



Supports Needed by
Early Childhood
Professionals to
Complete Degrees &
Certification

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Agenda



- The early care and education **context**
- **RESPECT across Nebraska**
- **Investigation** of early childhood students' and professionals' **facilitators and barriers** to education and teacher certification
- **Data-**and **experience-**informed decision-making to support early childhood educators



Early Childhood Care & Education Context

- Widespread **shortage of early childhood educators** in NE and US

- Nearly half (46%) of licensed childcare providers in Nebraska who employ staff report that **staff have left the profession entirely, in part, due to low compensation.**



- Grossly **inadequate compensation** for early childhood educators

- The average **median annual pay** for a center-based early childhood teacher is **below the U.S. poverty threshold for a family of three.**
- Nearly 30% of home-based providers and 20% of center-based providers **depend on some form of public assistance.**
- More than 11% of home-based providers **have a second job** and nearly 20% of center-based teachers, public PreK teachers, and K-3 teachers report holding a second job.



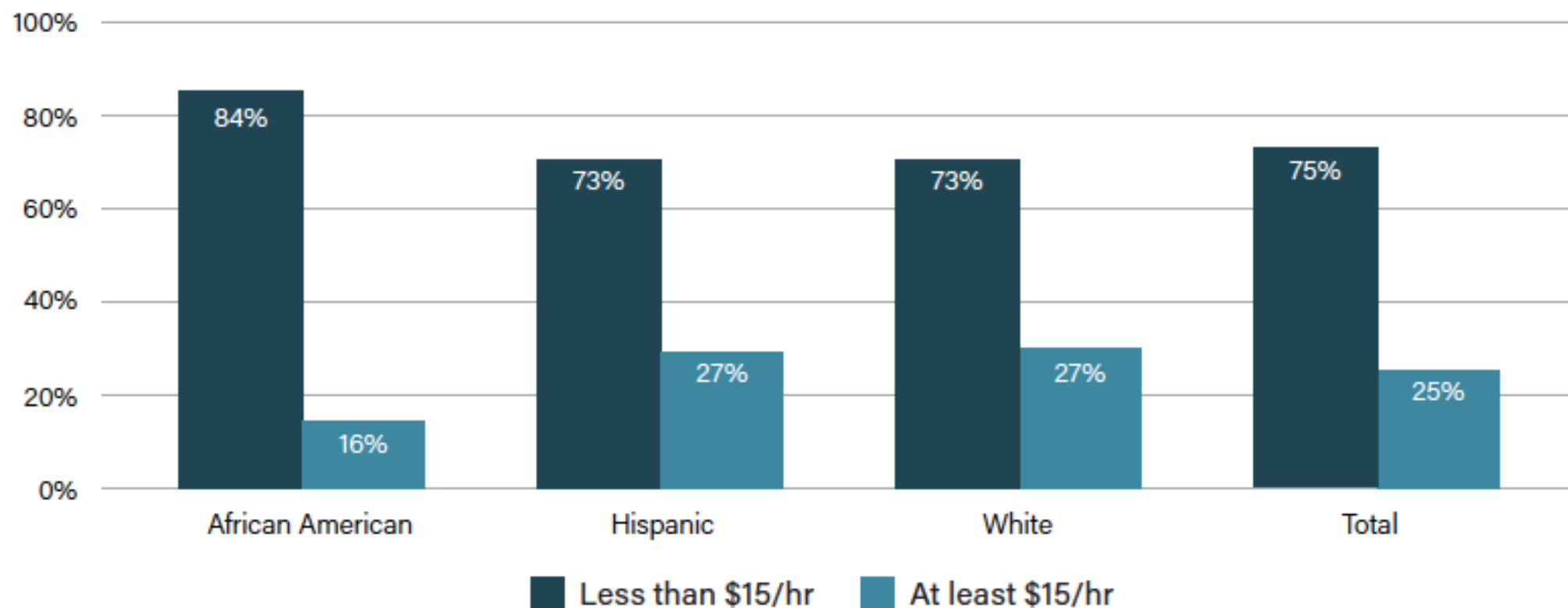
Limited Access to Higher Education & Teacher Certification for the ECE Workforce

- Nationwide, approximately **43%** of center-based early childhood educators have at least a bachelor's degree, but only **10%** in ECE¹
- Most early childhood educators can't afford to leave their jobs to earn degrees.



