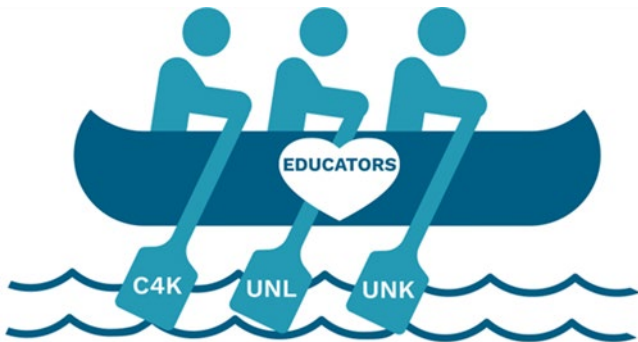
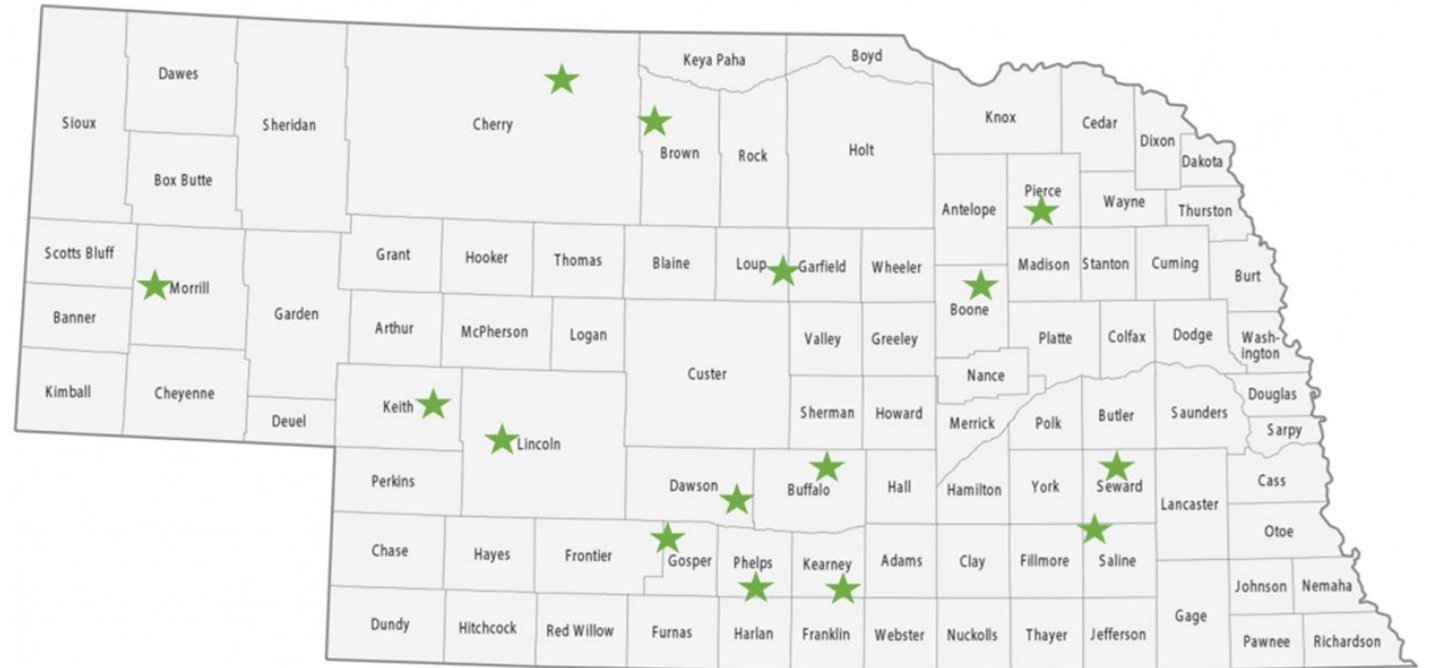


Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Workforce (KNEW): Committed to Growing & Supporting Early Childhood Educators in Nebraska



Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Education Workforce
PROJECT K.N.E.W.

KNEW Communities



Ainsworth
Albion/Boone County
Bridgeport
Buffalo County
Dawson County
Eustis - Elwood

Friend
Holdrege
Keith County
Loup / Garfield Counties
Minden

North Platte
Pierce County
Seward County
Valentine / Cherry County

UNK Team



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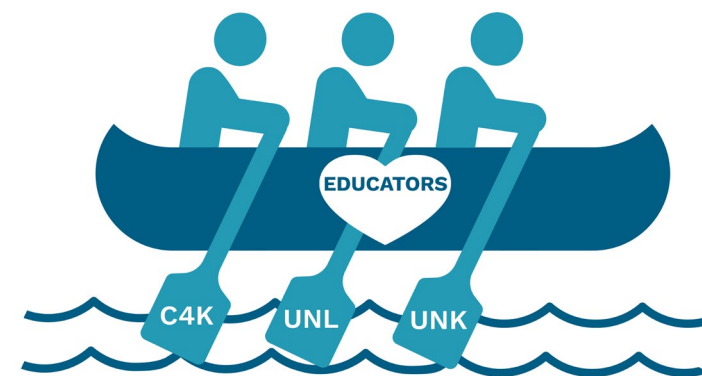


Mary J. Girard MSN, RN
Project Coordinator



EXTENSION

Early Childhood



Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Education Workforce

PROJECT K.N.E.W.

