

**Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council
Strategic Planning Process:
Data Report**

Fall 2021

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following organizations that participated in this strategic planning data collection process. Data collected represent one individual's thoughts and opinions, and do not reflect official viewpoints of these organizations. In addition to the list below, many other participants dedicated time and effort to this process anonymously. Your time and voices were invaluable to this process.

Division of Child and Family Services - State of Nevada - Early Childhood Mental Health
Department of Health and Human Services - Division of Welfare and Supportive Services – State
of Nevada - Child Care
Division of Public and Behavioral Health - State of Nevada
Las Vegas Urban League
Nevada Department of Education
Nevada Office of Rural Health
Nevada TEACH Early Childhood
The Children's Cabinet
The Nevada Registry
United Healthcare Nevada
University of Nevada Las Vegas
University of Nevada Las Vegas – Nevada Institute for Children's Research and Policy
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Washoe County Child Care Licensing

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Survey Respondent Demographics

Survey respondents were asked about both their roles relative to early childhood system as well as the geography they represent, with geography being categorized as rural and/or urban, statewide, or “other.” Chart 1 displays the number of survey respondents by both role and geography.

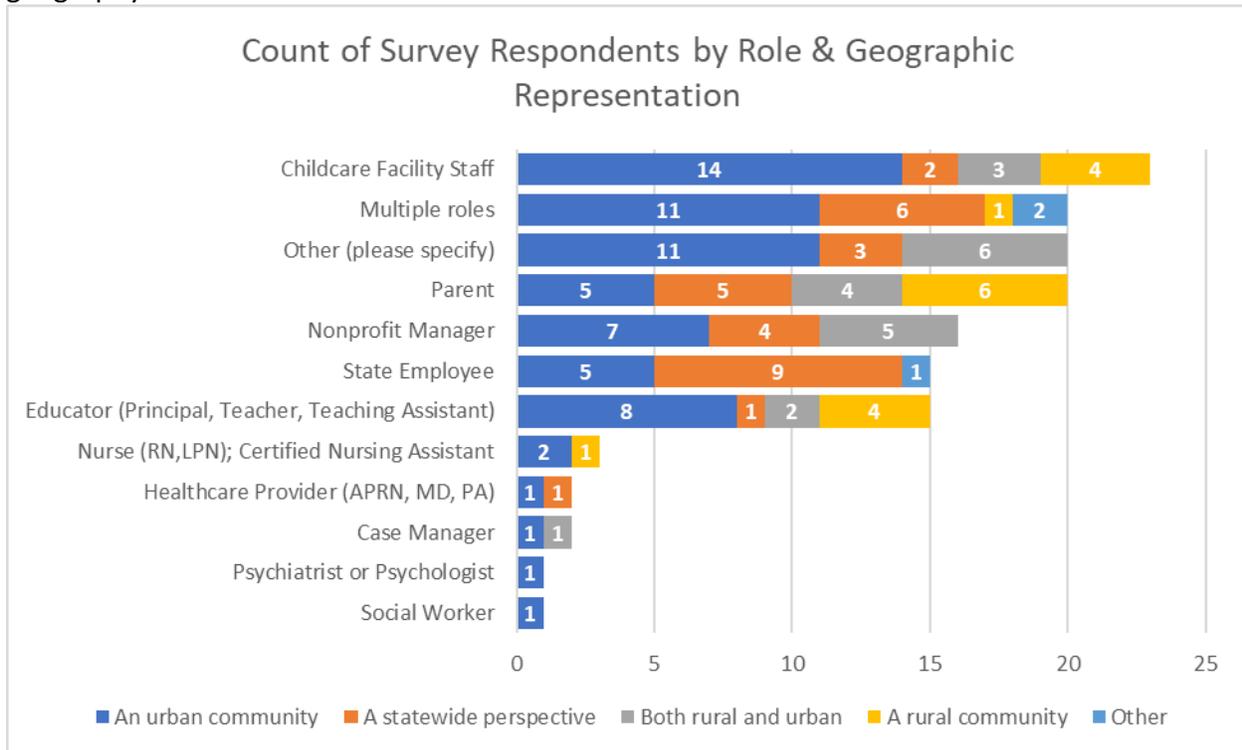


Chart 1. Count of survey respondents by role and geographic representation.

