public. Further, various levels of quality between licensing and accreditation are not differentiated in any system in Nebraska. This lack of information makes choosing high quality care difficult.

Two other issues regarding public awareness, which were presented during the forums, center on the medical needs of infants and toddlers. First, Nebraska's infant mortality rate of 6.8 infant deaths per 1000 live births (information from 2001) places the state near the middle of the rankings for the United States (US Census Bureau, 2005). Second, primary care physicians do not always have information about the services for infants and toddlers that are available in the community.

● **Solutions**

Participants at several different forums discussed the idea of a quality rating system for early education and care programs in the state. A quality rating system identifies criteria that are indicative of various levels of quality. Providers who choose to be part of the system are given a rating based on the quality of the practices evident in the program, similar to the five-star system used to rate hotels for the tourism industry. A quality rating system for early education and care programs would give parents an objective way to determine the quality of programs and settings the family may be considering. An added benefit of the rating system is that providers who have been implementing high quality practices would have a way to communicate this to prospective clients and would be recognized for their efforts.

Participants suggested that local advertising target expectant mothers—especially mothers with low to moderate incomes who may not have adequate private health insurance—with information about locally available services as a way to lower the infant mortality rate. A sustained public awareness campaign about the nutritional and medical needs of infants, and strategies for preventing child abuse were other suggestions to help reduce infant mortality. Finally, a targeted strategy to reach the medical profession with information regarding services for infants and toddlers would increase referrals to appropriate service providers.

■ **Challenge: Services for Children Ages B-3—Access**

● **Issues**

Much like the access issues for prekindergarten, the issues related to access to services for children birth through age three stem from the availability and affordability of services. In many regions of the state there is a dearth of programs serving infants and toddlers, much less programs of high quality. While the cost of providing care for preschool-aged children is high, the cost for providing care for infants and toddlers is proportionately higher. This exacerbates the problems of paying and keeping a well-educated staff. The high cost of providing care also impacts the ability of parents to afford high quality infant and toddler programs for their children. An additional issue concerning access to services for infants and toddlers is related to health care needs of children through age three. Families who rely on Medicaid may have limited access to specialists who are most knowledgeable about child development and are able to identify patterns of atypical development. This may result in delays for families in receiving early childhood special education and related services for children who have developmental disabilities.

● **Solutions**

Several ideas were presented to increase the availability of child care. Among these, participants suggested providing tax and business incentives to recruit additional child care providers. These would be similar to the incentives given to other sectors of the

business community. Additionally, participants proposed providing tax incentives for businesses if the business would provide child care for children of employees. This would boost productivity for the employer and help to increase access to infant and toddler programs.

AREA OF SERVICE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:

Family Involvement

■ Challenge: Family Involvement—Program Implementation

● Issues

The most often cited challenge presented by forum participants in the area of family involvement was the need to provide information and opportunities for families in a way that is useful and accessible for the families. Family involvement is particularly challenging when service providers and family participants do not share the same language. Forum participants also noted that families lead very busy lives. Some family members work opposite shifts or shifts do not coincide with service providers' work time, and some families work multiple jobs to "make ends meet." Program implementation issues include: finding time when both program staff and families can meet, providing services in a way that communicates respect for the family, and ensuring that all staff value the expertise families have about their children. Additional issues that program providers face include large caseloads and increasing amounts of paperwork.

● Solutions

Creativity was the common thread uniting the solutions presented by participants for the issues related to family and staff time. Ideas focused on non-traditional types of family involvement. Rather than home visits, staff could agree to meet at places more convenient to the family, including job sites or other community programs. For families who have Internet access, much communication could be shared through email correspondence rather than insisting on the traditional parent/teacher conference. Additionally, greater emphasis on finding bilingual staff, or collaborating

with other service providers to jointly employ staff who speak languages other than English, would increase the involvement of families. Further, participants noted that services are strengthened when staff of schools and community agencies work as a team rather than in competition with each other.

■ **Challenge: Family Involvement—Public Awareness**

● **Issues**

Two areas dominated the conversations around public awareness in the area of family involvement. First, as reported earlier, families sometimes underestimate the influence they have over the growth and learning of their children. Family members do not always understand the ways that they can affect their child's brain development and potential. Second, forum participants identified the lack of information available to parents regarding quality early childhood programs as a challenge for family involvement.