Communities for Kids (C4K)



KNEW'S PROJECT GOALS:

To increase recruitment and retention of rural early childhood educators who educate children from birth to eight years old, with the ultimate goals of children receiving quality child care, families having the opportunity to work, and for rural communities to thrive.

Specific Aims of KNEW:

1. Enhance and strengthen rural collaborative community partnerships.
2. Research social networks and best practices that identify gaps and opportunities for communities to collectively address retention and recruitment of providers and educators in rural communities.
3. Engage in outreach alongside local community organizations with shared interests in early childhood education for sustainability and scalability.
4. Develop a professional learning experience tailored to the learning needs of providers and teachers in rural communities.



How did the project come about?

- The KNEW project aims to address this childcare crisis with a focus on rural Nebraska.
- NE is more Rural than national average
- Lack of infrastructure & travel
- Challenges for educators: providers deal with challenging behaviors, need additional support in having difficult conversations



Childcare Deserts

- According to the Center for American Progress, 28% of Nebraskans live in a “childcare desert.”
- A childcare desert is defined as any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no childcare providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed childcare slots.

(Center for American Progress, 2018)



Bipartisan Policy Center



- In October of 2023, the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) found that rural families were experiencing challenges accessing and affording childcare and education programs. Statistics are showing that the challenges facing rural communities exceed those of urban areas.
- 86% of rural parents, who had one partner not working, reported that childcare responsibilities influenced their decision to not work.

- The Save the Children Action Network surveyed rural families and found that **48% of rural parents** had to call out or miss a shift at work due to difficulty securing childcare.
- 38% of rural parents had to leave the workforce altogether due to the inability to find affordable childcare.

IMPACTS ON THE ECONOMY: MISSING WORK & LACK OF UPWARD MOBILITY

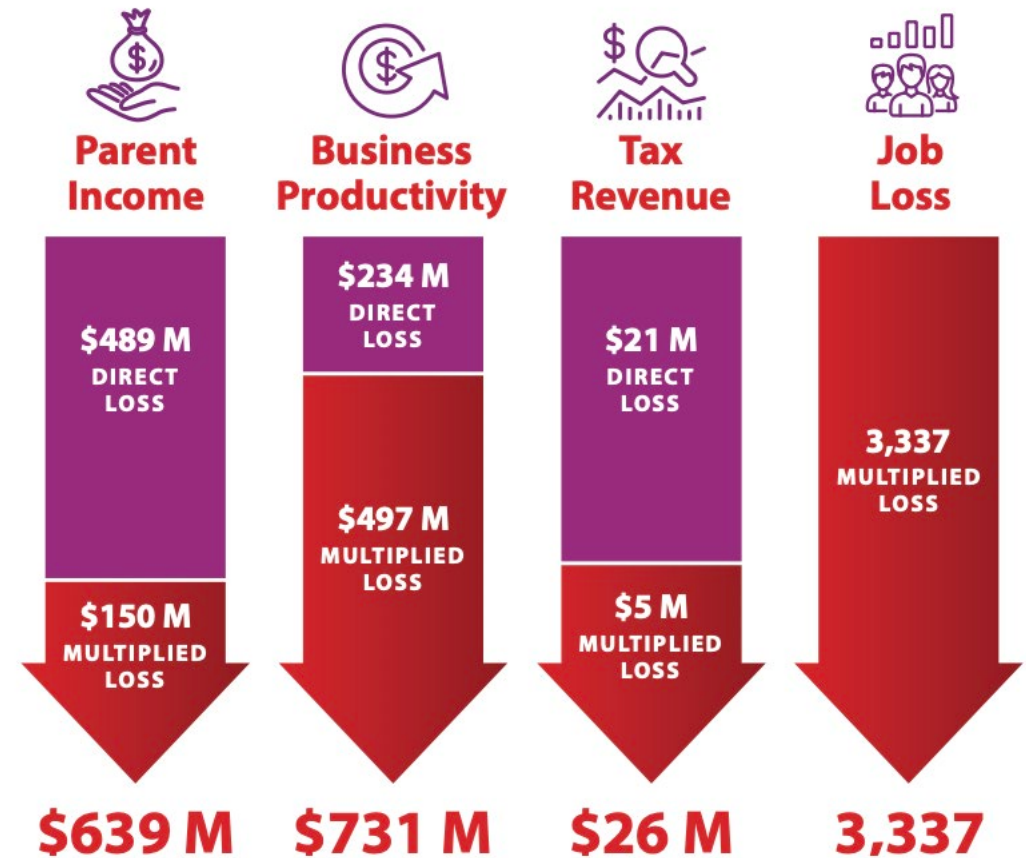


Public Support

- In Nebraska, the We Care for Kids 2024 Statewide Survey found nearly 80% of Nebraskans overwhelmingly support making major public investments (i.e., as much as \$190 million dollars of state funds each year for the next decade) in guaranteeing access to quality, affordable childcare and early learning.

Economic impacts of inadequate childcare access in Nebraska

- In Nebraska, **\$745 million annually in direct losses** due to Insufficient options for stable, reliable childcare (First Five Nebraska & UNL Bureau of Business Research).