There were 138 respondents to the survey. Those respondents identified their roles as follows:

- 17% (n = 23) identified as childcare facility staff.
- 14% (n = 20) identified as parents.
- 11% (n = 15) identified as educators.
- 29% (n = 40) identified as individuals with multiple roles in the early childhood system or had a role other than the options made available through the survey.

Those respondents identified their geographic representation as follows:

- 49% (n = 67) identified as representatives of urban communities only.
- 12% (n = 16) identified as representatives of rural communities only.
- 15% (n = 21) identified as representatives of both urban and rural communities.
- 22% (n = 31) identified as having a statewide perspective.

Progress in Achieving Strategic Goals

Survey respondents were asked to rank progress on achieving the three strategic goals on a five-point scale from “no progress” to “excellent progress.” The three goals were: provide excellent learning systems, ensure strong family partnerships, and support family and child health. The responses reflected respondents’ perception of progress on these goals over the past three years. A summary of responses for each of the three goals is available in Table 1.

Percentage of Responses						
Goal	<i>Unsure of what progress has been made</i>	<i>No progress</i>	<i>Below average progress</i>	<i>Average progress</i>	<i>Above average progress</i>	<i>Excellent progress</i>
Providing Excellent Learning Systems	17%	2%	13%	43%	18%	7%
Ensuring Strong Family Partnerships	14%	2%	15%	40%	20%	9%
Supporting Family and Child Health	15%	3%	11%	38%	26%	7%

Table 1. Progress on goals NECAC strategic goals over the past three years.

Each of the three goals had nearly 70% of responses rated as “average progress” or better. However, there were also approximately 15% of respondents who stated that they were “unsure of what progress had been made” for each of the three goals.

Progress in Achieving Goals from an Urban Perspective

The progress on goals for respondents who represent urban communities only is available in Table 2.

Goal	Percentage of Responses					
	<i>Unsure of what progress has been made</i>	<i>No progress</i>	<i>Below average progress</i>	<i>Average progress</i>	<i>Above average progress</i>	<i>Excellent progress</i>
Providing Excellent Learning Systems	15%	3%	15%	46%	15%	6%
Ensuring Strong Family Partnerships	10%	3%	19%	40%	18%	9%
Supporting Family and Child Health	10%	4%	12%	46%	19%	7%

Table 2. Progress on goals NECAC strategic goals over the past three years from those respondents who represent urban communities only.

Progress on the three goals from those respondents who represent urban communities only largely mirrors the responses from all respondents. This should be expected, given that respondents representing urban communities only comprised about half of the total survey responses.

Compared to all respondents, a slightly lower proportion of respondents who represent urban communities only stated they were “unsure of what progress has been made” on each goal. There were also a slightly higher proportion respondents who represent urban communities only who stated that “average progress” had been made on each goal and a slightly lower proportion of respondents who stated that “above average progress” had been made on each goal.

Progress in Achieving Goals from a Statewide Perspective

The progress on goals for respondents who represent a statewide perspective is available in Table 3.

Goal	Percentage of Responses					
	<i>Unsure of what progress has been made</i>	<i>No progress</i>	<i>Below average progress</i>	<i>Average progress</i>	<i>Above average progress</i>	<i>Excellent progress</i>
Providing Excellent Learning Systems	6%	0%	10%	39%	32%	13%
Ensuring Strong Family Partnerships	10%	0%	10%	42%	26%	13%
Supporting Family and Child Health	16%	0%	6%	29%	35%	13%

Table 3. Progress on goals NECAC strategic goals over the past three years from those respondents who represent a statewide perspective.

Compared to all respondents, a lower proportion of respondents who represent a statewide perspective stated they were “unsure of what progress has been made” on each goal. There were also a slightly lower proportion respondents who represent a statewide perspective who stated that “average progress” had been made on each goal and a higher proportion of respondents who stated that “above average progress” or “excellent progress” had been made on each goal.

