Early Childhood Education for Children with All Parents in the Labor Force

Jerry Deichert, Center for Public Affairs Research
University of Nebraska at Omaha
December 2012

Historically, Nebraska has had one of the highest labor force participation rates in the nation. As a result, a large portion of Nebraska’s children have working parents. Table 1 shows that in 2010, 75.2% of Nebraska’s children under 6 years old had all their parents in the labor force. This ranks second in the nation and compares to the national average of 64.6%. Moreover, the percentage of children with all their parents in the labor force has been increasing during the past decade. In 2000, the comparable value was 69.8% (see Figure 1).

Table 1. Percentage of Own Children under 6 Years Old with All Parents in the Labor Force for Nebraska and the United States: 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Children under 6 Years</th>
<th>National Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey; prepared by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, September 2012

Figure 1. Percentage of Own Children under 6 Years Old with All Parents in the Labor Force for Nebraska and the United States: 2000-2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2002 to 2010 and 2000 Census of Population and Housing; prepared by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, September 2012

Early Childhood Education

As documented in the Legislature’s Planning Committee 2011 Report, this trend has coincided with an increased effort in early childhood education in Nebraska. In 2010-2011,

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1 If children live with two parents, then both parents are in the labor force. If children live with one parent only, then that parent is in the labor force.
10,250 children attended an early childhood education program conducted by a school district or Educational Service Unit. This is a slight decrease from 2009-2010 (10,259) but an increase from 2009-2008 (9,641) and 2007-2008 (8,692). In addition, over 3,000 children were served by non-school district Head Start programs in 2008-2009.

Compared to the nation, Nebraska lags in the percentage of children aged three and four who are enrolled in an education program. According to the 2008-2010 American Community Survey, 47.8% of Nebraska’s children aged three and four were enrolled. This was slightly below the national level of 48.3% and ranks 24th in the nation. Regionally, only Colorado and Iowa had a higher percentage of children enrolled. Of those children enrolled, 53.7% were enrolled in a public school. This ranked 29th in the nation.

In its publication, “Early Childhood Programs: A Guide to Serving Children Birth to Kindergarten Entrance Age In Center-based Early Childhood Programs Operated by Public School Districts, Educational Service Units and their Community Partners”, the Nebraska Department of Education discusses the components of a community needs assessment to help determine the current status of early childhood education services in the community. The report suggests that “the community needs assessment should include, but is not limited to:

- The total number of children birth to age five in the community;
- The number of children from families with risk factors such as low income, English language learners, children of teen parents, and children who were born at a low birth weight;
- The number and enrollment capacity of currently licensed family child care homes, child care centers, preschools, and Head Start in the community;
- The number of children birth to kindergarten entrance age who are not currently receiving early childhood education services; and
- Barriers to accessing services for children not enrolled in other programs.”

**Conclusion**

In the list of items to include in a community needs assessment, the Nebraska Department of Education does not mention working parents; nor does the report recommend including children with working parents in the identification of current demographic information. Given the fact that a large and increasing percentage of Nebraska’s children under the age of six years have working parents, we suggest that this indicator should be utilized as a factor when considering the development of an early childhood program.

**References**