FIGURE 2.10

Wages of Center-Based Staff by Race/Ethnicity: National



Effects on Children and Families

- **28% of Nebraskans live in a childcare “desert”**
 - More than 3 children under age 5 for each licensed childcare slot
- **36% of rural communities are childcare deserts**



Responsive Equitable System for Preparing Early Childhood Teachers (RESPECT) across Nebraska

Design and implement **equitable, accessible, community-based** and **culturally sustaining** early childhood teacher preparation **pathways** in Nebraska.

Buffett Early Childhood Fund

investing in the early years

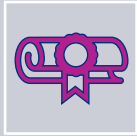
EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT COLLABORATIVE

Professional Educators. Professional Compensation. Prepared Children.

OUR PARTNERS



RESPECT Across Nebraska



Aim 1. Build a competency-based framework that defines common expectations



Aim 2. Collaborate with local communities to ensure the work is culturally sustaining



Aim 3. Develop accessible pathways and support mechanisms



Principles

- **Inclusion and empowerment**
- **Sharing power** – a Team Science approach
 - Acknowledge differences in power within structures
 - Voice, autonomy, decision-making, accountability, authorship/credit
- Data-driven **decision-making**
- Working **across systems**
- **Centering early childhood professionals**
 - Building pathways and programs to meet the needs of EC professionals



Investigating Facilitators & Barriers to Degrees & Certification

Mixed-methods study of ECE professionals and students in NE

- **Sequential convergent** design Quant->Qual

Survey distributed to ECE students and professionals (11/22-4/23)

- 155 English-speaking participants (Mean age = 37.8; range 18-64)
 - **131 currently working** in ECE (Mean 13.2 years; range 0-45 years)
 - **74 had a degree** in ECE (47.7%)
 - 5 CDA
 - 29 AA, AS, AAS
 - 44 BA/BS
 - **57 currently pursuing** a degree or credential (36.7%)
 - **27 had a Nebraska teaching certificate**
- 4 Spanish-speaking participants



Recruitment methods

- Phase 1: Electronic survey distributed via:
 - All community colleges offering ECE degree
 - Nebraska AEYC
 - Early Learning Coordinators
 - Workgroup members' professional networks
- Phase 2: Translated into Spanish
 - Postcards with link to both English & Spanish distributed to zip codes underrepresented in the sample and zip codes within partnership regions
 - Fliers distributed at ECE conferences (English & Spanish)



Selected Survey Results

Barriers to Completing Degrees & Certification

Financial – I have a family I am supporting	21.3%
Time – any other responsibilities	18.7%
Time – can't take time away from work to go to school	18.7%
Time – family responsibilities	16.1%
Financial – I am concerned about student debt	11.0%

Selected Survey Results

Supports that would Help to Complete Degree

Support	N(%)
Financial – stipend or wage increase to help with living expenses	86 (55.5%)
Financial – support for tuition, fees, books	81 (52.3%)
Time – a stipend to pay for time away from work to go to school	57 (36.8)
Greater earnings with degree// Minimize or avoid student debt	52 (33.5)
Time – I have many other responsibilities	51 (32.9)
Financial support for child or dependent family care	35 (22.6)
Location – a program I can complete close to home or virtually	32 (20.6)
Encouragement from others invested in my success	28 (18.1)
Stipend to cover the cost of travel	25 (16.1)
Information about what programs are available	23 (14.8)



