

**Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council  
Public Engagement Task Force Report and Recommendations  
Approved by the Council  
December 12, 2003**

**Research-Based Findings:** (see [www.earlycare.org](http://www.earlycare.org) for more information)

- Children who enter kindergarten from quality pre-kindergarten experiences have better reading, language and social skills than those who lacked this preparation.
- Early childhood education has a significant positive effect on students' performance on standardized achievement tests.
- Early childhood programs result in a 40% reduction in grade retention and special education placement.
- Early childhood care increases high-school completion rate by 29%.
- Children in high quality early care and education programs can expect to make roughly \$143,000 more over their lifetimes than children not receiving these benefits and mothers of these same children can expect higher earnings – about \$133,000 more over their lifetimes.
- Juvenile arrest rates for young people who participated in early childhood intervention programs were 33% lower than for children of comparable backgrounds. Also,
  - violent arrests were 41% lower, and
  - the rate of multiple violent arrests dropped by 38%.
- Seven dollars for every dollar spent on the program is returned to the community. Other benefits include:
  - program participants' increased earnings capacity,
  - higher educational attainment,
  - lower criminal justice system costs,
  - savings for crime victims, and
  - savings on school remedial service budgets.
- Fewer participants received welfare benefits and fewer women participants had children born out of wedlock.



# **Call to Action**

## **Can Children Wait? Can Nebraska Wait?**

We must act immediately to improve the lives of children in an effort to enrich the future of Nebraska! Recent brain research and current social conditions demonstrate the urgency of getting the message out to the citizens of Nebraska, NOW!

Accordingly, the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council charged its public awareness task force to formulate a recommendation to meet the need for a *Nebraska Early Childhood Public Awareness Campaign*. We named it, "Can Children Wait?"

### **History**

In September of 2002 the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council established three focus areas and voted to charter one standing committee and two task forces. This document reflects the work of the Public Awareness Task Force and is designed to give feedback to the Governor's Office regarding the need for a public awareness campaign and how it might look in the state of Nebraska.

To complete its work, the task force reviewed recent literature on early childhood initiatives and identified and examined current practices both in Nebraska and nation wide. Further, the task force members reviewed several documents and processes used to address public awareness campaigns regarding early childhood. Finally, the task force formulated recommendations for a public awareness campaign for the state of Nebraska.

### **Review of Early Childhood Initiatives**

#### **Nebraska**

Nebraska citizens have always been concerned about their young children between the ages of birth to 5. Recent campaigns in Nebraska have included statewide initiatives such as "Pierre the Pelican," "Nebraska Good Beginnings," and "Babies Can't Wait," to name a few. Further, public relations programs have been generated through Healthy Start, Head Start, Nebraska Early Childhood Training Coalitions, Nebraska hospitals and the public school systems in the state. Well-meaning and beneficial as these initiatives have been, changing times require that existing practices be reviewed and updated to meet the needs of today's society.

Public awareness campaigns have been an integral part of many early childhood initiatives. However, the campaigns have often occurred in isolation, have reached only a minimal number of families with young children, and lack the use of modern technology and the tie-in to recent brain research data. To be effective, a campaign

needs to have a statewide focus that reaches all constituents including, but not limited to, business, elected officials, government, law enforcement, hospitals, faith communities, community organizations and senior citizens.

**Other National or Federal Initiatives**

These public campaign efforts have served our state well in the past. However, changes in demographics, technology and family structures create a need to rethink and redesign the ways in which our state publicly advocates for its youth. Subsequently, the members of the task force reviewed a sampling of existing public awareness campaigns in other states. The following is a summary of the information gathered in this effort.