● **Solutions**

Many participants felt that business communities should provide opportunities, either paid or during staff breaks, for service providers to present information to employees directly at the business site about parenting issues, health and nutrition, as well as typical child development. This would also be an excellent opportunity to share information about available community services.

Forum participants again suggested a quality-rating system as a way to help families become aware of the differences in quality of care offered in the community. As discussed earlier, the quality rating system would give parents valuable information about what to expect of a child care provider. The rating system would also provide a reliable way to “shop and compare” before choosing child care.

Several ideas that were presented as solutions in the other areas were presented as solutions for these issues. Programs that provide regularly scheduled home visits that are available to all families, beginning with the first visit during pregnancy and

ending with the last visits near the child's third birthday, would allow the families to receive current information about typical growth and development (i.e., what to expect next) and strategies to support the child's growth and development.

Section 3: Summary

Regardless of the part of the state or the population density of the county, participants at the policy partner forums voiced similar concerns. Three themes emerged:

- Curriculum expectations
- Infrastructure issues
- Public awareness of young children's issues

The most often mentioned concerns were about curriculum expectations. Participants repeatedly expressed that early childhood programs for children from birth through the child's third grade year should focus attention on all areas of growth and development, including the child's mental health and emotional development. Specifically, participants were concerned about promoting an unbalanced educational process that focuses on academic skills at the expense of developing skills to enable children to function as "social beings" and contributing members of a community.

Infrastructure issues were also important to participants. The ability of schools, Head Start programs and community providers to find and keep well-educated and highly skilled staff was foremost on the minds of many participants. Participants identified distinct challenges in this area. Strengthening the post secondary early childhood programs throughout the state, and increasing their accessibility to greater numbers of students throughout the state was a large concern. The urgent need to find ways for programs to pay a living wage to well-educated teachers and support staff was also discussed at length. The crucial role administrators play in providing leadership to early childhood programs and community partnerships was in evidence by the number of participants who advocated that school administrators be required to take coursework in early childhood education. Solutions to facilities and financing issues were consistently identified. Most of the solutions require legislative changes. Participants called upon state level policy makers to assist in removing barriers and adequately financing early education.

Public awareness was divided into three categories:

- Unique learning and developmental needs of young children
- The important role of parents
- Defining and expecting quality programs and services

Participants discussed the need for greater awareness of the unique needs of young children by members of the community. This includes administrators, business and community persons, policy makers, and the general public. Forum participants also spoke of public awareness needs as they relate to families. Specifically, increasing parental awareness of their own importance as the first and most important teachers for their children. Participants also spoke about the impact that parents and other family members have on the development of their children through nurturing activities and through involvement, throughout the early years, in their child's education and care. Also, participants spoke about the importance of disseminating information about quality of programs for young children. Participants discussed raising awareness of the aspects of quality in programs for children from birth through age eight, and in settings from family child care to public school classrooms.

* * * * *

The attendance at the forums indicated high interest in early childhood issues. Participants thoughtfully and articulately presented their ideas to improve the lives of young children in Nebraska. The level of agreement showed that the time is right for a greater public and private investment in early childhood.

References

- Administration for Children and Families. (2004). *Head Start program information report for 2002-2003 program year—state level summary*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Administration for Children and Families, retrieved from www.act.gov 12-29-04.
- Administration for Children and Families. (2003). *Head Start FACES: A whole-child perspective on program performance*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Administration for Children and Families (1996). 45 CFR, Part 1304. Washington DC: Author.
- Bowman, B., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, M.S. (Eds.) National Research Council (2000). *Eager to learn: Education our preschoolers*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.
- Bredekamp, S. & Copple, C. (Eds.) (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs: Revised edition*. Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2005). Retrieved from www.cdc/nchs/fastats 6-15-05.
- Cryan, J.R., Bandy-Hedden, I.G., Sheehan, R., Wiechel, J. (1992). Success outcomes of full-day kindergarten: More positive behavior and increased achievement in the years after. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 7 (2), 187-203.
- Council for Exceptional Children/Division for Early Childhood (2000).
- Diamond, K.E., & Stacey, S. (2000). The other children at preschool: Experiences of typically developing children in inclusive programs. *Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series* No. 2, 59-68.
- Education Commission of the States (2005). *State statutes regarding kindergarten*. Retrieved March 1, 2005 from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/58/28/5828.htm>
- Edwards, C, Knoche, L., Raikes, A., Raikes, H., Torquati, J., Wilcox, B., et al. (2002). *Child care characteristics and quality in Nebraska*. Lincoln, NE. Midwest Child Care Research Consortium.
- Elicker, J., & Mathur, S., (1997). What do they do all day? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12 (459-480).

