# ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

## BA RESPECT SCHOLARS PROGRAM

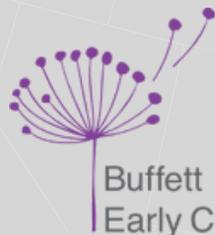**2024-2025**

# RESPECT PARTNERS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RESPECT (Responsive Equitable System for Preparing Early Childhood Teachers) Across Nebraska initiative provides equitable, flexible, and sustainable pathways for early childhood educators to earn their Bachelor's degrees while continuing to work. Funded by the Buffett Early Childhood Fund and the Early Educator Investment Collaborative, the program combines financial support, academic navigation, and cohort-based engagement to address long-standing barriers for nontraditional students. This Year 1 evaluation, drawing on surveys, interviews, and navigator documentation from UNL, UNO, and UNK (August 2024–July 2025), highlights key insights into the experiences of scholars, navigators, faculty, and administrators, informing ongoing program development and support.

## KEY FINDINGS

*Scholar Key Findings*

- Scholars experienced meaningful academic and personal growth supported by flexible structures. The online, asynchronous format allowed scholars to balance work, family, and school. Many applied new learning directly to their classrooms, noting that coursework "fits well into a busy life" and often aligned with their day-to-day responsibilities. Scholars also valued in-person gatherings that helped them feel less isolated and more connected to peers.

*It helped me not feel like I was the only one struggling super hard. – RESPECT Scholar*

- Individualized, relationship-based navigation was central to scholar success. Regular check-ins, emotional encouragement, and proactive problem-solving helped scholars stay motivated and manage personal and academic challenges. Scholars consistently described their navigator as responsive, patient, and supportive, even during major life transitions.

*She [navigator] was amazing…any success that I had, I felt like I could tell her, and I got so much support from her. – RESPECT Scholar*

*Navigator Key Findings*

- Navigators provided flexible, trauma-informed guidance that supported scholar motivation and wellbeing. Navigators described their role as a balance of encouragement, validation, and practical problem solving. They emphasized individualized communication, including texts, phone calls, and informal check-ins, to meet scholars' needs.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Navigators described themselves as a supportive "cheerleader," helping scholars "persist toward their goals."*

- System and structural limitations affected navigators' ability to fully support scholars. Although they are not academic advisors, navigators must understand both roles, and unclear distinctions created challenges. Navigators also cited inconsistent communication, limited access to campus systems, and an evolving academic program structure, for example, changing expectations around course pacing, required credit hours each semester, as barriers. These issues reduced the consistency of support for both students and navigators.

*Instructor Key Findings*
- Scholars enriched classroom learning through professional experience and applied knowledge. Instructors reported that full-time educators brought valuable insights to classroom discussions and assignments, strengthening learning for peers. Many adapted instruction to leverage this experience through real-world applications and theory-to-practice connections.

*Their experience brings a lot to the conversations…they're able to draw from that experience to correlate to some scenario that I provide. – RESPECT Instructor*

- Instructors identified communication, preparation time, and clarity of expectations for RESPCT Scholars in their courses as recurring challenges. Faculty emphasized the need for earlier notice when RESPECT scholars enroll, clearer program communication, and support for designing high-quality online courses. Many also noted that working professionals require flexibility and explicit assignment expectations.

## MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS
- Increase in-person or hybrid events to build scholar cohort connection and belonging.
- Develop standardized navigator training to ensure consistency and impact.
- Strengthen navigator engagement with structured check-ins and shared reflection tools that provide guided prompts to help them evaluate their support practices and identify areas for improvement.
- Improve cross-campus communication among campus leads, navigators, advisors, RESPECT administrative staff, and instructors, and strengthen documentation to ensure alignment of institutional expectations.
- Programs continue investing in culturally responsive, flexible supports that meet the realities of working professionals.