Name Of Program	Website	Project Summary	Budget/ Funding	Outcome/Results
<p><b>Colorado</b></p> <p>Colorado Children's Campaign 2002 Campaign for Kids (CCC)</p> <p>1985-2003</p>	<p><a href="http://www.coloradokids.org/about.html">http://www.coloradokids.org/about.html</a></p>	<p>The <i>Colorado Children's Campaign</i> has worked to mobilize individuals and organizations to think and act on behalf of children, with particular attention to the health, education and safety of children at risk.</p>	<p>Funding provided from numerous sponsors and volunteer efforts.</p>	<p>CCC provides information on child well-being by researching and publishing data on health, education, safety, and economic security. CCC stimulates dialogue on children's issues, promotes accountability and action by contributing to government committees and commissions involving children's issues, and organizes groups to advocate for children. CCC works with child advocates, community leaders, academic institutions, and government officials on the common goal of improving the lives of children in Colorado.</p>
<p><b>Florida</b></p> <p>Help Them Thrive, Birth to Five</p> <p>2002</p>	<p><a href="http://www.nga.org">http://www.nga.org</a></p>	<p><i>Help Them Thrive, Birth to Five</i> is a social marketing campaign that seeks to improve the health and well-being of Florida's families and children by encouraging access to existing preventive health care services.</p>	<p>Public and private concerns: \$1 million</p>	<p>Although all Florida families and parents can use <i>Help Them Thrive, Birth to Five</i>, the campaign targets at-risk populations. By presenting positive, supporting, and encouraging messages in a consumer education and public information campaign, it encourages families to seek prevention and early intervention services. The strongest aspect of <i>Help Them Thrive, Birth to Five</i> is that it was developed for Florida's families by Florida's families.</p>

Name Of Program	Website	Project Summary	Budget/ Funding	Outcome/Results
<p><b>Florida</b></p> <p>One Voice for Children</p> <p>1997</p>	<p><a href="http://www.nga.org">http://www.nga.org</a></p>	<p>The initiative was a collaboration of more than 25 organizations to raise legislative awareness of early education and health programs. The initiative reflects a 1 year effort to plan, develop, and convene more than 800 advocates.</p>	<p>Initiative was funded by the private sector with involvement by government agencies.</p>	<p><i>One Voice for Children</i> was the umbrella under which all Florida organizations with an interest in young children and families could come together.</p> <p>During the 1997 session, there was significant evidence that the initiative raised legislators' awareness of issues of concern to young children and families.</p>
<p><b>Illinois</b></p> <p>Learning Begins at Birth</p> <p>1997-2003</p>	<p><a href="http://www.voices4kids.org/start_early_content.htm">http://www.voices4kids.org/start_early_content.htm</a></p>	<p><i>Learning Begins at Birth</i> campaign increases awareness of the crucial learning that occurs in a child's first years.</p>	<p>Funding provided by the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, with additional funding from the Irving Harris Foundation and the Jessie V. Stone Foundation.</p>	<p>The campaign has three components:</p> <p><b>Public Policy</b> - works each year to improve and expand upon preschool and other early education programs offered in Illinois. <b>Parent Support and Professional Development--</b> <i>Start Early</i> messages are shared with over 120,000 new parents through the distribution of videos and parenting magazines produced by Voices and others. The campaign has created a network of more than 2,000 professionals at 400 partner organizations throughout Illinois who attend annual conferences and trainings to learn how to advocate on behalf of children. <b>Public Awareness</b> -- Messages about the need for high-quality, accessible early childhood education are shared through a new initiative, the Early Learning Illinois campaign, as well as via <i>Start Early</i> ads on radio, TV, billboards and print.</p>