- Fusaro, J.A. (1997). The effect of full-day kindergarten on student achievement: A meta-analysis. *Child Study Journal*, 27 (4), 269-277.
- Gormly, W.G., Dawson, B., Gayer, T., Phillips, D., (2004). *The effects of Oklahoma's Universal Pre-K Program on school readiness*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Center for Research on Children in the U.S.
- Harms, T., Clifford, R.M., Cryer, D. (1998). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hart, B., & Risley, T.R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Heckman, J.J. (1999, August). *Policies to foster human capital*. NBER Working Paper No. W 7288. Retrieved December 29, 2004, from http://www.papers.ssrn.com/so/3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=198970
- Helburn, S., Culkin, M., Howes, C., Mocan, N., Morris, J., Phillipsen, L., et. al. (1995). *Cost, quality and child outcomes in child care centers*. Denver, CO: Economics Department of University of Colorado at Denver, pp. 1-17.
- Henry, G.T., Gordon, C.S., Henderson, L.W., Mashburn, A.J., Ponder, B.D., & Rickman, D.K., (2003). *Report of the findings from the early childhood study: 2001-02*. Atlanta, GA: Author.
- Holahan, A., & Castenbader, V. (2000). A comparison of developmental gains for preschool children with disabilities in inclusive and self-contained classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 20 (4), 224-235.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, P.L. 105-17 (IDEA '97).
- Johnson, J.M., (2002). *Kids count in Nebraska*. Voices for Children in Nebraska. Omaha, NE.
- Lynch, R.G., (2004). *Exceptional returns: Economic, fiscal, and social benefits of investment in early childhood development*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- Masse, L.N., & Barnett, W.S. (2002). *A benefit cost analysis of the abecedarian early childhood intervention*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
- Midwest Child Care Research Consortium. (2004). *Policy Brief, Number 5*. Lincoln, NE: Center for Children, Families and the Law.
- Midwest Child Care Research Consortium. (2004). *Policy Brief Number 6*. Lincoln, NE: Center for Children, Families and the Law.

National Center for Educational Statistics (2004).

National Head Start Association, retrieved from www.nhsa.org 12-22-04.

National Institute for Early Education Research. (2003). *The state of preschool*. New Jersey: Author.

Nebraska Department of Education & Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. (2005). *Nebraska early learning guidelines for ages 3 to 5*. Lincoln, NE: Author.

Nebraska Department of Education (2004). *Rule 51: Regulations and standards for special education programs*. Lincoln, NE: Author.

Nebraska Department of Education (2002). *Rule 11: Regulations for early childhood programs*. Lincoln, NE: Author.

North Central Association, Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (2005). *School accreditation, standard and criteria: Early childhood education programs, elementary, middle level, secondary, and unit schools*. Tempe, AZ: Author.

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). *Trends in the well-being of America's children and youth 2003*. Washington DC: Author.

Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M, Culkin, M.L., Howes, C., Yazejian, N., et.al. (2000). *The children of the cost, quality, and outcomes study go to school: Technical report*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center.

Proctor, B.D., & Dalaker, J. (2003), United States Census Bureau, Current Population Reports. P60-222. *Poverty in the United States: 2002*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Rolnick, A., & Grunewald, R. (2003). *Early childhood development: Economic development with a high public return*. Minneapolis, MN: Retrieved from <http://www.minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/03-03/earlychild.cfm>

Schweinhart, L., Barnes, H.V., and Weikart, D. (1993). *Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 27*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