# INTRODUCTION
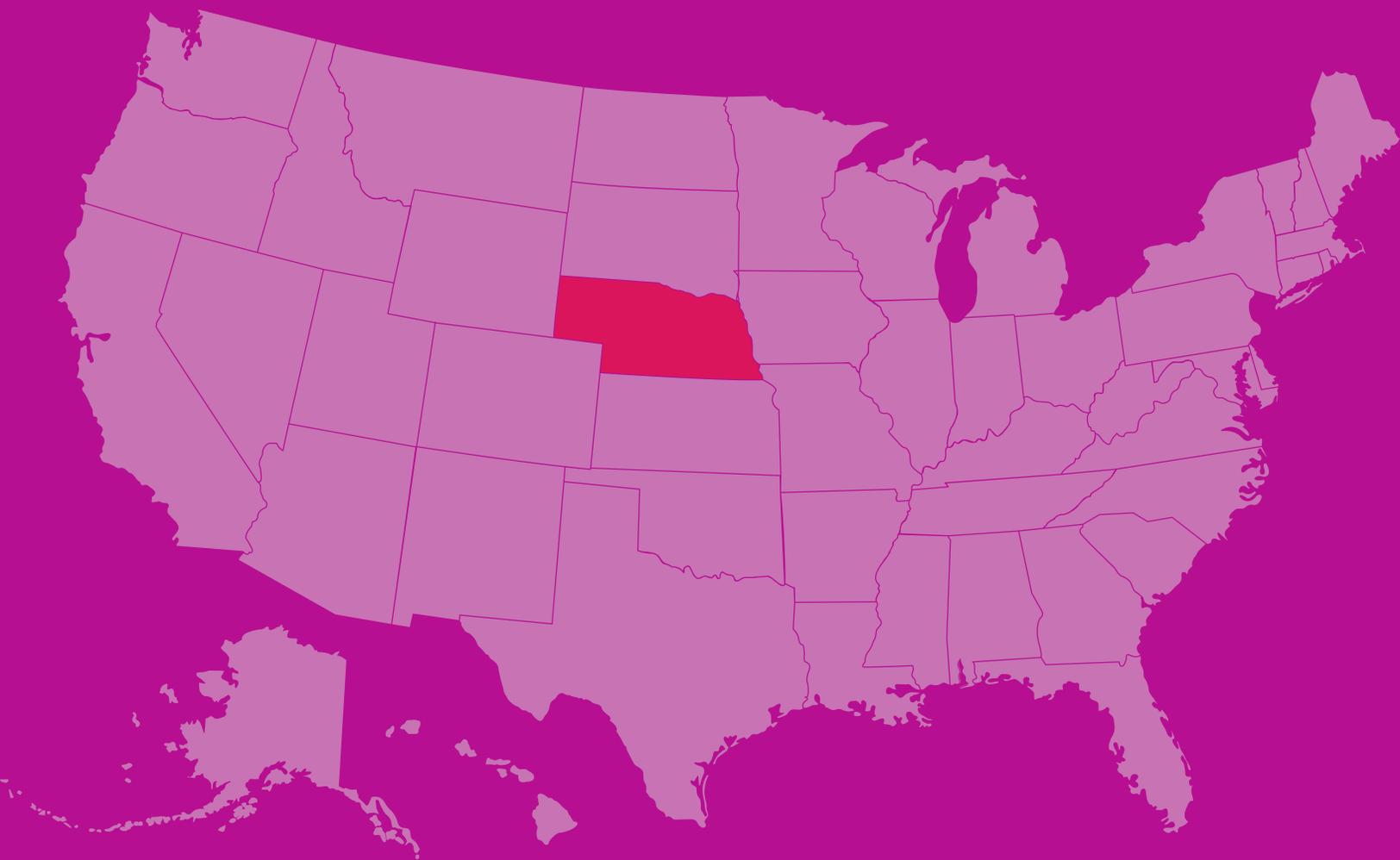
# INTRODUCTION

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The *RESPECT Scholars Program* aims to strengthen the state's early childhood workforce by creating accessible and culturally sustaining early childhood teacher preparation pathways. This unique initiative provides personalized and flexible program development and opportunities for individuals actively engaged in full-time roles within the early childhood field.

RESPECT Scholars receive tailored navigational and financial support, allowing them to seamlessly balance their professional commitments while advancing their education in early childhood.

## PROGRAM GOALS AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

Increase the number of qualified early childhood educators in Nebraska.

Support scholar retention, persistence, and degree completion.

Strengthen the early childhood workforce through integrated academic and professional development supports.

# INTRODUCTION

## BA SCHOLARS PATHWAY

BA Scholars enrolled at UNL, UNO, or UNK receive support through:

- Financial assistance: including tuition coverage and an annual stipend disbursed at the start of each semester.
- Flexible course formats: offered through hybrid, online, and in-person options to accommodate diverse schedules and responsibilities.
- Cohort activities: designed to build community, enhance peer connections, and foster shared learning experiences.
- Navigator support: providing individualized academic guidance, personal encouragement, and professional development.

## NAVIGATOR-PROVIDED SUPPORTS AND CHECK-INS

- Monthly meetings (in person, Zoom, phone, or text) with scholars

- Offer encouragement

- Address challenges

- Track academic and personal progress

- Plan semesterly cohort events

## EVALUATION CONTEXT

This evaluation was designed to capture the full range of Year 1 experiences across all participant groups, including scholars, navigators, faculty, and administrators. It aims to identify emerging strengths, persistent challenges, and opportunities for refining program structures and supports. The findings from this first-year analysis are intended to guide continuous improvement, inform adjustments for subsequent cohorts, and ensure the RESPECT initiative remains responsive to the needs of Nebraska's early childhood workforce.

