

# Northern Nevada Early Childhood ROUNDTABLE

2022 Report



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## **Background**

On January 7, 2022, the College of Education and Human Development, in partnership with the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, hosted a half-day Early Childhood Roundtable for northern Nevada, focused on identifying areas of biggest need for families with young children in our region. Attendees included an array of leaders and practitioners from multiple sectors focused on serving young children and their families. The Governor of Nevada and President of the University of Nevada, Reno both made remarks at the event affirming their commitment to a strong early childhood system in our state. This report serves to summarize the results of small group discussions, held in person and in Zoom breakout rooms, on three main questions:

1. What are the services available to young children and families?
2. What are the challenges of providing services for young children and families?
3. What is needed to build a stronger collaborative effort to serve families with young children?

A total of eight small groups participated in the discussions, 4 in person and 4 on Zoom. In-person participants shared responses individually on post-it notes and then grouped the responses of their table members on chart paper. Zoom participants shared responses on a Google slide and then discussed and grouped responses on that slide. After discussing and identifying common themes of individuals' responses, each group had the opportunity to share back with the whole group. The following pages summarize the themes that emerged after a close examination and thematic analysis of each group's responses to each question.

## **Services Available**

*What are the services available to young children and families?*

Participants identified hundreds of services designed to assist young children and families in Nevada. Broadly, these services could be grouped into three main categories: Promotion, Prevention, and Treatment/Intervention. Promotion services seek to promote health and wellbeing of all children and families, prevention services focus on preventing negative impacts for those at an increased risk for poor outcomes, and treatment/intervention services assist families and young children who are experiencing challenges.

*Promotion* services identified included community infrastructure such as public parks, childcare centers, museums, enrichment activities, and childcare resource and referral services.

*Prevention* services identified included home visiting, parent education initiatives, and Head Start/Early Head Start.

*Treatment/Intervention* services identified included medical services, mental health supports, early intervention and disability services, and monetary or other basic supports for qualifying families (e.g., food bank, Medicaid, WIC).

## **Challenges**

*What are the challenges of providing services for young children and families?*

Participants identified a multitude of challenges stemming from a variety of sources. Themes that emerged from these discussions included issues with: capacity, infrastructure, access, inclusion, communication, and trust. Discussions characterized a disparate group of systems supporting young children and families with numerous,

disconnected, and often short-term funding streams, separate data systems, inequitable access, insufficient funding, staffing shortages, and a crumbling infrastructure. An attendee from the Children's Cabinet shared with us a figure that illustrates the complexity of the various systems supporting young children and families in Nevada. With permission, this figure is shared in Appendix B. Participants also maligned the lack of inclusion of children with disabilities in Nevada and no apparent accountability for this privation. It was noted that Nevada's tribal communities are often disconnected from larger conversations about the needs of the state's children and families.

Participants noted that these challenges in our systems are overlaid on top of a series of societal ills including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, prevalence of overt and covert racism, a lack of diversity in providers of services to young children and families in Nevada, and a basic lack of trust and understanding at all levels (families not trusting systems, providers not trusting families, community members' not seeing early childhood services as a societal concern worthy of investment).

### **Ideas for Building a Stronger Collaborative Effort**

*What is needed to build a stronger collaborative effort to serve families with young children?*

Participants suggested a plethora of strategies to address the challenges facing the early childhood systems in our state. When strategies were shared with the entire group, several were met with resonant agreement. For example, one in-person group noted that early childhood systems were often driven by short-term, federal funding mechanisms. When the grant funding expires, the programs, processes, supports, and people necessarily shift to the next funding opportunity. This way of working is

counterproductive to long-term progress. The group noted that it is time for Nevada to develop a plan to address the needs of young children and their families and then seek funding for programs and services that address those needs, proactively. Funding opportunities pursued should be aligned with the needs of Nevada's systems, and ultimately, the needs of its young children and families. This way of working would unite early childhood systems around common goals that all are pursuing in concert. One specific strategy to make this idea a reality would be to create a centralized, funded state office charged with overseeing all components of the early childhood system. When this idea was shared, other groups applauded and nodded in agreement. Indeed, two groups specifically mentioned the need for a coordinated statewide office.

Another idea that resonated with the entire group in attendance was the need for Nevada to smooth the transitions that young children experience. For instance, a child identified with a disability at birth will be served by one entity for the first three years of life, then switch over to a school district that takes over coordination and provision of services. This way of working is a product of federal law distinguishing between service provision for infants and toddlers and young children. However, it doesn't work well for families or for children, who benefit from seamless systems that work together on their behalf. One strategy that was mentioned to address this issue would be to redefine early intervention as serving children aged 0-5 rather than stopping at age 3.