Participant Familiarity with Programs to Support ECE

- 72% T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Nebraska
- 25% Child Care WAGE\$ Nebraska
- 8.5% Nebraska Promise



Early Childhood Educator Interviews

UNDERSTANDING PATHWAYS



Maximum Variation Sampling

9 Participants:
Family & Center-based care
No degree, AA, BA
Experience: <5 yrs to 10+
4 of 7 Regions
White, Black; 100% Female



Semi-Structured Interviews

Experiences in the field:
Student
Professional



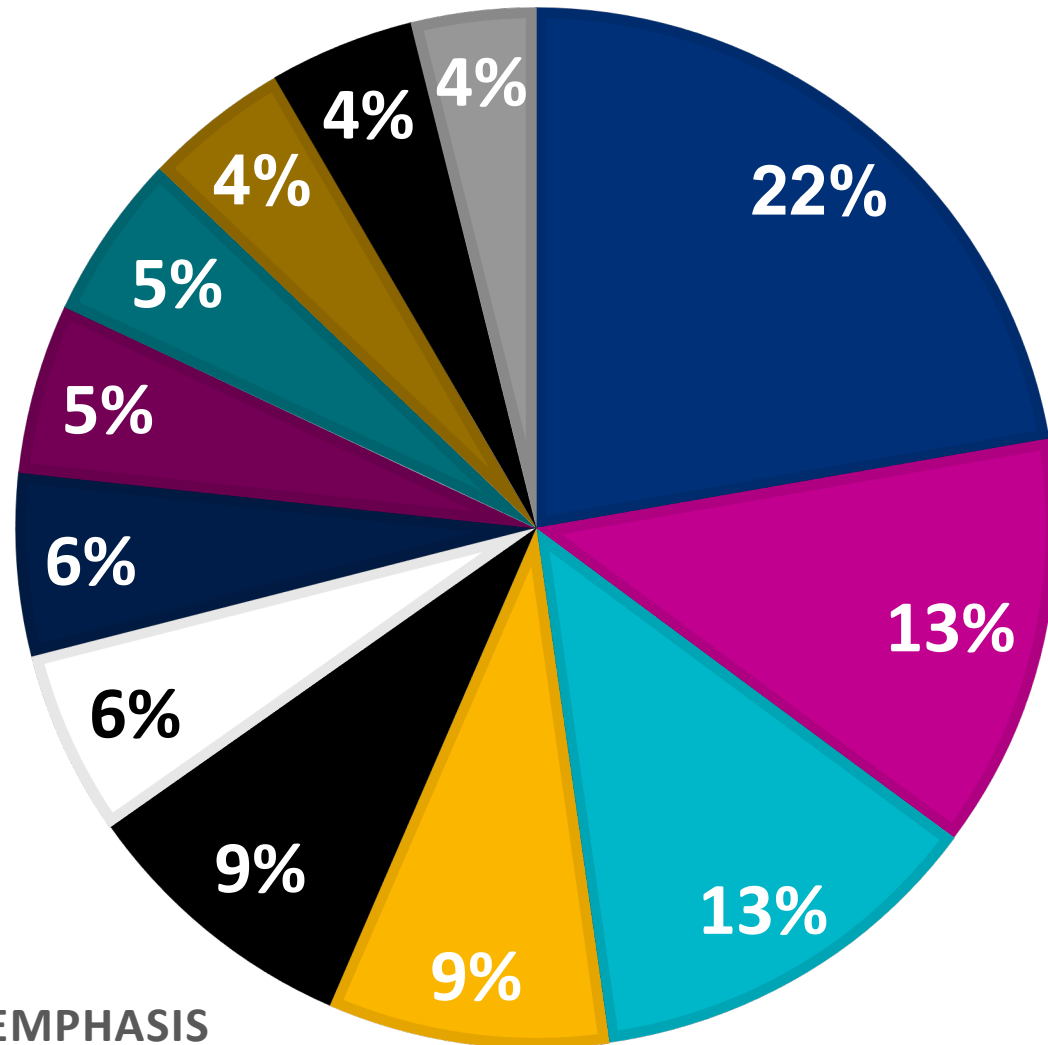
Thematic Analysis

(Braun & Clarke)