# EVALUATION METHODOLOGY
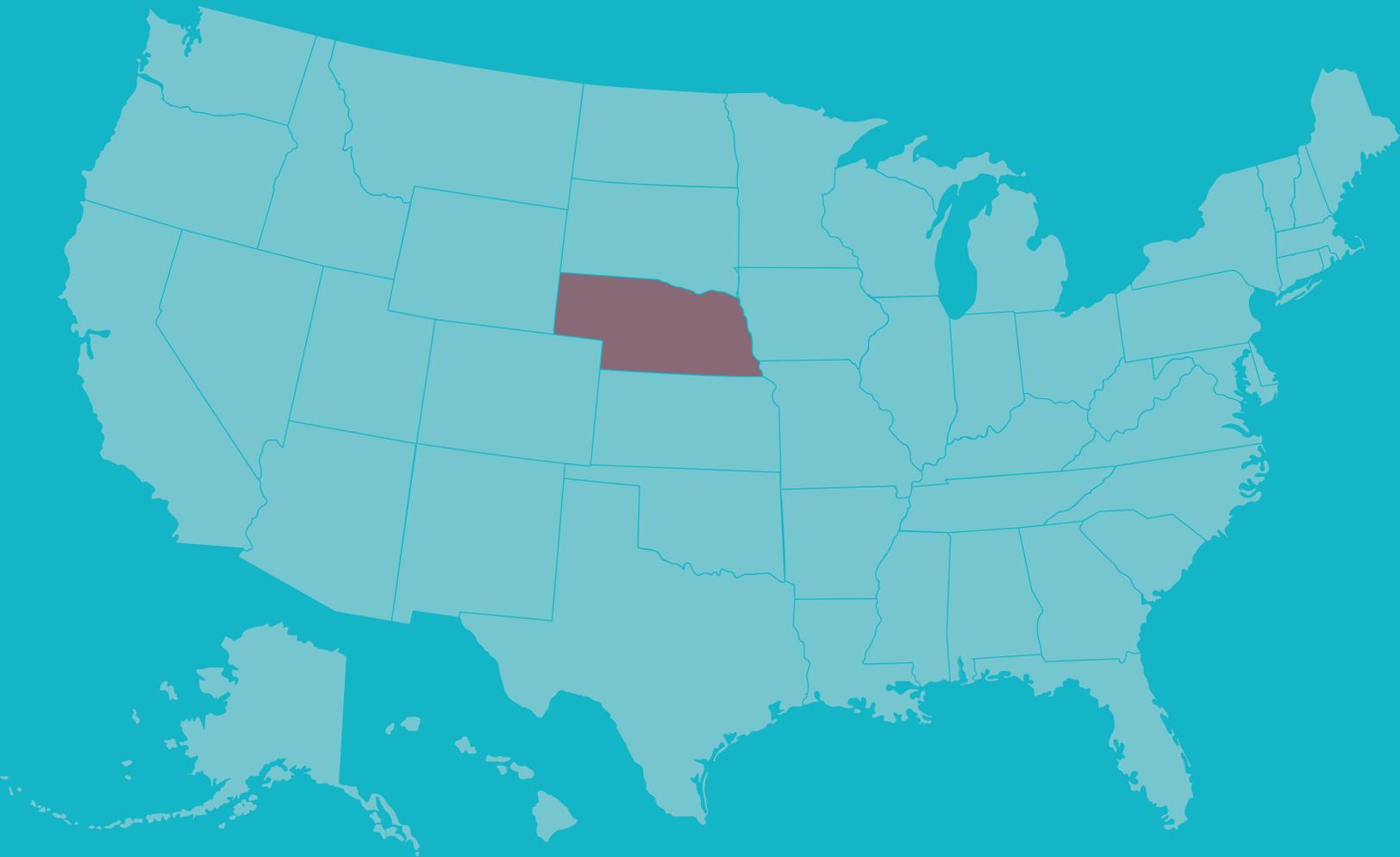
# EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

## EVALUATION DESIGN
A mixed-methods design was employed to capture both the breadth of experiences and the depth of perspectives. This approach allowed for data triangulation and a more comprehensive understanding of participant experiences.

## DATA SOURCES

| DATA TYPE | PURPOSE | PARTICIPANTS |
|---|---|---|
| Surveys | Surveys were collected at two points: Mid-Year (6 month mark) to assess early satisfaction, support, and emerging challenges, and End-of-Year to capture overall experiences, effectiveness of supports, and remaining barriers. | 10 Scholars, 2 Navigators |
| Interviews | Interviews conducted mid-year and end-of-year with a random third of scholars each round. | 4 scholars per round |
| Navigator Interviews | Collected at the end of the academic year, interviews explored navigators' experiences, challenges, successes, and recommendations for Year 2. | 2 Navigators |
| Navigator Notes | Monthly notes summarizing scholar progress, interactions, and barriers. | 2 Navigators |
| Instructor Interviews | Collected at the end of the academic year, interviews explored instructional adjustments, scholar integration, supports, and challenges. | 5 Instructors |

# EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES
- Surveys were administered electronically using secure online platforms.
- Interviews were conducted virtually or by phone, recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis.
- Navigator notes were compiled and shared with the evaluation team in de-identified form.

## ANALYSIS APPROACH
- Quantitative data (e.g., survey responses, enrollment figures) were analyzed descriptively to identify trends and patterns.
- Qualitative data (e.g., interviews, navigator notes) were coded thematically to surface recurring ideas, challenges, and strengths. Themes were validated across data sources for consistency.

## LIMITATIONS

**Sample size:** The small number of BA Scholars (n=13) limits the ability to generalize findings.

**Attrition:** Three scholars withdrew during the year, reducing available longitudinal data.

**Scope:** This evaluation covers only BA Scholars; AA Apprentices will be reported separately.
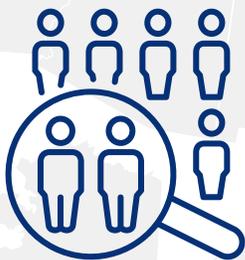
# FINDINGS
*Scholars' Experiences*