Funding through Washington DC

Congressionally Funded Community Projects

- Supported by Senator Fischer

KNEW Project had three potential landing spots in Washington DC

- Department of Labor
- Department of Health and Human Services
- **Department of Education**

U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer

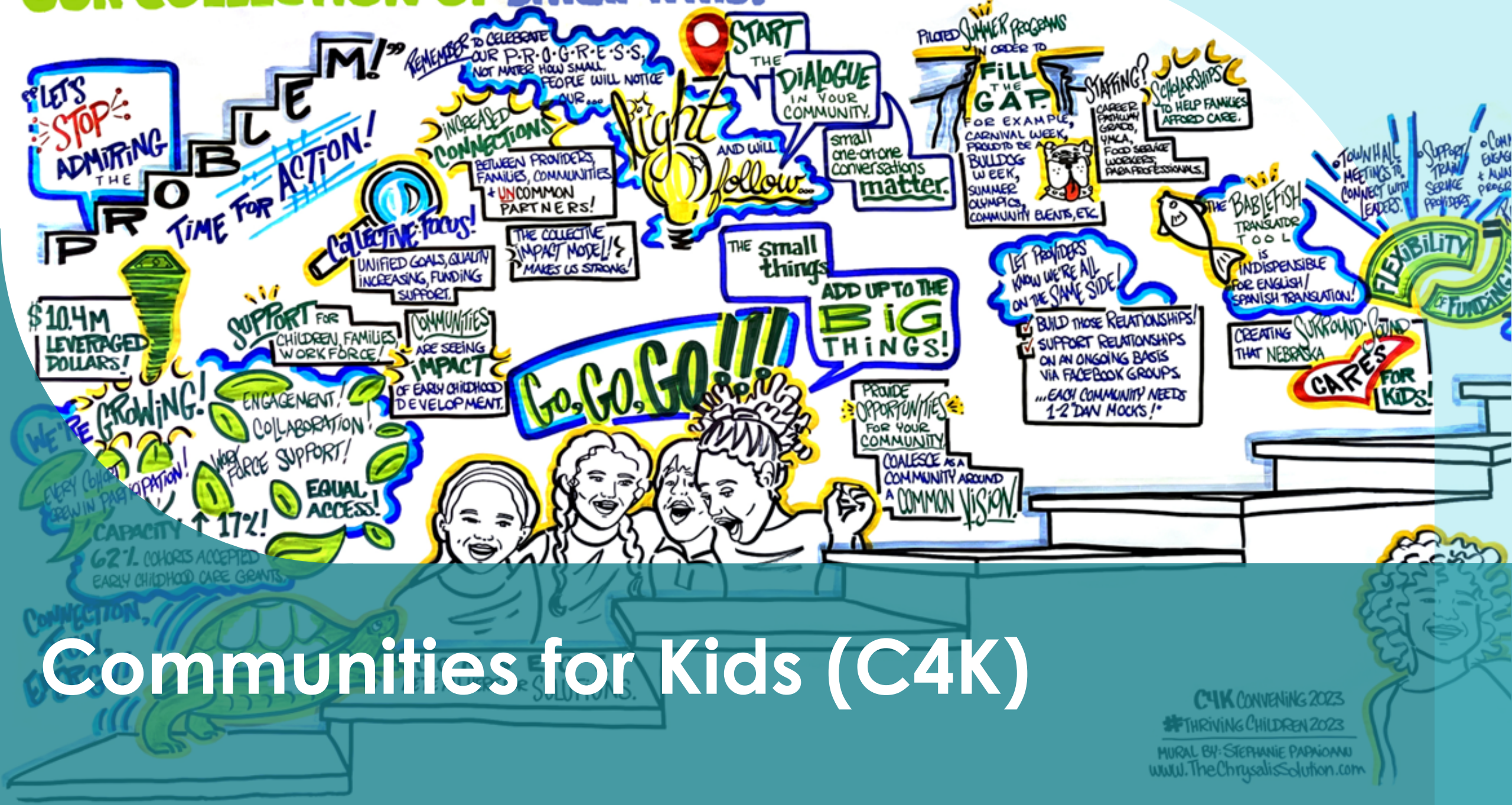


U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer addresses the audience Tuesday during an event announcing a new early childhood education initiative led by UNK. Fischer secured \$2 million in federal funding for the program.

“Families across this country often have a tough time finding affordable, quality child care – in both our rural and urban areas.

Here in Nebraska, we’re taking action to address that”

OUR COLLECTION OF small wins!