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<p><b>Indiana</b></p> <p>I Am Your Child Coalition</p> <p>1997</p>	<p><a href="http://www.nga.org">http://www.nga.org</a></p>	<p>The Indiana <i>I Am Your Child Coalition</i> was formed in April 1997 in response to the national <i>I Am Your Child</i> campaign, an awareness and engagement campaign to make early childhood development a top priority of the nation.</p>	<p>Not available</p>	<p>The overall focus of the coalition is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• raise public awareness about the importance of the first three years of life;</li> <li>• unite and expand the work being done on the national, state, and local levels;</li> <li>• connect families with young children to the information, resources, and services they need; and</li> <li>• increase the public will to make quality resources and services more widely available to families with young children.</li> </ul> <p>The coalition is striving to promote responsible parenthood, guarantee quality child care choices, ensure good health and protection, and promote community.</p>
<p><b>Oregon</b></p> <p>Oregon's Child: Everyone's Business</p> <p>1996</p>	<p><a href="http://nccic.org/ccpartnerships/profiles/oregon2.htm">http://nccic.org/ccpartnerships/profiles/oregon2.htm</a></p>	<p>The statewide campaign, <i>Oregon's Child: Everyone's Business</i>, is spreading the message and is motivating businesses, communities, and families to take action. The goal of the campaign is to promote the healthy development of young children.</p>	<p>Raises funds as needed.</p>	<p>The campaign has helped to solidify a network of key state-level public, private, and non-profit organizations invested in early childhood issues that will support local coalitions committed to the campaign goals.</p>

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<b>Washington</b>  Child Care 2000 Campaign  2000	<a href="http://www.nga.org">http://www.nga.org</a>	The <i>Child Care 2000 Campaign</i> is a collaborative, public-private partnership that targets four populations through a massive, multimedia consumer education effort aimed at transforming public opinion about child care.	Total Budget: \$100,000 State funds: \$15,000	The <i>Child Care 2000 Campaign</i> has produced the following results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer awareness</li> <li>• Interest has increased in the systems of the child care profession, including accreditation, training, professional associations, and the connection to other family support systems and welfare reform.</li> <li>• The Governor and the legislature approved training resources for training child care professionals.</li> <li>• The public has a greater sensitivity, and appreciation, to the overwhelming responsibility of caring for another's child.</li> </ul>

**Recommendations for a Public Awareness Campaign for the State of Nebraska**

*The proposed theme “Can Children Wait?” keeps this important question about the welfare of our children in the forefront of the minds of all Nebraskans. Consistent with research-based information about child development and education, the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council recommends that the following key points be included a public awareness campaign.*

**Key Points:**

1. Recent brain research indicates that:
  - All children are born eager to learn.
  - Birth to 3 is the most critical period for child development.
2. Care and education must be viewed as one and the same.
3. Family and community responsibility:
  - Children need supportive families and communities.
  - Parents are a child’s first and most important teacher.
  - Communities share the responsibility for developing healthy children.

## **The Time Is Now!**

*Research has indicated a strong link between the quality of early care and education and later success—not just for the individual children involved, but also for the community at large. It has also indicated that strong partnerships among parents, schools, child care providers and the community are critical in this success. The theme, “Can Children Wait?” begs the question of whether we can continue to make children wait while the debate continues. A number of other states have already launched significant public awareness campaigns to increase the public’s engagement in responding to the immediate needs of children. It is Nebraska’s turn to take action—NOW.*

### **Strategies for Implementation:**

\* Create and fund a task force that designs and implements the public awareness campaign with assistance from a professional marketing firm using the theme “Can Children Wait?” Utilize a multi-media approach including:

- cable and network television ads,
- radio,
- newspaper,
- billboard advertising
- power point presentations
- web page with links to other parent-child interaction websites.

\*Create a pool of local spokespersons, including parents and persons that represent the “big picture.” Recruit interagency groups that work with families, such as law enforcement, hospitals, mental health clinics, etc, to assist with local dissemination of messages and materials.

\* Use a corps of local spokespeople trained on the campaign’s core messages to increase the campaign’s reach and influence with audiences in communities throughout the state. The basic premise is that audiences would be more engaged if the campaign’s messages came from people they already knew and trusted.

\* Use voter registration drives, community meetings, and postcard campaigns to inform gubernatorial and legislative candidates that all children should be healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed by the time they enter school.