# SCHOLAR PROFILE

A total of 13 Bachelor's-level scholars participated in the RESPECT Scholars Program during Year 1. Of these, 11 scholars consented to participate in the evaluation, and 10 completed the end-of-year survey. The findings in this section draw on data from those 10 respondents (UNO = 3; UNL = 3; UNK = 4).
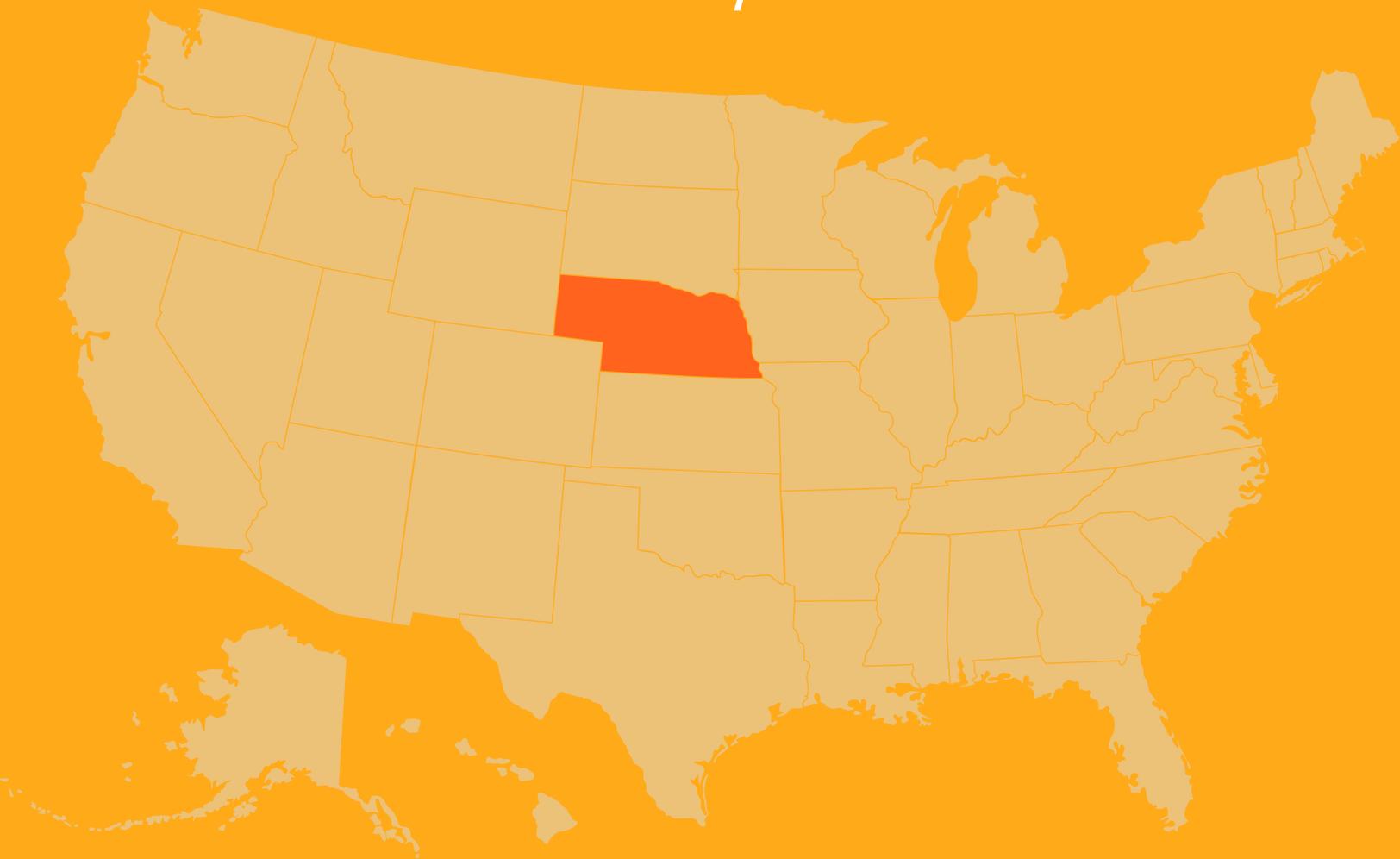
## DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Among the 10 survey respondents, 9 identified as female and 1 identified as male as shown in Figure 1. Of the 9 who reported their racial or ethnic background, 7 identified as White, 1 identified as Hispanic/Latina, and 1 preferred not to respond as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 1**
*Scholar gender identification*

Male
10%

Female
90%

**Figure 2**
*Scholar racial/ethnic backgrounds*

Native American   1

Black   1

White   7

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
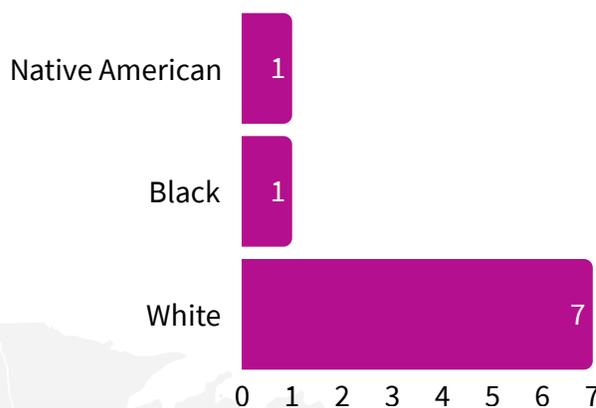
**60% of scholars identified as parents.**

**29% reported having caregiving responsibilities for adult relatives or loved ones.**

60%

29%

## GEOGRAPHIC AND PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

RESPECT Scholars represent communities across Nebraska, including **Winnebago, Omaha, Kearney, Hastings,** and **Lincoln** and are employed in a wide range of early childhood settings including home and center-based programs serving children 0-5 years.