Communities for Kids (C4K)

C4K CONVENING 2023
#THRIVING CHILDREN 2023
MURAL BY: STEPHANIE PADRONANO
WWW.THECHRYSLISOLUTION.COM

Overview

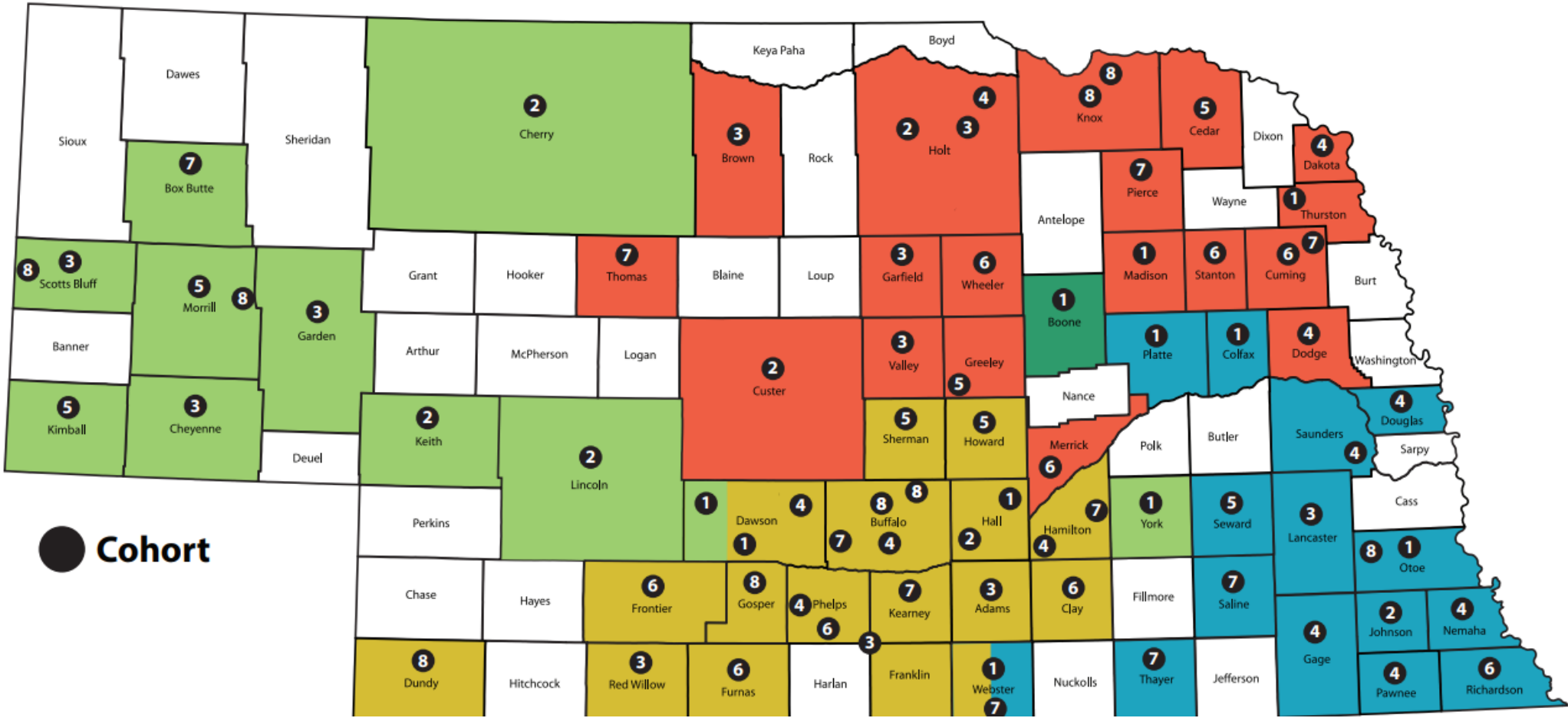


Communities for KidsTM

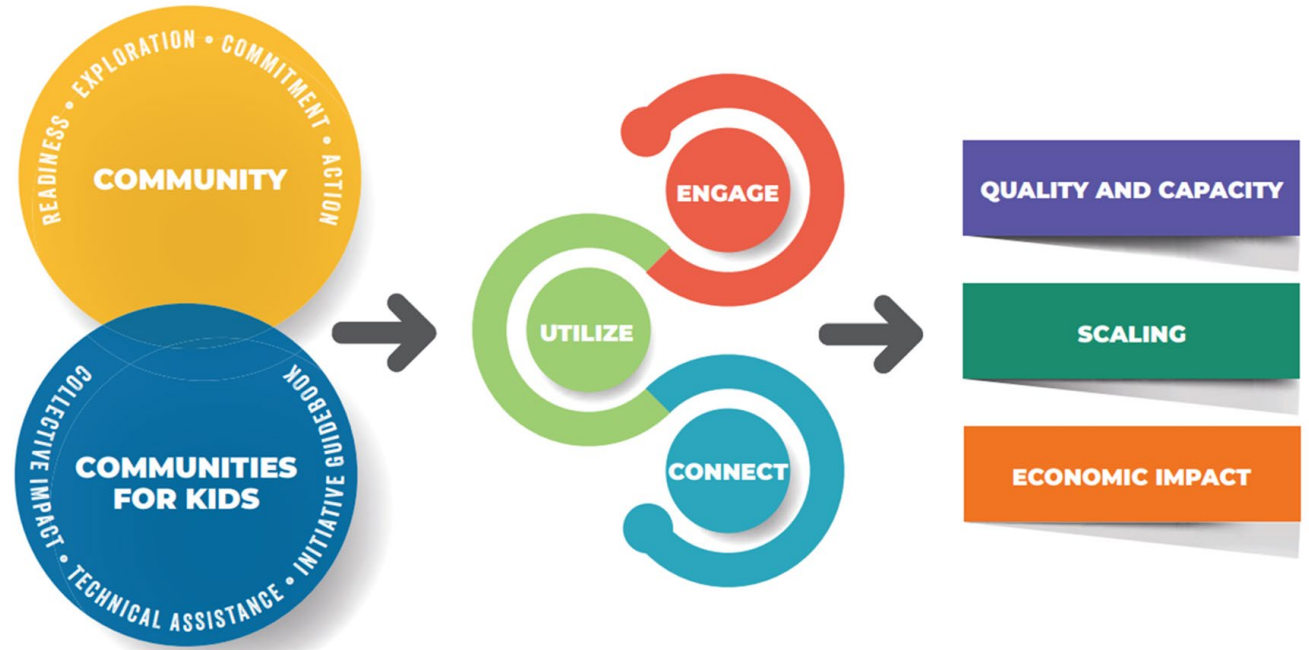
nebraskachildren

Hybrid leadership and systems change model grounded in Collective Impact principles, Kotter's change theory, and a community-centered, place-based approach. It emphasizes shared leadership, local capacity-building, and adaptability to rural contexts.

Communities for Kids Growth Map



Initiative Design



Aim 1: enhance and strengthen rural collaborative community partnerships

- The first project aim focuses on strengthening the foundation of rural early childhood education through meaningful community partnerships. By working closely with established organizations, we create sustainable networks that benefit children, families, and providers alike.
- Partner with Communities for Kids (C4K) to prioritize child care, utilizing the three foundational pillars of C4K: Engage, Utilize, and Connect.

Aim 3: engage in outreach alongside local community organizations with shared interests in early childhood education for sustainability and scalability

- Community Events - Host engaging community events in partnership with local stakeholders, creating opportunities for connection and collaboration across diverse community sectors.
- Local Business Partnerships - Collaborate with chambers of commerce and local businesses that share our commitment to early childhood education, ensuring the sustainability and scalability of our initiatives.

What Are Communities Saying?

CHALLENGES

- Low Wages
- Lack of Benefits
- Staff Shortages
- Turn Over
- Limited Training
- Providers not viewed as Professionals
- Licensing & Regulatory Barriers

- Qualifications and Educational Supports
- Work Environment Standards
- Compensation and Financial Relief Strategies
- Workforce Data
- Public Funding

POLICY AREAS

STRATEGIES

- Substitute Teacher Pool
- Support and mentorship to providers seeking educational opportunities