Progress in Achieving Goals from Other Perspectives

Other perspectives are difficult to interpret due to the low number of respondents representing those other perspectives. Consequently, those results are not summarized in this report.

- **Opportunities to strengthen Nevada’s Early Childhood System**
 - To improve communication among families and network
 - To improve training and professional development of staff
 - To increase funding for continued opportunities and long-term change
 - To increase resources to support students and families

- **Strengths of Nevada’s Early Childhood System**
 - Connection to community programs and partners
 - QRIS
 - Family involvement

- **Weaknesses of Nevada’s Early Childhood System**
 - Lack of qualifications and quality pay for teachers/staff
 - Lack of funding
 - Lack of consistency of best practices for all students such as assessments

- **Barriers and threats facing Nevada’s Early Childhood System**
 - Funding: Federal, state and county budgets; not affordable for all families; cost of childcare is a huge barrier; creates equity issues
 - Legislation: Who is the champion for this in the Legislature? In local governments? Legislation not understanding the importance of ECE
 - Awareness: Lack of knowledge about ECE in the community, lack of local ECE coaches, lack of sound business practices in childcare provider administration
 - Staffing: COVID absences of staff-not enough staff for the duration, lack of employees wanting to work in the ECE field, high turnover, poorly educated teachers majority of hiring pool

Focus Groups

Focus Group #1: Child & Family Health Subcommittee

The members of the Child & Family Health Subcommittee identified several strengths of the group and its work. Relationships were the unifying theme behind all these strengths. The collaboration within the group and with stakeholders was noted several times throughout the discussion. Community support from families and local government as well as improving relationships with state-level government were cited as critical inputs for the progress that has been made in early childhood efforts as well as a factor in pushing for more progress in the future. Through these relationships, NECAC has been able to secure two grants to support the execution of their goals. The group reported feeling empowered to make decisions about what to do to advance the goals of NECAC.

While the relationships among committee members and stakeholders have been instrumental in making progress towards early childhood goals, the Child & Family Health Subcommittee also noted several weaknesses in efforts to improve early childhood outcomes. Two primary weaknesses were mentioned during the focus group: short-term funding and operational silos. Short-term funding has made it difficult for NECAC to make any progress on building an early childhood system that will be accessible and equitable. Short-term funding also plays a role in developing operational silos, as having several funding-based programs has led to targeted interventions towards and reporting on numerous goals across the early childhood system, resulting in a disjointed effort to contribute to a smaller, more unified set of goals. Members of the subcommittee identified the need for this smaller and more unified set of goals to work towards. A third weakness that was mentioned was engagement. While the relationships among the subcommittee and their stakeholders has been strong, members agreed that engagement could be better in a few ways, including limiting the number of agenda items at each meeting to allow more time to focus on a few things, identifying those who are missing from the conversations and inviting them to have a seat at the table, and finding ways to more easily connect people who are doing similar work so that they can collaborate rather than continue working in their respective silos.

- Strengths
 - Relationships
- Weaknesses
 - Short-term funding and operational silos
- Engagement
 - Limit the number of agenda items at meeting to allow more time to focus
 - Invite missing parties to have a seat at the table
 - Connect and collaborate with those doing similar work

Recommendations

Design the NECAC website to be the go-to source for information about early childhood projects, service providers, early childhood resources for parents, etc.

Leverage the momentum of the American Rescue Plan Act community engagement to establish a grassroots advocacy approach for future legislative efforts, including policy and regulatory changes as well as funding.

- “We are in unique time right now where we have an infusion of federal resources through multiple channels to make some changes to infrastructure.”
- “I hope that the current focus on children is not the ‘flavor of the month’ and after everything goes back to normal, that the children will be on the back burner again.”
- “I attended many of the community meetings talking about the (\$770 million of pandemic funding) and I know this sounds like a one-shot deal. And I heard somebody talk about sustainability... I was so impressed with the community and how they felt about funding for early childhood development with that pandemic money.”