Areas of Interest:
Barriers & Supports
Participant emphasis



Overview of Findings



AREAS OF EMPHASIS

- Navigating the Profession
- Philosophies of Childcare
- Feeling Valued
- ECE Community
- EC Education Challenges
- Guidance & Mentorship
- EC Education Supports
- Why Get a Degree?
- Relationships with Parents
- Professional Development
- Navigating Higher Ed
- Financial Supports & Barriers



Overview of Key Themes

Navigating the Work

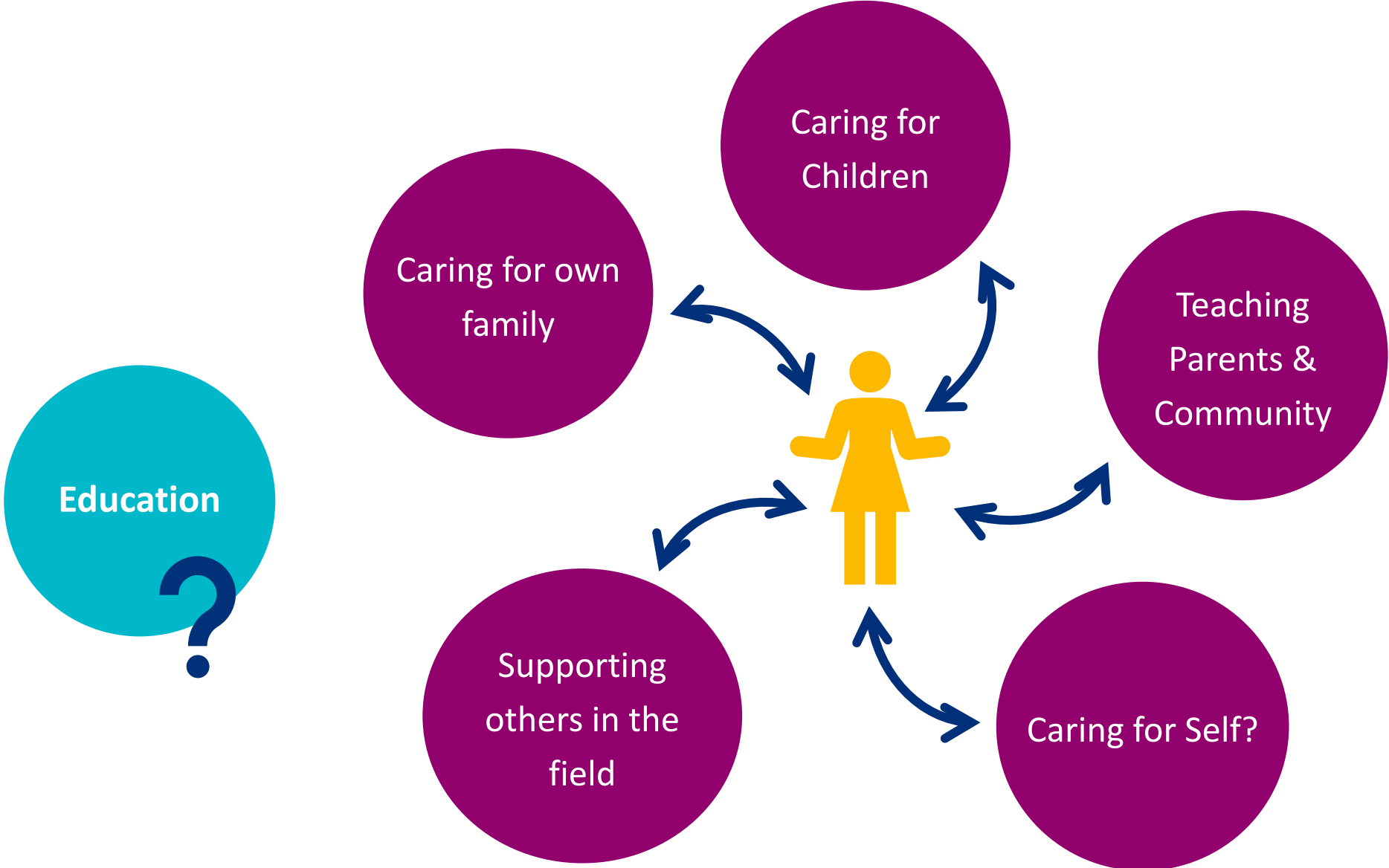
- **Relationships w/Parents**
- **Self-determination & family priorities** in career choices
- **Workplace challenges** (e.g., colleagues, running a business)
- **Economic challenges** (underpaid and overworked)
- **Philosophies of education** and **caregiving** alignment (e.g., with other centers of care)

