

NEWS RELEASE

NOTE: JOIN THE CONFERENCE AT ANYTIME TODAY AT [THRIVINGCHILDRENCONFERENCE.COM/2021](https://thrivingchildrenconference.com/2021)

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IMPROVING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN NEBRASKA IS FOCUS OF LEADERS FROM ACROSS THE STATE AT VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

*101 Nebraska Communities, 28 States to Participate
Nebraska State Senator Brett Lindstrom,
Dr. Rosemarie Allen, president and CEO of the Center for Equity & Excellence,
and Bina Patel Shrimali from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco to headline the event*

Omaha, Neb. — More than 750 civic, business, education, health care, and political leaders from across 101 Nebraska communities, 28 states, and Canada are participating in a virtual conference that strives to improve quality early childhood care and education for all children and families in Nebraska. The fourth annual Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference will give attendees the opportunity to learn about quality early childhood education programs and services and their important role in economic development and community vitality.

Sen. Brett Lindstrom (District 18) will help open the conference. He is a proponent of considering ways to invest public and private resources strategically in early childhood systems to create social, educational, and economic opportunity for all Nebraskans.

“In recent years, early childhood issues have become an increasingly visible part of public policy conversations in the Unicameral and elsewhere,” Lindstrom said. “We know that it is crucial to the economic well-being of our state that parents should have the opportunity to participate in the workforce, provide for their families, and ensure the productivity of our state’s employers. That cannot happen without access to reliable, quality child care programs.”

The conference will feature keynote speakers Dr. Rosemarie Allen, the CEO and president of the Center for Equity & Excellence, and Bina Patel Shrimali with the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. Allen will discuss the importance of ensuring all children have access to high-quality early childhood programs that are developmentally and culturally appropriate, and how it relates to economic development and community vitality. Allen focuses on the critical role families and communities play in quality child care, and how no decisions should be made without input from those key stakeholders.

Shrimali supports Allen’s approach. She will discuss how quality early childhood care and education can help advance healthy and resilient communities, a thriving labor force, and inclusive financial systems.

“We need to articulate the importance of these issues as front and center to our economy,” Shrimali said. “Over the course of the pandemic, I think we’ve seen much more realization from the business community and employers of the need for child care for a thriving labor force.”

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Attendance for the 2021 conference is almost triple that of the inaugural 2018 conference and has attracted national attention. The growth demonstrates the importance of and increasing demand for quality early childhood care and education programs. Nebraska ranks as one of the top states in the nation where all available parents work, yet research shows Nebraska, like many other states, faces great challenges, including a shortage of quality early childhood programs and services. This challenge has never been more prominent in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The critical role that quality early childhood education plays in the ability of children, families, and entire communities to thrive is clearer than ever before.

In addition to the keynote speakers, [the conference offers 10 breakout sessions](#) focused on economic development and community vitality, early childhood research, programs, policy, communications and outreach, and philanthropy. Some of the topics are related to new and evolving policies and funding designed to support local child care, law enforcement's support for quality early childhood programs, community-centered solutions and stories, Nebraska's definition of quality in early childhood programs and services, supporting the early childhood workforce, and the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan.

This year's event is [sponsored](#) by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, First Five Nebraska, the Nebraska Association of School Boards, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Extension, Nebraska Economic Developers Association, Nebraska Community Foundation, the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, Nebraska State Education Association, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska.

[Conference partners](#) include the Aksarben Foundation, Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce, the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children, Nebraska Business Development Center, Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Nebraska ESU Coordinating Council, Nebraska Head Start Association, Nebraska Hospital Association, Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, Northeast Nebraska Growing Together, Panhandle Partnership, Inc., and Urban League of Nebraska.

For more information on the conference, visit thrivingchildrenconference.com/2021.

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