Another example of transitions that make life more difficult for families is the dramatic transition occurring at kindergarten entry. The transition into the K-12 system is blunt and unsupported for many of Nevada's children and families. Children either move from a home environment or a learner-driven childcare center into a system where

teachers are not specifically trained to know about child development or learning science. While Nevada has an Early Childhood teaching license that spans from birth through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, it overlaps with the K-5 teaching license. Most K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers in the state hold the elementary teaching license, which does not require depth in understanding how young children learn best. A young child entering Kindergarten would experience a smoother transition if Kindergarten teachers engaged in more developmentally appropriate practices. One solution to this disconnect would be requiring that teachers who work with young children, aged 0-8, hold the Early Childhood Education license.

Several other themes on what is needed emerged from the discussions of question three. The themes, with exemplar ideas that emerged from the groups, are listed below.

*Systems*: A system that encompasses private providers; connecting with tribal and rural communities; stronger regulations for childcare licensing; aligned and coordinated systems; co-located services for families; preparing a high-quality workforce within the state (allied therapists, educators, mental health professionals- for example, Nevada does not have an Occupational Therapy training program); “rebuild the system!”

*Communication*: Communication between systems; continued collaboration; outreach to all geographic regions of the state; listening to communities and families

Funding: Sustainable funding or increased investment was mentioned by 6 of the 8 groups.

Data: Almost every group mentioned one or more issues relating to data—the need to collect common data, using the data we collect, sharing data, and making data-driven decisions.

## Exit Survey Results

Shortly after the Roundtable concluded, an exit survey was sent by email to all attendees. Several attendees also reached out to the author of this report directly by email to express their appreciation for the meeting and indicate interest in follow-up collaborations. A total of 19 attendees (9 virtual) completed at least a portion of the exit survey. The results follow.

Item	Mean/Percent
How likely are you to recommend the Northern Nevada Early Childhood Roundtable to a friend or	M = 8.9 (out of
In which of the following aspects of the event were you most interested? (Ranked)	% Ranking 1 or 2
What services are provided to families with young children?	0%
What are the challenges in providing services...?	57%
What is needed to build a stronger collaborative effort...?	71%
How satisfied were you with the...	M = 4.8 (out of 5)
Venue	M = 4.3
Food	M = 3.7
Audio Visual	M = 4.5
Roundtable Sessions	
In the future, how often would you prefer to attend a Northern Nevada Early Childhood Roundtable?	93% ranked as 1
Biannual Meetings	7% ranked as 1
Annual Meetings	

What is the ideal length for an event like this?	.07%
2 hours	28.6%
3 hours	57.1%
Half Day	.07%
Full Day	

<sup>a</sup> “Other” responses included rural/urban differences in service provision and challenges; participation from state and university leadership; future outreach to families

Respondents also answered several other open-ended questions. When asked what they liked *most* about the Roundtable, 13 participants responded, indicated the following:

The conversation with colleagues and reporting out. Was really interesting to hear that we are all on the same page regardless of what breakout group you
Collaborating with others
The diversity of providers/perspectives, the opportunity to connect and re-connect with others in the field.
The recognition that our systems are scattered, communication poor, and that we need to start to diversify our definitions of “childcare” to include private entities that work with children supporting families and the workforce.
The group think
I appreciated being able to be able to participate with my colleagues through the different platforms and have meaningful conversations about our collective work serving children and families.
opportunity to interact with wide range of service providers across disciplines
Representation of people from different organizations in person & virtually.
Quick-pace organization, although that did not allow many follow up conversations, it was useful for the purpose of establishing topics and generating a good picture of what the attendees want for the future of ECE in
Seeing all the potential for collaboration and improving our early childhood systems
The ability to meet and work with other professionals in the field
Allowing all to have input, a voice.
The conversation is important
The networking component--so many of us are doing similar things or have similar goals, but don't have opportunities to talk.

