



Step Up to
Quality

HIGH FIVE *for* **QUALITY**
TOOLKIT



CELEBRATING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Five years is a significant milestone for us — but we're just getting started!

We have lots more teachers to reach and lots more kids to teach. In the meantime, let's celebrate this accomplishment we've achieved together by giving each other a high five! This toolkit can be used to invite parents, kids, your community and other providers to the celebration. We're all in this together to help Nebraska's children reach their fullest potential.

Step Up to
Quality

Department of Health & Human Services
DHHS
NEBRASKA





WHAT'S INCLUDED

A Note from the Step Up to Quality Team

A special thank you to you and all of Nebraska's child care providers who are participating in the program.

High Five Activity Instructions

A simple yet meaningful handprint celebrating five years of Step Up to Quality.

High Five Activity Sheet

A customized sheet for the handprint that parents can take home and save as a keepsake.

Parent Letter

An easy way to let parents know what Step Up to Quality is all about.

FAQ Sheet for Parents

Paired with the letter, it helps explain why Step Up to Quality is important, and that they can take pride that their child is being given the best care possible.

Social Media Posts

Just copy and paste the language provided to your social media channels or use as inspiration for posts in your own words.

Growth Chart Instructions for Teachers

Some fun ideas on how to make this growth chart an educational opportunity for the children in your care.

Growth Chart Instructions for Parents

This is no ordinary growth chart, so we've provided guidance on how to make this chart something parents will keep for a lifetime.

Media Outreach Tips

A place to start when working with your local newspaper, radio or TV station.

Press Release Template

Just fill in the blanks and you're ready to be front page news.

WE'RE CELEBRATING 5 YEARS OF STEP UP TO QUALITY!



To our valued child care providers:

Whether you've been participating in Step Up to Quality for five days or five years, **we are so grateful for your commitment to quality early childhood education.**

Five years of Step Up to Quality means we now have a significant group of five-year-olds entering kindergarten throughout the entire state that are ready to learn. They're creative, confident and curious learners. They have a solid, well-rounded foundation of skills to build from for their entire lives.

As Step Up to Quality has grown over the last five years, the number of children we're influencing is also growing. This is incredibly exciting for our entire state — studies have shown that quality early childhood education translates to better high school graduation rates and higher earnings for those adults later in life, among many other life-changing benefits.

We've said from day one that it doesn't matter whether you're at Step 1 or Step 5 in Step Up to Quality — what's important is that by your enrollment in our program, you're showing your parents, your teachers, your community members, and yes, even your kids, that **a quality education and environment for young children is your number one priority.**

You are where Step Up to Quality lives and breathes. You're the most important cog in this wheel, and **we want to celebrate all your hard work!** In this High Five for Quality Toolkit you'll find lots of fun ideas to help spread the good news about how you've made a difference in our state's future. We know you're busy, so these are very simple, yet meaningful, ways to mark this milestone.

To show our gratitude, and to illustrate the importance of Step Up to Quality in a different way, we're **sending you growth charts for the children in your care.** These growth charts are something families will keep for a lifetime and will be a loving reminder of the quality care they received from you.

Thank you for all you do for your kids – high five to you!

Sincerely,
The Step Up to Quality Team

A row of six handwritten signatures in black ink, reading from left to right: Laurie, Lynne, Jenny, Morgan, Julie, and Ann.

*P.S. We have more in store this year so be sure you're connected to Step Up to Quality on social media. If you have the chance, share what Step Up to Quality has meant to you and your program on your social media channels and be sure to tag us on **Facebook, @Nebraska Step Up to Quality** and on **Twitter, @NDE_StepUp.***

HIGH FIVE FOR QUALITY ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS



What parent doesn't love having their child's handprint? It's a way to mark their growth, and it's like a permanent high five!

For the High Five for Quality activity, we're encouraging child care providers to celebrate Step Up to Quality's five year anniversary with a special handprint activity. We've supplied the sheet — simply print it out and follow these instructions (or just do what you normally do if you have a system that works).

- 1 Make sure your paint is water-based and non-toxic, especially for the babies in your care.
- 2 May we suggest you use blue for your paint color? It's our signature color.
- 3 Choose a time for this activity when your kiddos are easy-going and happy, like after snack or nap time.
- 4 Prepare your painting space by putting down newspaper or plastic table cloths for easy clean up.
- 5 Explain the activity to the kids — involve them in the celebration!
- 6 Brush the paint over the child's hand — aim for even coverage but not too much paint.
- 7 Give the paper a high five by guiding their hands and pressing their fingers and palm gently into the table.
- 8 Slowly lift the hand and head to the sink to wash hands.
- 9 Let the paper dry for several hours — consider sending it home the next day so it has plenty of time to completely set.

Name _____ Age _____

Date _____ Care Provider _____



Five fingers for five years!

Step Up to Quality celebrates each child with a high five and enthusiastic cheers!

“While I miss you all day
I’m having fun and making friends
and learning through a lot of play!”

We are proud to be a Step Up To Quality provider.





