



Quality Early Childhood Education  
For All Nebraska Families

## Press Release

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For Immediate Release:

### **“We Care for Kids” Campaign Launches in Nebraska**

*Focus is quality early childhood education for all Nebraska families*

June 15, 2022 – A statewide partnership of public and private organizations today announced the launch of *We Care for Kids*, a public outreach campaign to build support for quality early childhood education for all Nebraska families. A virtual event kicked off the campaign and featured an array of state and community leaders who spoke about the value of early childhood education, including University of Nebraska President Ted Carter and Senator John Stinner.

[We Care for Kids](#) is a collaborative, community-based initiative to help meet the need for quality early childhood programs and services across the state. According to the [Nebraska Community Foundation](#) which works in more than 250 communities across the state, child care consistently ranks as one of the most urgent issues facing communities. More than [three-fourths](#) of Nebraska children under the age of six live in homes where all adults work, making it essential that families have access to safe, loving, and stimulating early childhood education with the help of quality early childhood educators.

“Children who receive quality early childhood education are better prepared to learn, more likely to read by the fourth grade, graduate school, and go on to college,” said Sam Meisels, Founding Executive Director at the [Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska](#), which is coordinating the campaign. “The more we care about bringing quality early childhood education to all families, the more we ensure that Nebraska thrives.”

Access to quality early childhood education for all Nebraska children is at the heart of *We Care for Kids*. The campaign aims to support families with resources and tools to help them recognize and seek out quality early care and learning for their children, especially in under-resourced communities. A special focus is the importance of early childhood professionals and the need to ensure that they are supported and can afford to stay in the profession.

The campaign provides families with information on quality early childhood education through a new [website](#) that provides easy access to local early education programs and providers and a host of other resources that have been developed by state agencies and organizations, including the [Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services](#), the [Nebraska Department of Education](#), [Nebraska Extension](#), and [First Five Nebraska](#). A new [community toolkit](#) provides resources to support local efforts and comes ahead of a state media campaign that begins later this summer.

“As a campaign partner, [Communities for Kids](#) is already working in 51 Nebraska communities to help address the shortage of options for quality early childhood education,” said Marti Beard, Vice President of Early Childhood Programs at the [Nebraska Children and Families Foundation](#) and a driving force behind supporting local efforts. “*We Care for Kids* will bring the stories of Nebraska communities to light and is an important galvanizing force for our efforts statewide.”

*We Care for Kids* launches at a time of great strain for early childhood programs and, in particular, the professionals who care for and teach young children. In addition to a statewide shortage of programs – [91 percent](#) of Nebraska counties with child care facilities do not have enough available places to meet the demand – the ongoing pandemic has taken a toll on the early childhood workforce. Two-thirds of licensed center-based providers [recently surveyed](#) by the Buffett Institute said they were experiencing turnover, and of those providers, nearly 70 percent reported that staff had left the profession. Nine in 10 providers employing staff have had extreme difficulty hiring for open positions, citing a lack of applicants and inability to offer sufficient pay, among other reasons.

“*We Care for Kids* embraces the critical role early childhood educators have in our children's lives. My community, like many others in Nebraska, needs more quality early childhood educators so that families can work and know that their children are being prepared for success in school and life,” said Colten Venteicher, who is a member of the [campaign's advisory group](#) and helps lead community efforts in [Gothenburg](#). “Early childhood educators become an important part of families with young children and play a huge role in helping Nebraska communities thrive. They are an extension of our community and an important part of our family.”

Nebraskans are encouraged to visit [NebraskaCaresForKids.org](#) to learn more and sign up to join the campaign. Early childhood educators are invited to share their stories via the website and the campaign will offer additional resources over time. Information and materials are available in Spanish at [Portodoslosninos.org](#).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [Preschool Development Birth-Five Grant](#), the [Holland Foundation](#), and the [Buffett Early Childhood Institute](#) provide funding for the campaign.

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## **We Care for Kids Campaign Advisory Group**

More than 20 early childhood champions are members of the [We Care for Kids Campaign Advisory Group](#), serving as statewide ambassadors and who are available for media interviews. The group includes educators, parents, community leaders, advocates, and philanthropists.

Please contact Campaign Manager Kara Ficke at [kara@nebraskacaresforkids.org](mailto:kara@nebraskacaresforkids.org) or 402.226.6500 to coordinate media availability, interview a local early childhood educator, or arrange a site visit to a local program. Photography and digital graphics are available upon request.