- Collaborative opportunities between home-based and center providers

Aim 4: develop a professional learning experience tailored to the learning needs of providers and teachers in rural communities and **provide stipends for participating in these learning opportunities to appropriately honor their growth, commitment, and time.**



How to Address These Issues Regardless of Profession?

Job Performance:

A study published in *Journal of Organizational Behavior* found that emotional intelligence (EI) accounts for about **58% of professional success**, even more than IQ (TalentSmart, 2014).

Leadership Effectiveness:

Research by the Center for Creative Leadership found that 75% of careers are derailed for reasons related to emotional incompetence, like poor interpersonal skills and inability to handle stress (Goleman, 1998).

Teamwork and Collaboration:

A report by the *Hay Group* showed that teams with high emotional intelligence outperform others by **20% to 30%** in productivity and overall effectiveness.

Conflict Management:

Employees with high EI are 40% more likely to successfully resolve workplace conflicts, fostering healthier work environments (American Management Association, 2017).

Why Community Based Professional Learning May Support ECE

Teacher-Child Relationship Quality Predicts Child Outcomes:

A 2010 study published in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* found that early childhood teachers who scored higher on emotional competence created stronger, more supportive relationships with children. This, in turn, led to better social skills and fewer behavioral problems in kids (Hamre & Pianta, 2010).

Emotional Competence Reduces Teacher Stress and Burnout:

Research shows that early childhood teachers with higher emotional skills experience **lower levels of stress and burnout**, which improves their ability to provide nurturing, consistent care to children (Jennings, 2015). Given that burnout rates for early educators can be as high as **40-50%** annually (Whitebook, McLean, et al., 2016), EI is critical for retention.