Dear Parents,

We're celebrating five years of Step Up to Quality! Because we participate in the Step Up to Quality program, your little one is among the thousands of other children in Nebraska who are experiencing all the benefits quality early childhood education has to offer. High five to you!

Research shows that kids in quality early childhood education programs:

- 1 | Reach developmental milestones early or on time
- 2 | Build emotional intelligence
- 3 | Show improved reading skills
- 4 | Have better math skills in elementary school (it's true!)
- 5 | Are prepared for the next educational step

Those are just five ways quality early childhood education helps kids — there are many more!

We are marking this milestone with some special activities, so stay tuned!

If you want to know more about Step Up to Quality, I've attached a frequently asked questions sheet to this letter, but you can also visit their website at StepUpToQuality.ne.gov where you can sign up for their e-newsletter, which has great parenting tips included and is sent out every month. Follow them on social media, where you'll see other child care centers celebrating, too!

Thank you for partnering with us to encourage growth and development in your child. It's our honor to take care of your precious little one!

PARENT FAQ RESOURCE



What is Step Up to Quality?

Step Up to Quality is the State of Nebraska's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).

What is a QRIS?

A QRIS helps states assess, improve and communicate the level of quality of early childhood programs. Programs are awarded quality ratings for meeting a defined set of program standards.

Is Step Up to Quality required for licensed child care programs?

Step Up to Quality is voluntary for most early childhood programs. Programs who receive more than \$250,000 in child care subsidies are required to participate. Regardless, if your child care program is participating in Step Up to Quality, you can be assured they are going above and beyond to ensure the safety and growth of the children in their care.

How much does it cost for child care providers to participate in Step Up to Quality?

Step Up to Quality is not only free for child care providers, they can receive financial incentives! Step Up to Quality is funded through the Nebraska Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services. We are proud that the State of Nebraska is investing in our future through this important program.

What does it mean when a child care provider is participating in Step Up to Quality?

A child care provider enrolled in Step Up to Quality is demonstrating a commitment to best practices in early childhood education.

Want to know more about Step Up to Quality? Visit our website at StepUpToQuality.ne.gov — you can get more details on the provider rating tools and more.

HANDPRINT ACTIVITY SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



STEP 1

Be sure to take photos (being mindful of photo releases, of course) when your kiddos do their handprint activity!

Here are some photo ideas! Or use the provided image of the High Five for Quality ribbon.



STEP 2

Choose a sample Facebook post below or feel free to create your own.

If you do create your own, be sure to use #HighFiveForQuality, tag Step Up to Quality and include your current step if you would like.

- We're celebrating 5 years of Step Up to Quality in Nebraska today with a #HighFiveForQuality – we're incredibly proud to participate in the program. Nothing is more important to us than providing high quality care and education to our kiddos. Learn more about Step Up to Quality at <http://stepuptoquality.ne.gov>
- Five years of Step Up to Quality deserves a high five! We're so proud to be enrolled in the program. Our kids' parents know that we're doing all we can to provide a high quality education and environment to their little ones. #HighFiveForQuality Learn more about Step Up to Quality at <http://stepuptoquality.ne.gov>

HANDPRINT ACTIVITY

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS *(Continued)*



- We're one of hundreds of child care providers across the state of Nebraska who are enrolled in Step Up to Quality. The program turns 5 years old this year and we're celebrating with a #HighFiveForQuality! Learn more about Step Up to Quality at <http://stepuptoquality.ne.gov>
- Children who receive quality early childhood education are more likely to show better math skills, better capacity to learn, less behavioral issues and even earn higher wages later in life. We believe in the power of quality so much that we're enrolled in the rigorous Step Up to Quality program, which turns 5 years old this year! To learn more about Step Up to Quality, visit <http://stepuptoquality.ne.gov> and join us in giving our kiddos a #HighFiveForQuality!
- We celebrate every first word, first step, every birthday, every milestone – and everything in between. We know that everything we do contributes to a child's development, which is why we participate in Step Up to Quality. It's a program offered through the Nebraska Department of Education and we're proud to use our enrollment to show that we're committed to the very best in early childhood education for each of our kiddos. Step Up to Quality turns 5 years old this year, which we think deserves a #HighFiveForQuality – learn more about the program at <http://stepuptoquality.ne.gov>



STEP 3

Publish!



STEP 4

Encourage your parents to share these posts and celebrate this milestone, too.

HIGH FIVE FOR QUALITY GROWTH CHART INSTRUCTIONS



How to Use the Growth Chart in Your Classroom

Early childhood education teachers are the unsung heroes of our state, and no one knows this more than all of us at Step Up to Quality!

We know it's exhausting work, and you don't always see immediate gratification for all your efforts.

But the long-term effects of a quality early childhood education are undeniably worth it. And this growth chart will be the proof!

We suggest using this growth chart in classrooms — have each child make their mark at the beginning of the year, and then at the end of the year. Or have them make their mark on their birthday. If your facility is small enough, you could have this growth chart mark their development the entire time each child is attending your program!