- Schweinhart, L.J., Barnett, W.S., Belfield, C.R., Montie, J., Nores, M., Xiang, Z. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The Perry Preschool study through age 40*. (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.
- Shin, H.B. (2005). *School enrollment: social and economic characteristics of students: October 2003*. Washington DC: United States Census Bureau.
- Shonkoff, J.P., & Phillips, D.A. (Eds) National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Shore, R. (1997). *Rethinking the Brain*. New York: Families and Work Institute
- United States Census Bureau (2002). Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/threshold/thresh01.html>
- United States Government Accountability Office (2004). *Prekindergarten: Four selected states expanded access by relying on schools and existing providers of early education and care to provide services*. GAO-04-852.
- Walston, J., & West, J. (2004). *Full-day and half-day kindergarten in the United States: Findings from the early childhood longitudinal study, kindergarten class of 1998-99*. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.
- Willer, B. (Ed.) (1990, reprint 1998). *Reaching the full cost of quality in early childhood programs*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Xaing, Z., & Schweinhart, L., (2002). *Effects five years later: The Michigan school readiness program evaluation through age 10*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Attachment A

EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY STUDY LEADERSHIP TEAM

Vickie Anderson

Vice President, Nebraska State Education Association, Omaha

Alicia Baillie

Faculty, Early Childhood
Southeast Community College, Lincoln

Marge Beatty

Administrator, ESU 16, Ogallala

Beth Birnstihl

Associate Dean, Cooperative Extension
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln

Cheryl Blue

Representative, Nebraska Association for
Supervision & Curriculum Development,
Plattsmouth

LaWanda Buck

Prekindergarten Teacher, Omaha

Rosemary Cervantes

ESL Program Coordinator, ESU 10, Kearney

Kim Chase (formerly Peterson)

Member, Nebraska Board of Education
(resigned June 2005);
Family Child Care Provider

Linda Chatelain

Director, Special Education, ESU 7, Columbus

Marcia Corr

Administrator, Office of Early Childhood/Early
Childhood Grant Program, Nebraska
Department of Education, Lincoln

Scott Dodson

President, Nebraska Association of
Elementary School Principals, Norfolk

Sherry Dostal

Special Education Teacher, Omaha Public
Schools, Omaha

Mary Drew

Elementary Principal, Westside Community
Schools, Omaha

Christine Drews

Parent, prekindergarten children, Gordon

Carolyn Edwards

Professor, Psychology, University of
Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln

Richard Eisenhauer

Superintendent, Lexington Public Schools,
Lexington

Dan Ernst

President, Nebraska Association of School
Administrators, Waverly

Paula Eurek

Project Director, Together for Kids and
Families
Nebraska Health & Human Services System,
Lincoln

Carol Fichter

Director, Early Childhood Training Center,
Omaha

David Friedli

High School Principal, Umon'hon' Nation
Public Schools, Macy

Sue Galvin

Elementary Principal, South Sioux Community
Schools, South Sioux City

Sally Ganem

Elementary Principal, Fremont Public Schools,
Fremont

Jane Gibson

Kindergarten Teacher, Fremont Public
Schools, Fremont

John Hakonson

Superintendent, Sidney Public Schools,
Sidney

Gladys Haynes

Director, EDUCARE, Omaha

Barbara Jackson

Director of Education & Child Development,
Munroe-Meyer Institute, University of
Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha

LeaAnn Johnson

Chair, Early Childhood Interagency
Coordinating Council, Lincoln

Eleanor Kirkland

Director, Head Start State Collaboration
Office/Even Start, Nebraska Department of
Education, Lincoln

Marjorie Kostelnik

Dean, College of Education and Human
Sciences
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln

Richana Lessley

Parent, prekindergarten children, Omaha

Catie Limbach

Kindergarten teacher, Crawford Public
Schools, Crawford

David Ludwig

Elementary Principal, Wisner-Pilger Public Schools, Wisner

Kim Madsen

Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education, Chadron State College, Chadron

Katie Mathews

Elementary Principal, Kearney Public Schools, Kearney

Betty Medinger

Administrator, Child Care, CCDF State Plan Nebraska Health & Human Services System, Lincoln

Sharon Meyer

Administrator, School Improvement/Accreditation Nebraska Department of Education, Lincoln

Nicholas Meysenburg

Elementary Principal, Millard Public Schools, Omaha

Kent Miller

Superintendent, South Central Nebraska Unified System 5, Fairfield

Dawn Mollenkopf

Assistant Professor, Teacher Education University of Nebraska at Kearney, Kearney

Kathy Moore

Executive Director, Voices For Children, Omaha

Donna Moss

President, Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors, Hastings

Duane Obermier

President, Nebraska State Education Association, Lincoln

Sue Obermiller

President, Nebraska Head Start Association, Loup City

Mary Jo Pankoke

Executive Director, Nebraska Children & Families Foundation, Lincoln

Marilyn Peterson

Administrator, Title I, No Child Left Behind Nebraska Department of Education, Lincoln

