

Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference

NEWS RELEASE

NOTE: KEYNOTE SPEAKERS WILL BE LIVESTREAMED AT [THRIVINGCHILDRENCONFERENCE.COM/2022](https://thrivingchildrenconference.com/2022)

For release: Sept. 19, 2022

Contact: Erica Sesay, emnett@nebraska.edu or 402-554-6723, or Ally Freeman, afreeman11@nebraska.edu or 402-250-9901

IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NEBRASKA IS FOCUS AT STATEWIDE CONFERENCE

*Dr. Dana Suskind, co-director of the TMW Center for Early Learning + Public Health and New York Times bestselling author,
and Barry Ford, president and CEO of Council for a Strong America, to headline the event*

Kearney, Neb. – More than 650 civic, business, education, health care, and political leaders from 108 Nebraska communities and 29 states are gathering today in Kearney for a conference focused on the importance of quality early childhood care and education for all children and families in Nebraska.

The fifth annual [Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference](https://thrivingchildrenconference.com) 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. The conference returns to an in-person format for the first time since 2019.

The conference will feature keynote speakers [Dr. Dana Suskind](#), professor of surgery, pediatrics, and public policy at the University of Chicago, co-director of the [TMW Center for Early Learning + Public Health](#), and New York Times bestselling author, and [Barry Ford](#), the president and CEO of [Council for a Strong America](#). Nebraska [Sen. Myron Dorn](#) (District 30) will provide opening remarks.

In addition to the keynote speakers, a community lunch panel will highlight how Nebraskans are engaging with the recently launched statewide campaign, [We Care for Kids](#). [The conference also offers 17 breakout sessions](#) focused on economic development and community vitality, early childhood research, programs, policy, communications and outreach, and philanthropy. Additionally, in-person attendees will have the option to tour [the Plambeck Early Childhood Education Center](#) on the University of Nebraska at Kearney campus to see firsthand how to help children grow and explore in a rich learning environment.

Fresh off the release of her book, [“Parent Nation: Unlocking Every Child’s Potential, Fulfilling Society’s Promise,”](#) Dr. Dana Suskind will talk about the importance of building public support to create a society that better supports families.

“I want [people] to be inspired that they are a key factor in changing the lives of children and families in this country,” Suskind said. “The healthy development of children is a barometer of the health of a society. We all benefit from it, because a healthy next generation ensures the strength of our communities and our nation.”

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Suskind has dedicated her research and clinical life to optimizing foundational brain development and preventing early cognitive disparities and their lifelong impact. In 2013, Suskind and her team led the first-ever Bridging the Thirty Million Word Gap convening at the request of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Barry Ford underscores the importance and impact of quality early childhood education.

“The need for investment, the need for support, the need for systemic change around early childhood investments is true in rural America, it’s true in urban America, it’s true in suburban America,” Ford said.

At [Council for a Strong America](#), Ford is the president and CEO of an organization whose members include prominent law enforcement, military, and business leaders who champion early childhood education as an essential strategy for preparing the next generation of Americans to live productive lives.

“We’re losing incredible potential brainpower by not investing in every child,” he said. “We need to create conditions so that parents and caregivers are able to create the opportunity, the structure, and the environment for the kids they care about to be successful.”

The conference returns to an in-person event this year but will also offer a virtual livestream of the keynote presentations for those unavailable to attend in Kearney. Attendance for the 2022 conference is more than double 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. The COVID-19 pandemic made clearer than ever before the critical role that quality early childhood education plays in the ability of children, families, and entire communities to thrive.

This year’s event is [sponsored](#) by First Five Nebraska, Northeast Nebraska Growing Together, the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children, the Nebraska Association of School Boards, Nebraska Business Development Center, Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Community Foundation, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Nebraska Department of Economic Development, Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, Nebraska ESU Coordinating Council, Nebraska Extension, Nebraska Hospital Association, Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, Nebraska Early Learning Connection, Panhandle Partnership, Inc., the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, Nebraska Economic Developers Association, and Nebraska Head Start Association.

For more information on the conference and to view the livestreamed keynote sessions, visit thrivingchildrenconference.com/2022.