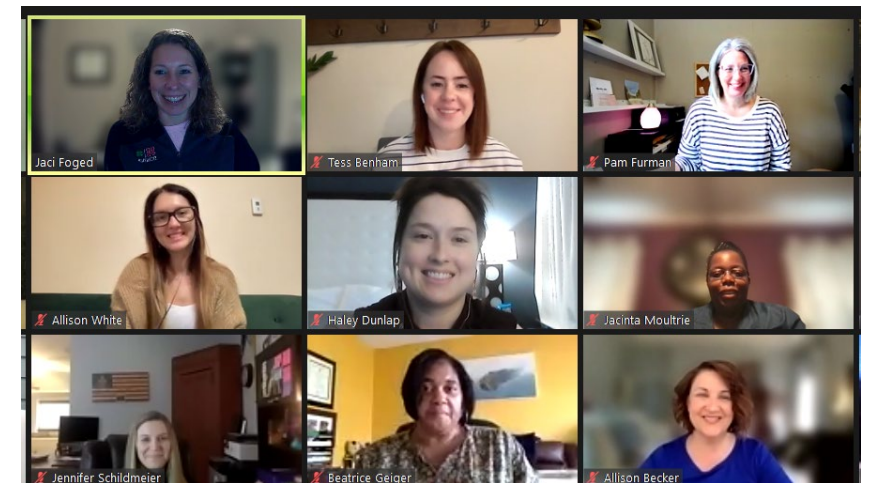
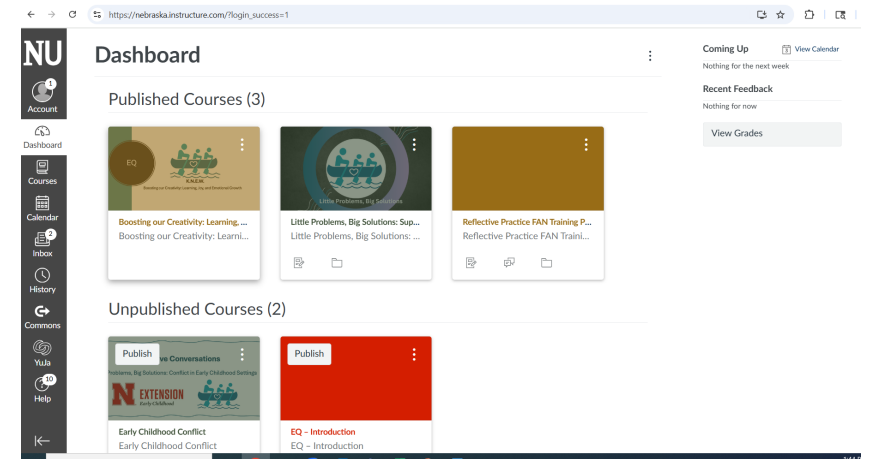
Impact on Classroom Management and Child Behavior:

Studies indicate that early childhood educators trained in social-emotional skills have classrooms with **up to 30% fewer disruptive behaviors**, as these teachers are better at modeling and guiding children's emotional regulation (Raver et al., 2008).

Professional Development in EC Yields Positive Results:

Programs focused on improving early educators' social-emotional competence, like the CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) program, show that teachers increase emotional regulation and relationship skills by **20-40%** post-training, which benefits both teachers and children (Jennings et al., 2017).

OUR APPROACH FOR GROWING EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING OF ECE IN RURAL NEBRASKA



Year One

16 approved in-service hours

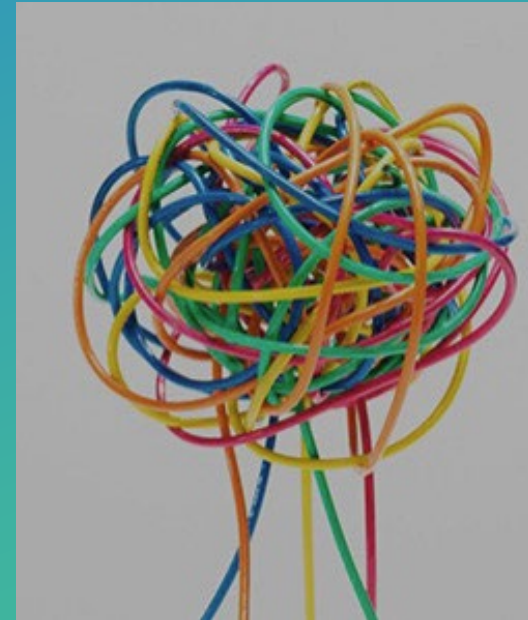
- ❖ Professional Development - on demand
 - 2 hours Supportive Conversations
 - 6 hours of Growing Emotional and Relationship Building Skills
- ❖ Reflective Consultation
 - 8 hours – via zoom
 - Topic for Building Skills for Being Healthy, Responsive Educators

Year Two

Leadership tract added

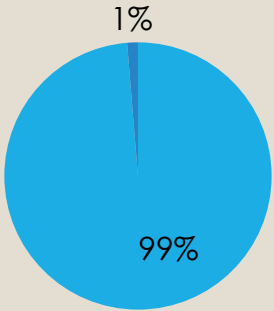
- 12-18 approved in-service hours
- 10 hours of Consultation

NAVIGATING KNEW PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



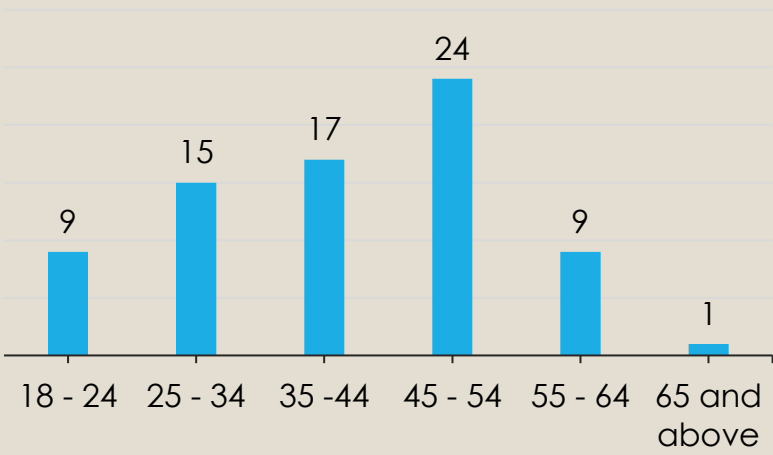
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Gender