Navigating Higher Ed

- **Guidance & Mentorship = KEY**
- **Professional Development** as a segue into higher ed pathway
- **Financial Support** is critical
- **Barriers:**
 - navigating the process
 - balance with work obligations
 - balancing family responsibilities
 - adequate self confidence
 - need for education at all?



EC Educators as Community Caregivers



EC Educators as Community Caregivers

*“...right now **seems like everybody's pushing...** like, you know, every time you go to a meeting or go to something. Oh, you should try Step Up to Quality, oh you should do NEC, oh you should, you know you should be in this, you should be in that and you should be in that. **And it seems like everything's thrown on you that you should be doing all this stuff.** And you should, you know, you have to take this class to be able to teach the kids. You should be taking this class, you know, to be better. You know and then all of a sudden you get all this pressure to do this stuff and then boom. **You know, I get it. I've gotten to where I've got so much going on, that, it's like I'm just exhausted.**”*



Philosophies of Care and Education

Views and practices of the EC educator on what is important for children to experience in early childhood care and education

- **Involves / Impacts:**

- Views on what constitutes “quality” care and education
- Motives to change careers or design their own family- or center-based program
- Relationships and interactions with parents & coworkers
- Sense of satisfaction in the work

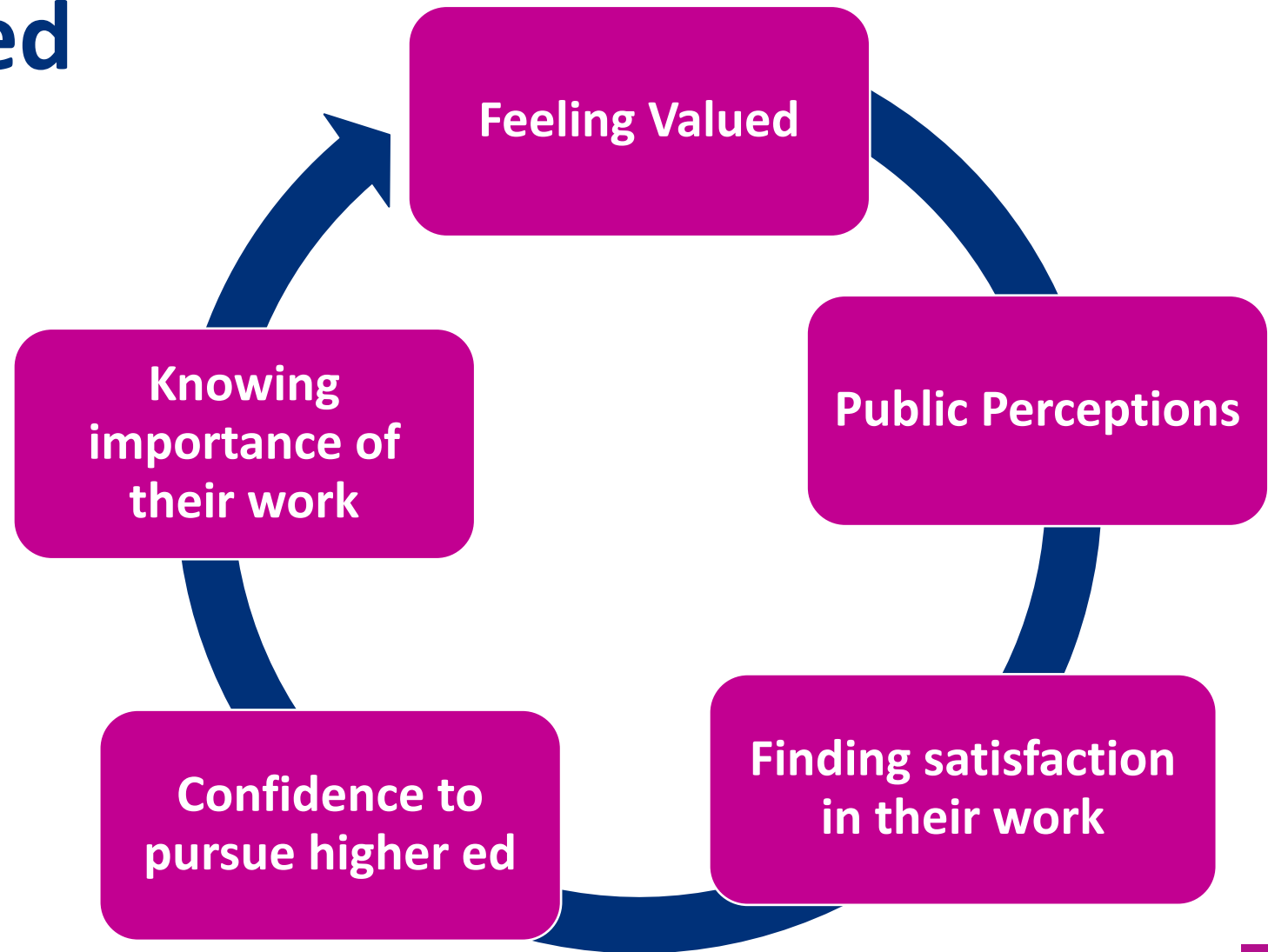
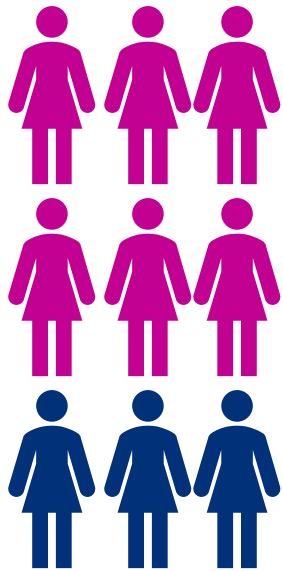
- **Highly influenced by:**

- Personal experiences, culture, and background (positive & negative)
- Educational experiences



Feeling Valued

Early Childhood Educators are NOT “babysitters”