Focus Group #2: Family Support & Community Engagement

Set strategic plan goals that are agreed upon by the majority of stakeholders and reasonably within the Council’s control that would logically contribute to improvements in early childhood (e.g., “get a state legislator to sponsor a bill to increase childcare worker pay” rather than “increase childcare worker pay”).

- Previous strategic plan too large and members feel disconnected, little gets accomplished
- Funding is a threat and a barrier, not sustainable
- Create cross-sector partnerships
- Silos
- Need for systems-level thinking

It is possible that COVID has had an impact on strategic planning efforts due the changes in communication, meeting structure, and immediate attention needed in specific areas, which has caused people to not reach their goals. Members are not feeling empowered or connected to the previous strategic plan. Therefore, there are some feeling of being disconnected. The previous strategic plan is so large to where very little gets accomplished since there is not enough focus on individual goals or objectives. In addition, the plan was not written with realistic outcomes in mind. Furthermore, funding has been both a threat and a barrier due the amount of funding available yet little guidance of how to manage grant funding. In addition, there is a growing

concern of how to maintain sustainable programming once the funds are exhausted. With the lack of coordination and collaboration, there is the potential for missed opportunities to develop partnerships that could lead to future funding opportunities. Therefore, it is important to create cross-sector partnerships to help with the various issues that early education faces such as homelessness. Unfortunately, silos do exist. This creates a barrier in developing partnerships as members are unaware of what other groups do. There is a need for systems level thinking in order to create a no wrong door approach with a trusted one stop shop for all resources. Ultimately, outcomes for early childhood development could improve if resources were accessible and inclusive for all families.

Recommendations

Find effective strategies, provide tools, or develop skills of board members to empower them to fulfill their roles.

- *“Tell me what I can do if I'm not the director of anything. And I never got this answer at all. I'm very willing to do something, but there was nothing that I was being guided with.”*
- *“If I was given more of a better framework, then, even though I may not be directly over a specific program or strategy, I could probably be more informed in terms of how I can impact it.”*

Develop a strategic plan with SMART goals for sustainable programming.

- *“And there's just so much in the plan that it makes it very hard, basically doing 5% attention on every little thing, instead of giving your full focus on one goal or objective that you have control over, or you have influence over.”*
- *“[O]ne thing I worry about in terms of what are we building that's sustainable after these funds go away.”*

Develop an asset map or similar document to showcase all available programs to reduce duplicated efforts while bringing all stakeholders together to discuss future programs.

- *“[I]f we don't have the comprehensive conversation, that we're missing, a huge piece of what could be if we do find sustainable funds”*

Structure future strategic plans around inclusive, accessible resources for families.

Restructure ECAC meetings to promote discussion of ideas.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted via phone or Zoom during September and October 2021. Nineteen participants were asked ten questions and interviews lasted 30-60 minutes in duration. Interviews were transcribed in real time.

- **Highlights of what is working well**

- “People are dedicated, committed, play nicely together and enjoy each other.”
- “Awareness. Everyone in the system knows it is fractured. Everyone shares the desire to address the problems and improve the system. We all know we need to work together to support children and families.”
- “Impressed with the work that has been done with minimal resources.”
- Themes: Connectedness, collaboration, solidarity

- **Barriers or needs improvement**

- “Ultimately it comes down to there isn’t a system - hugest barrier. Not coordinated, not planned. It’s piece meal service delivery. The ECAC is supposed to be the hub and provide direction, but that isn’t coming to fruition in that way.”
- “Often times the conversations are more about admiring the problem rather than solving the problem.”
- “Need a focused, coordinated, solid effort to get a system in place, develop it, ensure it is working well, show outcomes, and then think about scaling up and expansion. Better to go deep vs wide.”
- “We need to find new ways to reach out/involve new people; cultivate generations of leadership (need a pipeline of people to fill in when people retire, etc.). People are tired and stretched thin.”

Participants were read the following preamble: “The next strategic plan covers a 3-year period. The following five questions will address ideas you have for specific and achievable strategies to be considered for this plan. Most importantly, these action items should be within your control or Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council’s (NECAC’s) control within the 3-year strategic plan.”