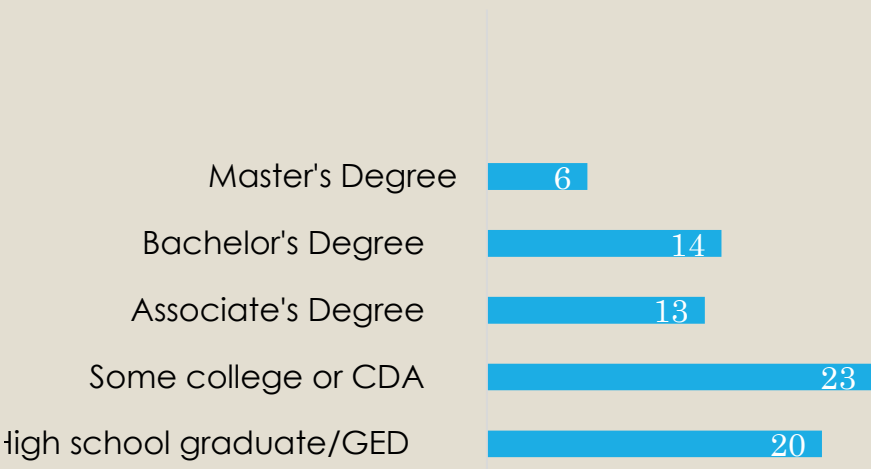
■ Female ■ Male

Age



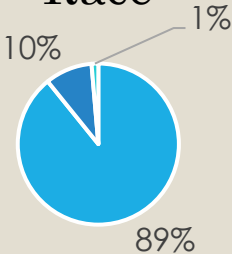
■ Age

Level of Education



■ Level of Education

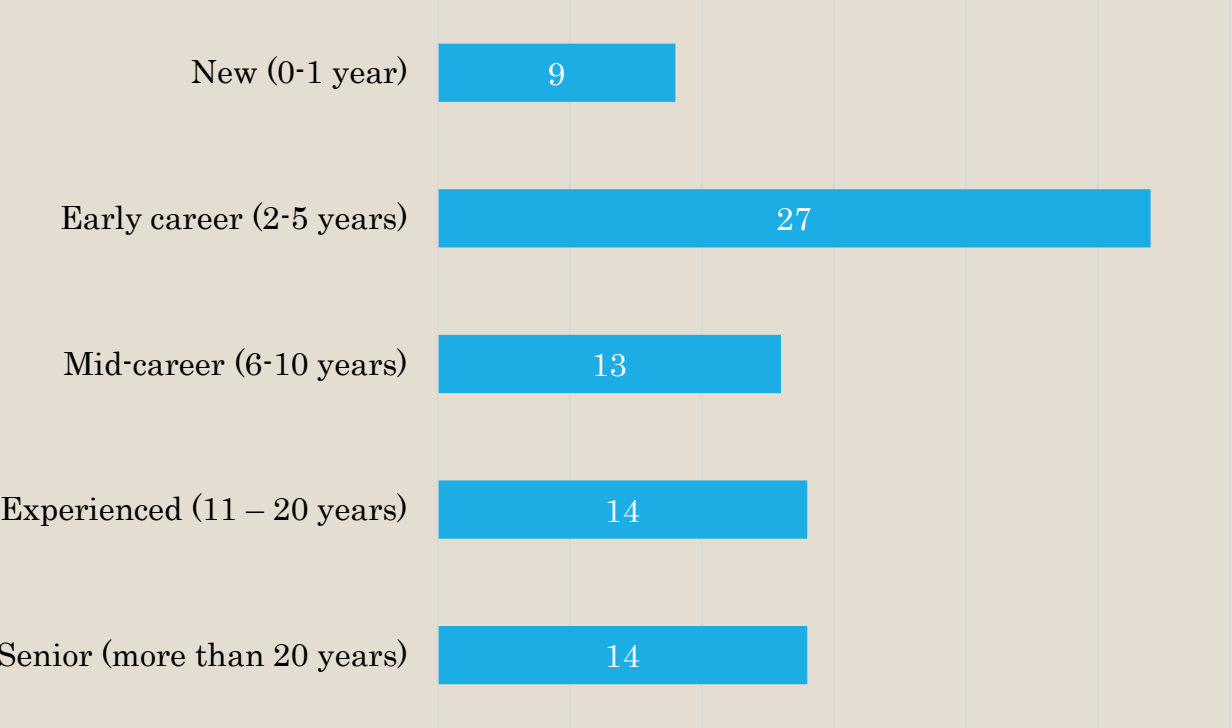
Race



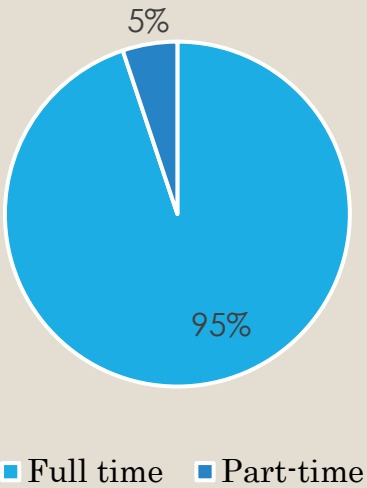
■ White ■ Hispanic/Latino ■ American Indian

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Experience Level



Job Type



Positive Feedback from Participants

- High level agreement ($M=4.41$) agree they will change their behavior in positive ways as a result of the training
- The content aligned with professional beliefs and values ($M=4.35$)
- High intentions to apply what was learned ($M=4.46$)
- High agreement that make me a better professional ECE ($M=4.31$)

Note: Data presented considers missing data (incomplete responses and survey previews)

Participant Feedback

- Contribution to Wellbeing: Participants highlighted how the program has increased their self-awareness about their emotions and the areas they need to work on.