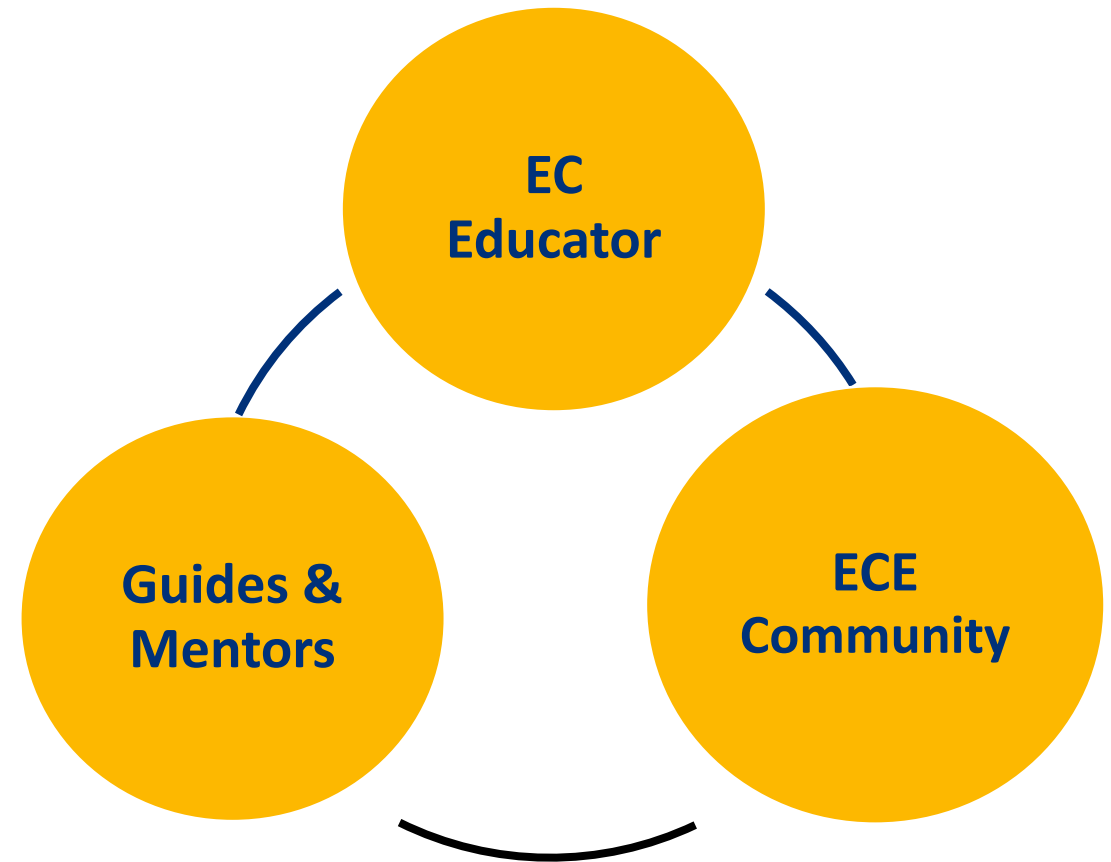