Sandra Peterson

Director, Special Education, ESU 3, Omaha

Helen Raikes

Researcher, Midwest Child Care Consortium, Omaha

Mary Beth Rathe

Director, Association of Nebraska Community Action Agencies, Lincoln

Nancy Rosenow

director, First Plymouth Early Education Programs/ Dimensions Education Research Foundation, Lincoln

Jay Sears

Staff member, Nebraska State Education Association, Lincoln

Jerry Sellentin

Executive Director, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Lincoln

Deila Steiner

Director, Early Childhood Programs Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln

Jan Thelen

Coordinator, Early Childhood Special Education Nebraska Department of Education, Lincoln

Ann Thober

Kindergarten teacher, Norris Public Schools, Firth

Joyce Thomas

Director, Santee Head Start, Niobrara

Nancy Vossler

First grade teacher, Friend Public Schools, Friend

Patti Waltman

President, Nebraska Family Child Care Association, North Platte

Steve Wilson

Elementary Principal, Centura Public Schools, Cairo

Denise Wright

Director, Early Development Network/Early Childhood, ESU 13, Scottsbluff

Jose Zapata

Executive Director, Central Nebraska Community Services, Loup City

Linda Zinke

Executive Director, Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children, Lincoln

* * * * *

Melody Hobson

Early Childhood Policy Study Coordinator, Office of Early Childhood, Nebraska Department of Education, Lincoln

Betsy Kosier

Meeting Facilitator, Interaction Alliance, Lincoln

Early Childhood Policy Study Focus Group/Discussion Forum Questions

SET 1:

- 1a. What are the early childhood issues...for families, schools, programs, and communities?
- b. What is the impact of **not** addressing these issues?
2. As you think about the children in your community, what do you want prekindergarten and kindergarten to be like for them?
3. Reflect on the "Vision for Early Childhood". How do *your* thoughts and ideas fit with the vision of the Policy Study Leadership Team for supporting young children prior to, and including, kindergarten?
4. What needs to happen so that families, schools, and communities can partner effectively to achieve this vision?
5. What are your recommendations for next steps to make the vision a reality?

Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood, July 2004

SET 2:

1. Reflect on the "Vision for Early Childhood". How do *your* thoughts and ideas fit with the vision of the Policy Study Leadership Team for supporting young children prior to, and including, kindergarten?
2. As you think about the children in your community, what do you want prekindergarten and kindergarten to be like for them?
3. What is the role of the schools in the overall provision of prekindergarten and kindergarten services to children and their families?
4. What are your recommendations for next steps to make the vision a reality?

Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood, August 2004

Glossary of Acronyms

AA	Associate of Arts Degree
ACF	Administration on Children, Youth and Families The federal agency funding state, territory, local, and tribal organizations to provide family assistance (welfare), child support, child care, Head Start, child welfare, and other programs relating to children and families.
BA	Bachelor of Arts Degree
CCP	Child Care Professional Credential
CDA	Child Development Associate Credential
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
DEC	Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Early Childhood
EC Certificate	Early Childhood teaching certificate
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECICC	Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council Governor-appointed statewide council to advise state government on the improvement of services affecting young children and their families.
ECPA	Early Childhood Program Aid
ECTC	Early Childhood Training Center
ELCS-K	Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, class of 1998-99
ESU	Educational Service Unit
FACES	Family and Child Experiences Survey
GAO	Government Accountability Office Investigative arm of the U.S. Congress charged with examining matters relating to the receipt and payment of public funds
GED	General Education Development testing
HHSS	Nebraska Health and Human Services System

Attachment C

IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Federal law that works to improve results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities
Leadership Team	Nebraska Early Childhood Policy Study Leadership Team
MCCRC	Midwest Child Care Research Consortium
MEAP	Michigan Educational Assessment Program
MSRP	Michigan School Readiness Program
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NASA	Nebraska Association of School Administrators
NASB	Nebraska Association of School Boards
NCEDL	National Center for Early Development and Learning
NDE	Nebraska Department of Education
NeAEYC	Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children
SOSR	State of the School's Report Report compiled by NDE of demographic and student achievement data for Nebraska schools