"Yet again I appreciate that the materials are asking us as students to understand where we stand personally. Having greater knowledge and insight into who we are, how we operate and how we can do better is a great first step. Connecting self-knowledge to the benefits of operating better socially is of great benefit. Getting the chance to change future outcomes with a greater knowledge base is powerful."

What participants are saying...

- Participant from Little Problems, Big Solutions:

“Honestly, I now see conflict not as something to be scared of, but as something I can approach with confidence and empathy.”

UNK's Role in KNEW

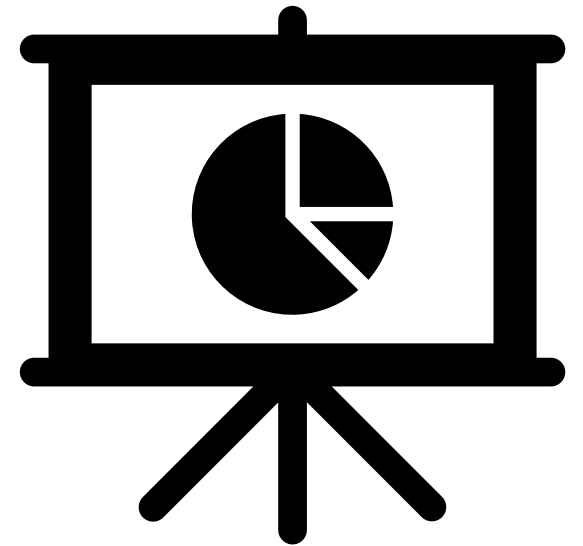
Aim 2: research social networks and best practices that identify gaps and opportunities for communities to collectively address retention and recruitment of providers and educators in rural communities.

Research for the KNEW project will investigate social networks and best practices within and between different rural communities in Nebraska.

Multi-level modeling will be used to statistically analyze the social network connectedness among ECE workforce and stakeholders to predict recruitment needs and retention of the ECE workers.

Data Collection

- Gather data which will include: intentions to stay in ECE, health and well-being, self-efficacy, and social support, will be measured using previously validated questionnaires.
- Two rounds of surveys/questionnaires.



Software

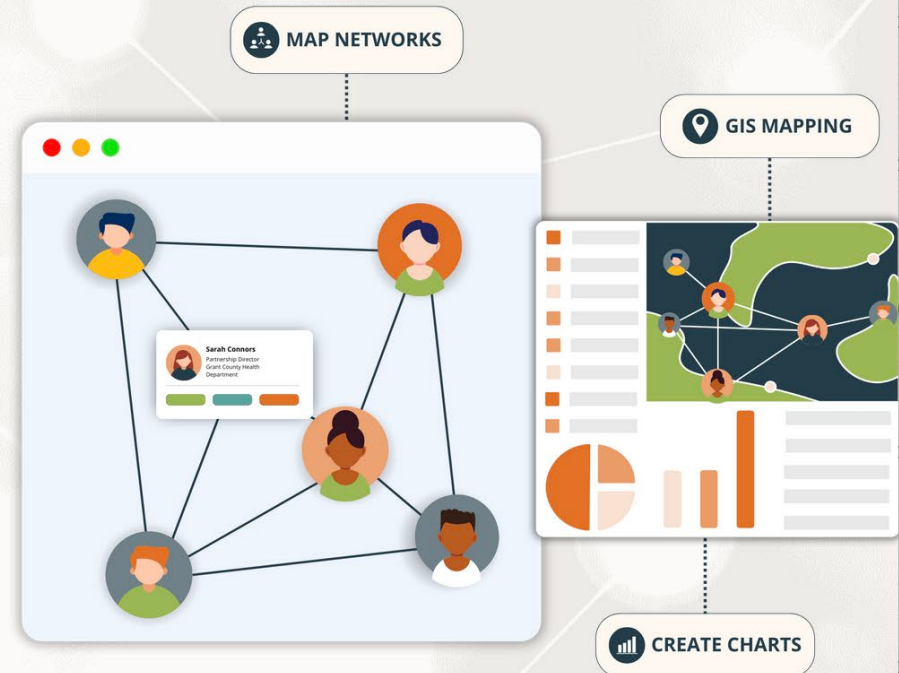


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PARTNER CPRM™ is an ecosystem data and learning platform for managing members, tracking and mapping relationships, analyzing data, and generating insights to inform evidence-based strategies.

Get started now for free or request a demo with a network science expert.





Team members from the UNK College of Education, Nebraska Extension and Communities for Kids are working together to address the state's early childhood education workforce shortage. (Photos by Erika Pritchard, UNK Communications)

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March 3, 2025

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Scan to visit KNEW Project Website



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Thank you!

Don't forget to
complete the
session
evaluation!

Next event for the
conference is the
Legislative Panel
in the main
ballroom –
starting at 2 p.m.

Thank you!