# SCHOLAR PROFILE

## AGE AND CAREER STAGE

Scholars range in age from their early 20s to mid-40s, reflecting a mix of early-career educators and experienced professionals returning to higher education. Many are balancing multiple roles—working full time, pursuing coursework, and fulfilling family responsibilities—while demonstrating strong commitment to advancing their education and careers in early childhood.

**100%** 100% of scholars are working over 30 hours per week.

Scholars have 1–25 years of experience working with children, **with an average of 7 years.**

## LANGUAGE USE

Language data offer additional insight into the cultural and linguistic diversity of the scholar cohort. All 10 scholars reported speaking English most often at home. However, within their early childhood programs and professional environments, scholars noted exposure to and use of multiple languages, including English, Spanish, American Sign Language (ASL), and Ho-Chunk as shown in Figure 3.

When asked to identify all the languages they speak, scholars reported English, ASL, Ho-Chunk, and Umonhon as shown in Figure 4. Illustrating a meaningful connection to both spoken and signed languages as well as to Indigenous languages rooted in the region. This linguistic diversity enriches the early childhood environments in which scholars work and supports culturally responsive and inclusive learning experiences for young children.

**Figure 3**
*Languages spoken within their early childhood programs*

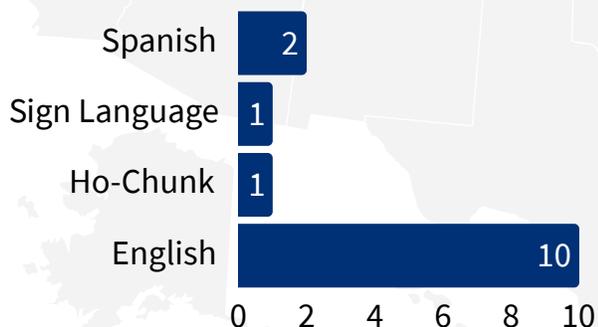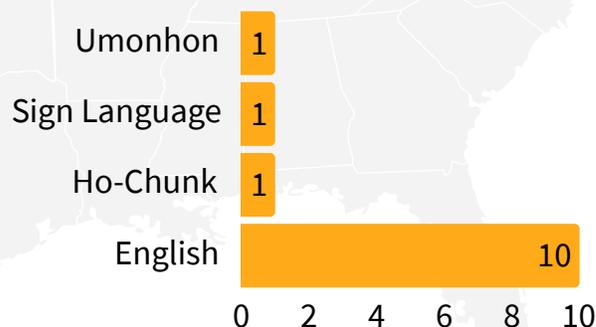| Language | Count |
|---|---|
| Spanish | 2 |
| Sign Language | 1 |
| Ho-Chunk | 1 |
| English | 10 |

**Figure 4**
*All languages Scholar's speak*

| Language | Count |
|---|---|
| Umonhon | 1 |
| Sign Language | 1 |
| Ho-Chunk | 1 |
| English | 10 |

# PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Findings in this section draw from Mid-Year and End-of-Year Scholar Interviews *(n=4 per round, representing one-third of scholars randomly selected at each stage)* as well as data from the End-of-Year Scholar Survey. Combined, these sources offer a comprehensive understanding of scholars' experiences, perceptions, and engagement in the RESPECT Scholars Program.

## OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROGRAM

Across both data collection points, scholars consistently described RESPECT as a flexible, empowering, and responsive program that made completing their degree more attainable while balancing full-time work and family responsibilities. The program's structure was repeatedly characterized as accommodating to the realities of nontraditional students in the early childhood field.

> *Without RESPECT, I wouldn't be in school right now. Between work, kids, and everything else, I needed a program that actually understands what my life looks like.* — *RESPECT Scholar*

Scholars emphasized that the program's design and level of individualized support distinguished it from traditional degree pathways, particularly for working professionals.

## KEY PROGRAM STRENGTHS

Participants identified several core strengths that contributed to their persistence and satisfaction:

- **Financial Support:** Tuition and textbook assistance were frequently cited as major enablers of participation, reducing financial strain and allowing scholars to focus on coursework rather than cost.
- **Navigation:** Regular one-on-one meetings with Navigators provided individualized encouragement, accountability, and problem-solving. Scholars appreciated the Navigators' understanding of their life circumstances and practical guidance.
- **Cohort and Community:** The cohort model fostered a sense of belonging and connection among scholars pursuing similar goals. Peer encouragement was noted as a source of motivation and reassurance during challenging periods.

> *It's more than financial help. It's the people checking in, reminding you that you can do this. That makes the difference.* — *RESPECT Scholar*

# PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

## CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR GROWTH

Although scholars generally reported positive experiences, they noted challenges in managing competing responsibilities. Time management and balancing workloads were common concerns, especially for those working full time or raising families while enrolled. Several scholars also suggested that communication regarding degree planning and transfer processes could be more consistent across institutions. These observations highlight the complexities of navigating multi-institutional degree pathways and identify opportunities for program improvement. Despite these challenges, participants emphasized that Navigator support and peer encouragement were essential in helping them persist and overcome barriers.

## IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Overall, scholars expressed a high level of satisfaction with the RESPECT Scholars Program and described it as transformative for both their academic and professional growth. Many credited the program with reigniting their confidence as students and reinforcing their sense of value within the early childhood field.

> **RESPECT reminded me that I'm capable—that I can still grow and keep learning, even with everything else on my plate.** — RESPECT Scholar

The combination of financial, academic, and emotional support provided through RESPECT contributed to improved motivation, reduced stress, and a greater sense of professional identity among participants.

## END OF YEAR SCHOLAR SURVEY RESULTS

Six scholars completed the End-of-Year survey, providing valuable insight into their satisfaction with the supports received from their university ECE program, the RESPECT Scholars Program, and their RESPECT Navigator. Overall, 100% of respondents reported being *satisfied or extremely satisfied:*

**100% reported they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the support they received from the RESPECT Scholars Program** — 100%

**67% reported they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the support they received from their university ECE program** — 67%

**100% reported they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the support they received from the RESPECT Navigator** — 100%
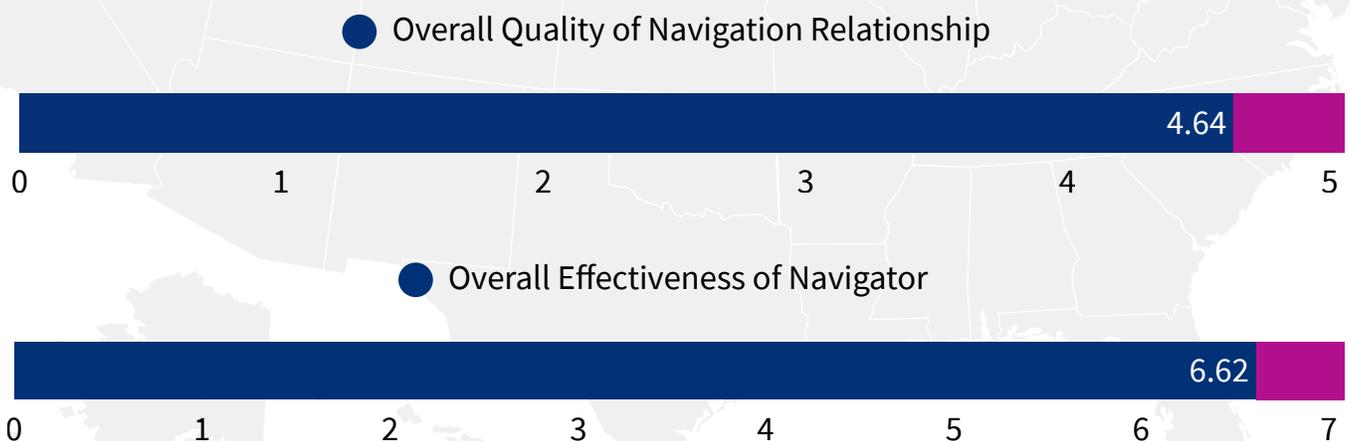
# RELATIONSHIP WITH NAVIGATORS

Findings in this section draw from both the Scholar Survey and the Mid-Year and End-of-Year interviews. Across all data sources, scholars consistently reported that their relationship with their navigator was one of the most valuable aspects of their experience in the RESPECT program.

Navigators were described as approachable, dependable, and genuinely invested in each scholar's success. Scholars shared that navigators provided individualized guidance, emotional encouragement, and accountability throughout the semester. Regular check-ins helped scholars manage their workload, problem-solve academic or personal challenges, and stay on track with degree requirements.

*Just knowing I'm not doing this alone makes a huge difference. My navigator really listens and helps me see the bigger picture.* — RESPECT Scholar

Survey results reinforce these themes. The Scholar–Navigator Relationship Survey, administered in April 2025, measured both the quality of interpersonal relationships (5-point scale) and the perceived effectiveness of navigational support (7-point scale). Across all items, scholars rated their navigators high, reflecting strong trust, mutual respect, and effective support.

*My navigator is my biggest cheerleader. She helps me figure things out before they become problems.--* RESPECT Scholar

● Overall Quality of Navigation Relationship

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4.64 | 5 |

● Overall Effectiveness of Navigator

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6.62 | 7 |

# FEEDACK & NEXT STEPS

## SCHOLAR REFLECTIONS AND ADVICE
Scholars shared reflections and guidance highlighting strategies for success and personal growth:
- "Know what you can handle and take care of yourself first."
- "Don't be afraid to reach out to your navigator."
- "Advocate for yourself—ask questions and take ownership of your learning."

These comments underscore the importance of self-care, proactive engagement, and leveraging support systems to meet program demands.

## NAVIGATOR SUPPORT AND PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT
Scholars consistently identified relationships with navigators as central to their persistence, confidence, and sense of belonging. Navigators helped scholars feel connected to the program and broader early childhood education community, encouraged engagement with coursework, supported resource-seeking, and prompted reflection on professional goals. A few scholars suggested additional group check-ins and more structured tools for time management and program guidance.

## LOOKING AHEAD
Scholars expressed a mix of optimism and apprehension as they anticipate the next academic year—eager to continue learning while mindful of challenges such as student teaching and balancing full workloads. Their advice to incoming students emphasizes self-advocacy, proactive communication, and using program supports.