- **Funding**

- “Be strategic from the beginning to collect the right data components to ensure our investment is paying off.”
- “Independent, professional cost analysis to draw a precise picture of how much funding we’ll need to move forward on the key components of our plan”

- “Focusing on communities that need it most - childcare deserts”
- Themes: Increase wages, subsidies, legislation, sustainable funding
- **Advocacy/policy**
 - “We can promote individual needs and talk about how that improves the community as a whole (rising tide lifts all boats); we all improve when we help each other and help each other out—legislatively, that’s the type of message to talk about.”
 - “More explicit and upfront about core values is something ECAC could do – we’re going to stay in line with our value to promote XYZ; perhaps moving forward, the ECAC could be more obvious or explicit about it so that connection is made for everyone, including in the general community (not just the field).”
 - “Standing meet and greet forums to accomplish check-ins, not just a focus on problems.”
 - “We actually do some good work in these areas, but we could do a lot better if our meetings were not taken up with updates and reports. We need that time for targeted thinking on issues and opportunities. We’re supposed to be an advisory council, but there doesn’t seem to be much advising going on.”
 - “We are split into too many agencies. Need a combined agency/voice for Early Childhood. Leadership that can negotiate the politics and keep an eye on maintaining quality in the system. Create an ongoing outreach campaign. The HRSA grant is a good start.”
 - “Need a common system of data and communications. Other states are moving on this, and it works.”
 - “If we see early childhood as birth-8 and policies/programs are Pre-K, what do we do with the system around it to make it more robust and balance out?”
 - Themes: Communication, messaging, strong agenda
- **Partnerships/Collaboration**
 - “For the ECAC, that would probably be a valuable visual to show some of the steps being taken to get us toward longer-term vision. Better evaluation loops might make sense and communicating those (we’re reviewing xyz quarterly, etc.). More of an ongoing action planning revising as needed based on evidence we have and are collecting.”
 - “We share common priorities, but we don’t work together on them enough.”
 - “Build partnerships between training and delivery systems. Increase linkages with higher education.”

- “The landscape right now has to do with social determinants of health and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)—all entwined. You can’t separate health and education. Thinking of it that way, have we partnered with nonprofits and community-based orgs that deal with pregnant moms and babies who can give us insights....talk to orgs who are talking to the end user every day? Have we engaged on the food insecurity piece? Are we creating those cross-linkage? “Those community-based organizations that are meeting social needs are engaging families, so we need to talk to them to make sure we’re solving for those needs and not the needs we think should be solved for.”
- Themes: Silos, paid positions
- **Increasing Engagement**
 - “We could consider encouraging idea of partnership/ collaboration across sectors....is there a way to incentivize? Trying to encourage people’s flexibility in their thinking about that starting at the State-level. Why are we breaking up this age group from birth-2 to 3-5?”
 - “ECAC is engaged. COVID has made it much harder, just as we were starting to work on the last plan. And everybody is trying to drink out of a firehose right now. With new resources and new focus, we’re ready to go forward together.”
 - Theme: Communication
- **Improving ECE Workforce**
 - “Could the State potentially supplement to promote teachers with more experience and skill? Create that type of pathway that helps them get into other areas.....good pre-school teacher who goes to work for School District or early intervention or Head Start. Combo of pay commensurate with education and experience and then making sure we provide quality education.”
 - “We ask a lot of these people. The pay, benefits and working conditions all need to be upgraded substantially. Minimize unnecessary credentialing barriers. Use system changes like going remote to build capacity with frontline program staff.”
 - Themes: Funding, living wages, subsidies, education, recruitment, credentialing

The following key themes were identified during this data collection process as specific and actionable items to be considered in future strategic planning. While many other themes were identified, not all items are appropriate nor actionable for a three-year strategic plan:

- Advocacy, including a strong connection to the Governor and other decision makers
- Sustainable funding
- Mental health
- Data systems
- Training and technical assistance
- Rural areas
- Creating a common agenda
- Communication strategies
- Workforce development