When asked what they liked *least* about the Roundtable, 13 participants responded, indicated the following:

Maybe more next steps...now what? Can we reconvene this group for local/regional action?
No time for action planning/follow up
It was fantastic. I would have liked more clarity on next steps, perhaps.
The clustering of like minds at individual tables. Mix it up.
Nothing
Dedicating three hours to a meeting was difficult.
wish all could have been in person
TBD... for me, this depends a lot on what happens next. Lack of follow up could be my only issue. (But I doubt I will be disappointed!)
Not being able to ask follow up questions to the Governor. Haha, like he has time for that. :)
Unable to have everyone in the room together
Would like to see some solid plans for change and to continue to work together
No parents/consumers of services were represented. However, that may be part of future plans I'm not aware of.
Not being Able to see everyone
The start time. I definitely would have preferred meeting over lunch or in the afternoon

When asked what we missed, 4 participants responded with the following suggestions:

I missed participating in person, but really didn't miss a beat as the "Zoomers" were facilitated so professionally. Thank you Melissa! Really a great job.
I suppose more concrete plans on what we all are expected to do within our work. We are waiting for a report / summary of the events, but what exactly are we going to do with it? WHO receives it, WHEN do we meet again? HOW do we build momentum and begin the shift in our state?

This was a great start! A clearer picture of what is envisioned for future events would be lovely. When will we meet again? How was this event different than previous conferences, meetings, summits, etc.

Improve K-3 participation in attendees...there were several folks from Shurz primary level services and I would have loved to see more. I hope they got something useful out of the meeting.

There was Native representation but we didn't get to actually discuss inequalities and brainstorm solutions specifically for underserved populations. It came up, but perhaps needs to be a more targeted question to generate ideas and share experiences.

It was great to be able to participate cross-sector and share opinions and experience, and I think it would be awesome to create an online space (forum, discussion, etc.) where we can continue to contribute to the ideas brought forth, share resources virtually, make connections and network, etc. until the next Roundtable. The What Next question that someone asked at the end about "What can I do Monday when I get back to work?" is really important, as

Outreach to families. What do Washoe County families need? How do we gather that information?

## **Conclusions**

A strong commitment and devotion to the young children and families of Nevada was evident among all participants attending the Northern Nevada Early Childhood Roundtable. They engaged in small group discussions with energy, openness, and dedication to improvement. The Roundtable resulted in improved knowledge with regard to what services exist, what challenges are faced, and what is needed in order to foster stronger systems for young children and families in Nevada. Several themes emerging from discussions stood out.

1. The need for Nevada to restructure its early childhood system(s) under one umbrella entity, similar to how other states have reorganized. Participants mentioned specifically looking to New Mexico, Colorado, and Minnesota. Restructuring would

provide the opportunity for seamless and unified goals, and fostering systems that work for young children and families.

2. The need for adequate, long-term state investment into the early childhood system. Participants mentioned the need for investment in universal services rather than services requiring that qualification criteria be met. Several cities and states across the nation have done this; for example, in providing universal childcare for all 3- and 4-year-olds.
3. The need for a concerted, unified focus on the entire age span of early childhood, from the prenatal period through age 8. Such a focus would be fostered by the creation of a state level office spanning multiple departments and divisions, highlighting the importance of creating seamless transitions for young children throughout the first 8 years of life. Such a focus would also be fostered by the creation of regional early childhood hubs which concentrate on providing promotion, prevention, and treatment/intervention services in a single location for young children and families in the local community.

### **Next Steps**

The organizers of this Northern Nevada Early Childhood Roundtable will reach out to and work alongside leaders of agencies in attendance to make progress toward improving the early childhood systems in our region. Organizers intend to begin a concerted fundraising campaign to create a Northern Nevada Early Childhood hub on the University of Nevada, Reno campus to illustrate how a single location can weave together multiple services at all levels (promotion, prevention, treatment/intervention) for the benefit of young children and families. The survey results overwhelmingly indicated

that a Roundtable such as this one is needed and should occur twice annually. The organizers will begin planning for a Summer Roundtable to take place in summer of 2022.

Finally, we wish to thank all of the individuals who attended the first Roundtable on very short notice and gave us an entire morning of their excellent thoughts, conversation, and brainstorming. It is clear that northern Nevada is filled with enthusiastic, driven leaders in all fields related to early childhood. Together, we will make a difference for families with young children in northern Nevada.