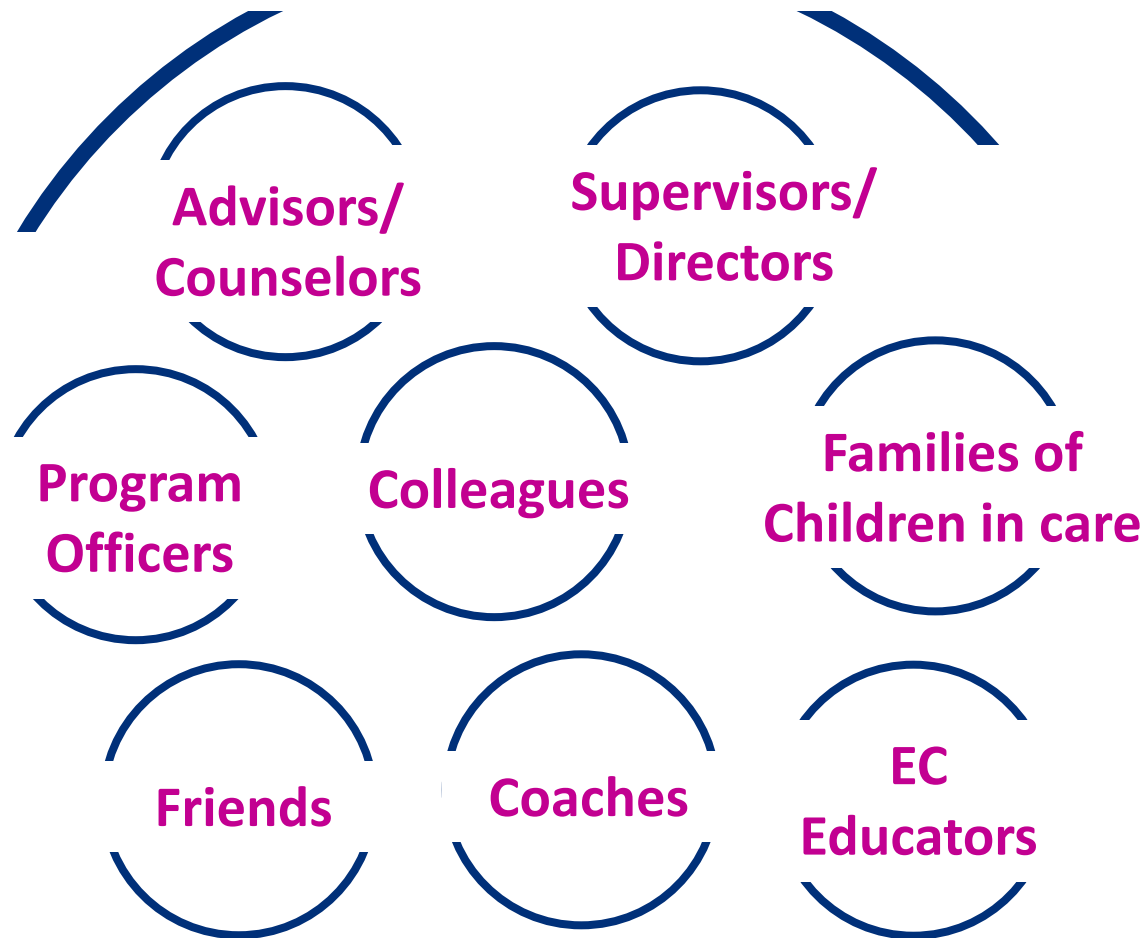
Feeling Valued