## AREAS FOR GROWTH AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Scholars identified areas for program enhancement:

**Improved Coordination and Communication:** Some experienced confusion regarding course sequences, advising, and scholarship requirements.

**Course Design Enhancements:** Suggestions included more timely feedback, clearer assignment directions, and culturally responsive content.
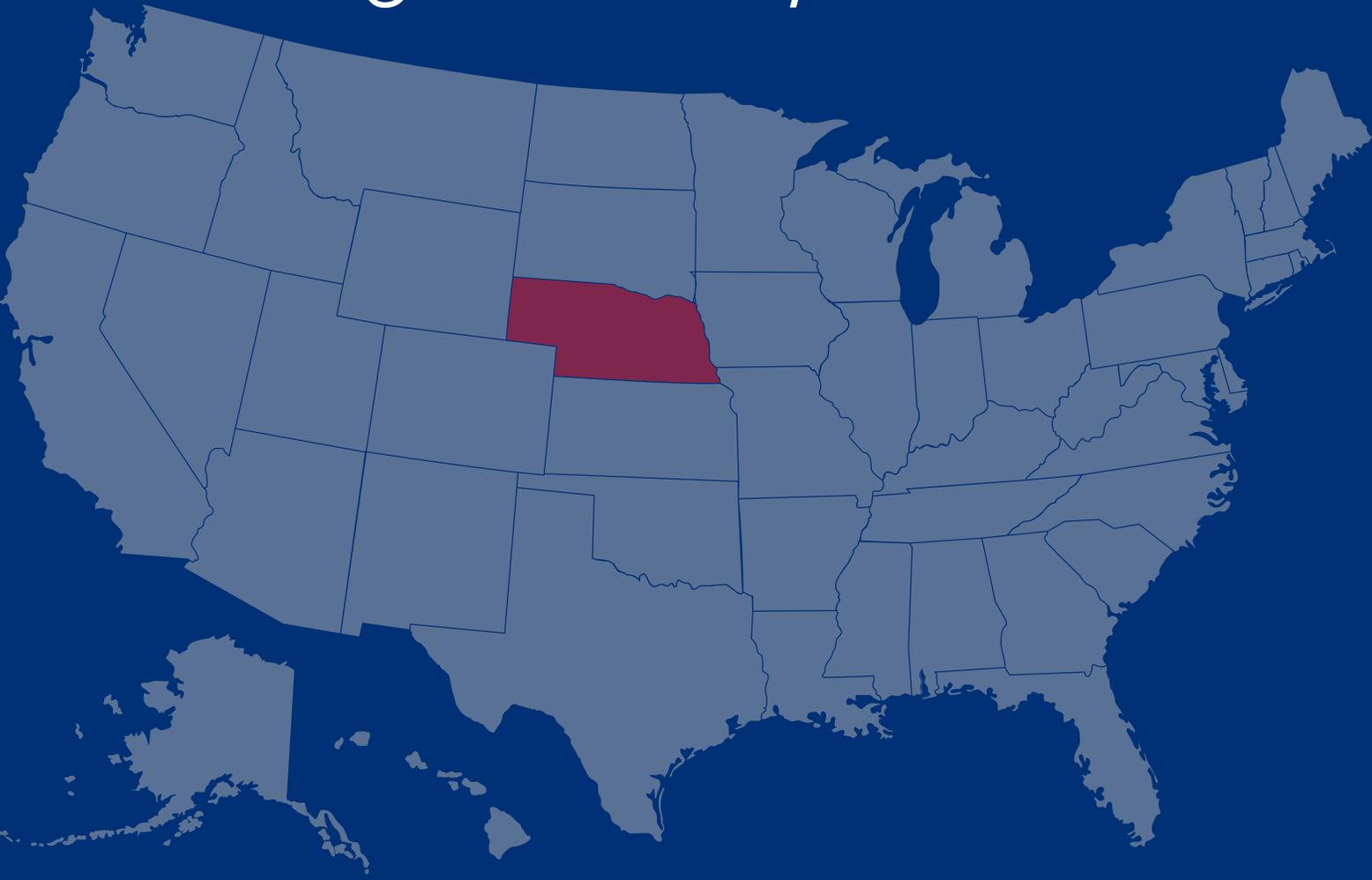
**Expanded Career Pathways:** Recommendations to add administrative or leadership-focused career trajectories.

**Cohort Connection Opportunities:** Requests for more in-person or virtual gatherings to strengthen peer relationships and networking.

# FINDINGS
*Navigator Perspectives*

# NAVIGATOR ROLES & BACKGROUND

## NAVIGATOR ROLE AND BACKGROUND

The RESPECT Scholars Program employs two Navigators to support scholars pursuing Bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education. One Navigator serves students at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO), while the other supports students at both the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK). Navigators provide consistent, individualized support, helping scholars stay engaged, overcome challenges, and complete their degrees.

## ROLE OVERVIEW

The Navigators' primary responsibility is to guide scholars academically, professionally, and personally by fostering trusting relationships, offering practical support, and tracking progress toward degree completion.