## Appendix A

### Agencies/Companies Represented at the Northern Nevada Early Childhood Roundtable

Office of the Governor
University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) President's Office
UNR College of Education & Human Development Dean's Office
UNR Department of Human Development, Family Science, & Counseling
UNR Department of Speech Pathology & Audiology
UNR Child & Family Research Center & Early Head Start
UNR Department of Educator Preparation
UNR School of Public Health, Center for Public Health Excellence
Great Basin College
Nevada Division of Welfare & Supportive Services
Nevada Early Intervention Services
Nevada Department of Education
Nevada Office of Early Learning & Development
Nevada Division of Child & Family Services
Nevada Division of Public & Behavioral Health
Nevada Division of Aging & Disability Services
Nevada Department of Health & Human Services
Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada
The Nevada Registry
Washoe County School District
Mineral County School District
Washoe County Human Services Agency
Washoe County Safe Babies Court
Nevada Pyramid Model Partnership
The Children's Cabinet

Reno Sparks Indian Colony

LeAn Shelton Consulting, LLC

## Appendix B

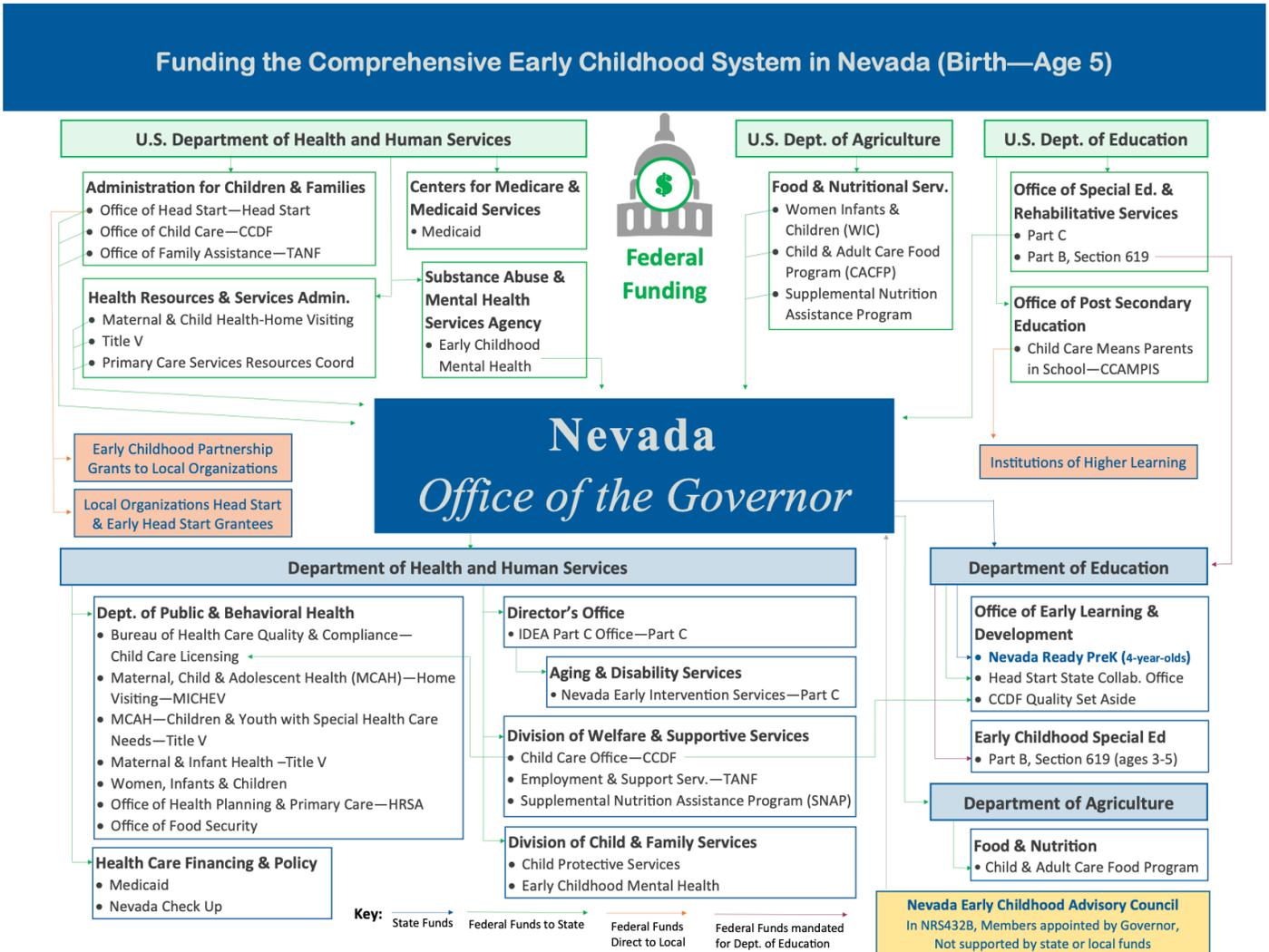


Figure shared by Marty Elquist, Department Director, Supporting Early Education and Development, The Children's Cabinet