*“I think people look at us as and you know how much **we all cringe at babysitters, daycare, oh my God, you know, I don't take care of the day I take care of children. Don't call me daycare, you know. Because I don't do that, I teach, I'm a teacher.** And that's so hard for people to understand. I worked very hard for that degree and **I want to enhance a child's life, but I need the respect of that;** and we all need that respect, and we don't see that in childcare. And it just kills me. And maybe it's because we call it childcare, I don't know—**we're caring for more than the child, we're caring for the whole family.**”*



Guidance, Mentorship & Community

Guides & Mentors



Guidance, Mentorship & Community

*“I think **we probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for all of the programs and stuff that have been a part of everything that we've done.** So, I feel like **there is a lot of help** and a lot for early childhood. I think **you just have to look for it and you have to be willing to put the work in** and to, you know, **make those connections.** And I feel like once you make a connection with someone, then it just kind of like [takes off from there].”*



Using Data to Inform Design of Early Childhood Educator Degree Pathways

Challenges/Needs

- Time
- Money
- Encouragement
- Information

Supports/Facilitators

- Financial support for educational expenses, time away from work and family
- Key relationships: mentors, navigators, colleagues
 - Cohort model
 - Success navigator
 - Mentors/journeyperson



Key Takeaways

- Interviews and surveys with educators in Nebraska indicate that those who are working full time need financial support to cover costs of education as well as time to complete coursework.



Key Takeaways

- The experiences, or pathways, for early childhood educators vary widely. From motivations to enter the field, through the access points that have made their pathways possible, each interview has highlighted the importance of creating new pathways that are flexible enough to hold space for individual complexities.



Key Takeaways

- Mentorship grounded in empathy and characterized by flexibility along with a network of support from supervisors, families and friends encourages persistence in early childhood preparation programs that contributes to educators' sense of community and belonging. These experiences create a safety net to prevent attrition from preparation programs and build confidence and perceived value in their role.



Thank You!

For additional information, contact us.

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<http://respectacrossnebraska.org/>