To set up, simply unroll and hang your chart 11" from the ground and you are ready to start measuring. For younger children, you may use their documented measurements to mark their height on the chart.

We are sending similar growth charts for you to distribute to parents, too. We are encouraging them to use the growth chart to mark their handprints in white paint, which you could also do. On the next page you'll find a letter you can send with the growth chart to parents — with special instructions on how to use it.

We'd love to see your growth charts on social media – tag Step Up to Quality and/or use the hashtags **#StepUpToQualityNE** and **#HighFiveforQuality**.

Be creative, and take a moment to reflect on what an incredible difference you're making at the most crucial learning time of a person's life. It's awe-inspiring. Thank you for all you're doing for Nebraska's children.





They Grow So Fast

When you look back at your little one's newborn photos, isn't it sometimes hard to believe they were ever that small?

It's hard to imagine when they could only coo and smile — especially if they are now talking up a storm and running all over your home. Because your child is enrolled in a Step Up to Quality-rated child care center, preschool or home, they are probably reaching developmental milestones frequently.

Step Up to Quality is a program offered by the State of Nebraska's Departments of Education, and Health and Human Services. It helps child care providers ensure every aspect of their teaching reflects industry best practices. In other words, we help great child care providers become even better!

It's our fifth anniversary at Step Up to Quality, and we wanted to find a way to celebrate every child and not only their physical growth, but what they learn and the new skills they acquire along the way.

We're so proud to give you this growth chart to mark how tall your baby grows during the first five years of their life, but we've also left space for you to mark different ways they are growing intellectually. What new words are they saying? How are they helping around your home? What music do they like? What sport are they learning?

We would like to encourage you to mark these milestones with a handprint! You'll be amazed how your baby's hands continue to grow. We think using white non-toxic craft or tempera paint would be perfect for this growth chart. Simply unfold and hang your chart 11" from the ground and you are ready to start measuring. For younger children, you may use their documented measurements to mark their height on the chart.

We'd love to see how you're using your growth chart! Tag us on social media using the hashtags **#StepUpToQualityNE** or **#HighFiveforQuality**.

Stay connected to Step Up to Quality through our monthly newsletter — it's filled with expert parenting tips and activities you can do at home to boost your child's development. Visit our website at **StepUpToQuality.ne.gov** to sign up.



MEDIA OUTREACH TIPS & PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE



Media Outreach Tips

Build a media list specific to your area, including local TV stations, newspapers and radio stations. Go online and visit your local media websites to gather contact information. You may want to target reporters who specifically cover education, but generally you'll want to contact the editor or news director.

Check with each outlet to see how they prefer to receive information. Most prefer email.

If emailing, copy and paste the content from the press release directly into the body of the email. Many journalists delete emails with attachments because they take too much time to download and may contain viruses. Send your press release to one publication at a time to make it more personal. **DO NOT CC your entire media list in one email.**

After you've emailed the press release, contact the editors or reporters by phone to see if they have received the information and if they are interested in doing a follow-up interview.

If you are interviewed, assume that everything you say is "on the record" even if you say something is "off the record." Don't assume anything you say before or after the interview won't be included in the story. Be sure you have parents' permission for the news outlet to take photographs or video of any of their children.

Press Release Template

The press release will need to be updated with the following, customized to your location:

- Your organization's logo
- Date
- Your contact information, including phone and email
- How have your facility and the children in your care seen the benefits of Step Up to Quality in your programs?



[Add your organization's logo here]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
[Insert date]

[Insert contact name & title]
[Insert email address]
[Insert phone number]

Step Up to Quality Celebrates Five Years

[Insert Name of Child Care Facility] sees the benefits of quality childcare practices in its program

[Insert city, state – Insert date] – Quality child care and early childhood education is important in our state's future. Step Up to Quality is celebrating its five year anniversary in 2019, assisting programs like [Insert name of child care facility] to go beyond state licensing requirements to better serve the needs of young children and their families and to prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond.

"Five years of Step Up to Quality means we have a significant group of five-year-olds entering kindergarten throughout the entire state that are ready to learn," said Lauri Cimino, director of Step Up to Quality. "They're creative, confident and curious learners. Quality early childhood education builds a solid, well-rounded foundation of skills to build from for their entire lives."

That includes five-year-olds right here in [insert city]. [Insert name of child care facility] has seen the benefits of Step up to Quality in its program. [Insert a quote or example of how Step up to Quality has helped your facility improve.]

With 90 percent of brain development occurring before age 5, early child care and education is crucial to a child's future success. Early learning builds the foundation for skills needed in school, work and life. Research shows that kids in quality early childhood education programs are more likely to:

- Reach developmental milestones early or on time
- Build emotional intelligence
- Show improved reading skills
- Have better math skills in elementary school
- Be prepared for kindergarten and to become lifelong learners

Step Up to Quality supports early child care and education programs, including licensed family child care homes and child care centers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, public school-operated early childhood programs and preschools. To learn more about Step Up to Quality, visit stepuptoquality.ne.gov.

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