Kyle Arganbright, Community Banker and Mayor, Family and Community Representative (Valentine, NE)

Marti Beard, Vice President of Early Childhood Programs, [Nebraska Children and Families Foundation](#)

Lorena Beckius, Marketing Coordinator at Wolf Auto, Family and Community Representative (Ogallala, NE)

Anne Brandt, Executive Director, [Lincoln Littles](#)

Cama Charlet, Associate Director, Professional Learning, [Buffett Early Childhood Institute](#)

Emily Fern, Grow Kids Associate Director at Good News Church, Family and Community Representative (Omaha, NE)

Tawana Grover, Superintendent, [Grand Island Public Schools](#)

Holly Hatton-Bowers, Assistant Professor and Early Childhood Education Extension Specialist, [Nebraska Extension](#)

Nicole Johnson, Director, [ESU 13](#), serving the Panhandle

Amy LaPointe, Education Director, [Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska](#)

Carrie Malek-Madani, Director of Marketing and Communications, [Nebraska Community Foundation](#)

Michael Medwick, Strategic Communications Manager, [First Five Nebraska](#)

Jason Prokop, Director, [First Five Nebraska](#)

Jessie Rasmussen, President, [Buffett Early Childhood Fund](#)

Mohammad Sahil, Education and Training Supervisor, [Lutheran Family Services](#)

John Spatz, Executive Director, [Nebraska Association of School Boards](#)

Angie Stenger, Executive Director, [Northeast Nebraska Growing Together](#)

Sue Sullivan, Early Childhood Educator, [South Sioux City School District](#)

Fawn Taylor, Vice President of Family and Community Services, [Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative](#)

Albert Varas, Chief Executive Officer, [Latino Center of the Midlands](#)

Colten Venteicher, Attorney, Bacon, Vinton & Venteicher, L.L.C. and Board President, [Gothenburg Early Childhood Learning Coalition](#)

Renee Wessels, Associate Executive Director for Strategy and External Affairs, [Buffett Early Childhood Institute](#)

Jeff Yost, President and CEO, [Nebraska Community Foundation](#)

## Quotes

“Early childhood professionals are an integral part of the economic growth and vitality of all Nebraska communities; when child care providers are not working the community is not working. How to develop and support access to high-quality child care is a conversation that is happening across our state, from business leaders, schools, health care facilities and parents, this topic is a priority area. By engaging local leaders, utilizing key data points and resources, and making connections for support, communities can, and are, supporting early childhood professionals by finding right-sized solutions that work for their unique community.” – **Marti Beard, Vice President Early Childhood Programs, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation**

“Early child development matters and depends on everyone in our community to be successful. As a parent and business partner, I see the importance of supporting access to quality early childhood education. We need to focus on our children because they are our future, and 90 percent of their brain is developed by age five. On the other side, we can have quality employees if they have peace of mind knowing their kids are receiving the best care possible.” – **Lorena Beckius, Marketing Coordinator, Wolf Auto Ogallala**

“Opportunities for all children to receive early care and education is vital to the well-being and future success of our state. Investing in children during the most critical time of brain development equips them with the building blocks necessary to become adults who are able to relate to others, think creatively and critically, and contribute to society. The quality of care and education children receive in the first five years is directly impacted by the individuals providing the care. We are currently seeing a workforce crisis in this industry primarily due to lack of pay and benefits. It is essential we develop solutions to recognize and compensate the early childhood field to retain and attract those who are passionate about this crucial work. Working early childhood educators, our children, and our communities depend on it.” – **Anne Brandt, Executive Director, Lincoln Littles**

“The commitment to early childhood education yields one of the most critical returns on investment for all communities. When we partner together, the impact of quality early childhood

education is illuminated for all kids whether they are enrolled in in-home centers, in school-based centers, or in community-based centers. Wherever there is quality and love, we show how much we care for kids and ultimately the impact pays off from generation to generation all across Nebraska.” – **Dr. Tawana Grover, Superintendent, Grand Island Public Schools**

“We cannot have reasonably well-informed public conversations about our state’s most urgent social and economic issues without also addressing the challenges facing professional early childhood educators. Nebraskans have a right to know why this segment of our statewide workforce is crucial to enabling families and communities to thrive, and what’s at stake if we struggle to keep talented workers in this skilled and demanding profession. The *We Care for Kids* campaign is an important step in building those conversations throughout the state.” – **Michael Medwick, Strategic Communications Manager, First Five Nebraska**

“The K-12 community in Nebraska understands the importance of quality early childhood opportunities for all children. We have always believed the effort made to engage young children by professionals is an investment, not an expense. For families and communities there are few things you can invest in that would provide a higher rate of return than quality early childhood opportunities. Supporting and retaining a strong early childhood workforce will help Nebraska thrive well into the future.” – **John Spatz, Executive Director, Nebraska Association of School Boards**

“My goal is to work collaboratively with parents and professional educators to realize students’ potential. I believe in quality early childhood education that encourages learning through hands-on experiences and opportunities for multi-sensory exploration and discovery, while celebrating the wonder of all children’s cultures and values. It inspires children on their lifelong journey of growth.” – **Sue Sullivan, Early Childhood Educator, South Sioux City School District**

“In today’s economy, people can live and work wherever they choose. Nebraska communities must invest in high quality early childhood education because it is what young families require in the places they choose to live, work, and raise their families. From a people attraction perspective, a workforce perspective, and most importantly, as an investment in the future of Nebraska, quality early childhood education is non-negotiable.” – **Jeff Yost, President and CEO of Nebraska Community Foundation**