## EXPECTATIONS:

- Minimum one meeting per month per scholar (more as needed).
- Documentation submitted after each meeting; quarterly reminders provided.
- Respond to scholar inquiries within 48 business hours.
- Engage in program improvement by providing feedback and ideas.
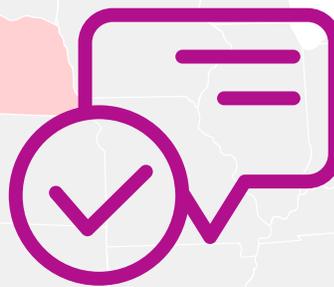
# EXPERIENCES SUPPORTING SCHOLARS

### OVERALL EXPERIENCE AND SUCCESSES/CHALLENGES

Navigators described supporting scholars as a creative and rewarding process that evolved from structured approaches to flexible, individualized support. Key successes included building trust, fostering community, and maintaining engagement through in-person communication. Challenges included scholars' frustration with academic program changes and balancing guidance with promoting independence.

> *The year was a creative and rewarding process of building flexible, relationship-based support.* – RESPECT Navigator

### MENTORSHIP AND GUIDANCE

Navigators emphasized their role as supportive "cheerleaders," providing validation, encouragement, and motivation. Flexible check-ins and in-person events were particularly effective in fostering engagement, connection, and a sense of community.

> *Effective mentoring was achieved by drawing on personal experience, administrative background, and trauma-informed practices.* – RESPECT Navigator

### LIMITATIONS IN SUPPORT

Navigators identified limitations related to the evolving program structure—with the RESPECT program in the process of being established while scholars were enrolled, many procedures and requirements remained in development.—and to ongoing uncertainty around academic advisor roles. They also noted technical access challenges that at times hindered assistance with course planning, campus logistics, and other administrative tasks. Additionally, personal and professional demands occasionally affected the consistency of check-ins.

> *Our relationship grew stronger once we established consistent communication. My scholar knows I'm here to support them.* – RESPECT Navigator

> *By the end of the year, my scholar felt more comfortable reaching out to me directly when they needed something.* – RESPECT Navigator

# EXPERIENCES SUPPORTING SCHOLARS

Navigators consistently described positive relationships with their assigned RESPECT Scholars. Results from the Navigator–Scholar Relationship Survey, administered in April 2025, showed that navigators generally rated their relationships with scholars highly and their perceived effectiveness with each scholar.

Scores reflected variation across individual partnerships while highlighting the development of strong, supportive connections over the course of the year.

## RANGE 1.8-4.8

● Overall Perception of Relationships with Scholars

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4.01 | 5 |

## RANGE 3.6-5.8

● Overall Perception of Effectiveness as Navigator with Each Scholar

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5.27 | 6 | 7 |

These results align closely with navigator interview data, reinforcing that the navigator–scholar relationship served as a foundation for scholar success and retention. Navigators described their support as highly relational and adaptive, helping scholars balance professional, academic, and personal responsibilities.

> *The biggest challenge as a navigator was balancing providing support with fostering scholars' independence, ensuring they develop agency and responsibility without being overly enabled.* – RESPECT Navigator

# EXPERIENCES SUPPORTING SCHOLARS

## SCHOLAR ENGAGEMENT

Navigators observed consistently strong engagement from scholars in course content and in translating their learning to real-world practice. Scholars demonstrated commitment to their academic development, yet engagement through official university platforms was less consistent. Navigators attributed this to competing work and family responsibilities, as well as varying levels of comfort navigating academic systems that may not always align with scholars' cultural or professional backgrounds. Stress points were most visible during midterms and finals, highlighting the need for proactive communication and targeted check-ins during these high-demand periods.

Navigators reported periodic challenges in maintaining regular communication due to scholars' demanding and shifting schedules. Navigators emphasized that when communication was steady, relationships strengthened significantly, boosting scholar confidence, motivation, and overall engagement in their program.

Structured opportunities for scholars to share successes, challenges, and emerging needs were particularly valued. These spaces allowed navigators to respond more intentionally and helped scholars feel seen and supported.

## KEY CHALLENGES

The most frequent challenge was balancing the level of support provided while fostering scholar independence — ensuring that scholars developed agency and responsibility without being over-enabled. Navigators also faced scheduling difficulties and the need to adapt support strategies to diverse scholar needs.

# FEEDBACK & NEXT STEPS

## PROGRAM AND ROLE RECOMMENDATIONS

Navigators suggested expanding in-person events to twice yearly, and providing thorough onboarding for new navigators to clarify generational differences and the hybrid mentor-coach role. They recommended structured discussions on supporting versus enabling, clearer communication around budgets and administrative procedures, and frequent cross-campus meetings to share information and address questions.
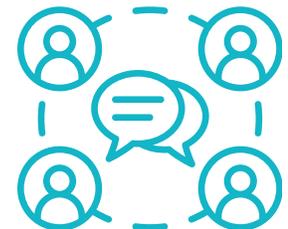
## SUPPORT RESOURCES AND STRUCTURAL IMPROVEMENTS

Additional resources suggested included campus orientations or handouts guiding students through university systems, and early in-person meetings (potentially including families) to strengthen community. Maintaining degree rigor while encouraging campus engagement was emphasized.

## ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

Continuous reflection and system improvement were highlighted as essential. Frequent, structured meetings among navigators and administrators were recommended to share information, answer questions, and ensure consistency of support across campuses.

> *Twice-yearly in-person events and more frequent, structured meetings for sharing information and addressing questions would strengthen the navigator role and program effectiveness.* – RESPECT Navigator

# FINDINGS

*Instructor Perspectives*
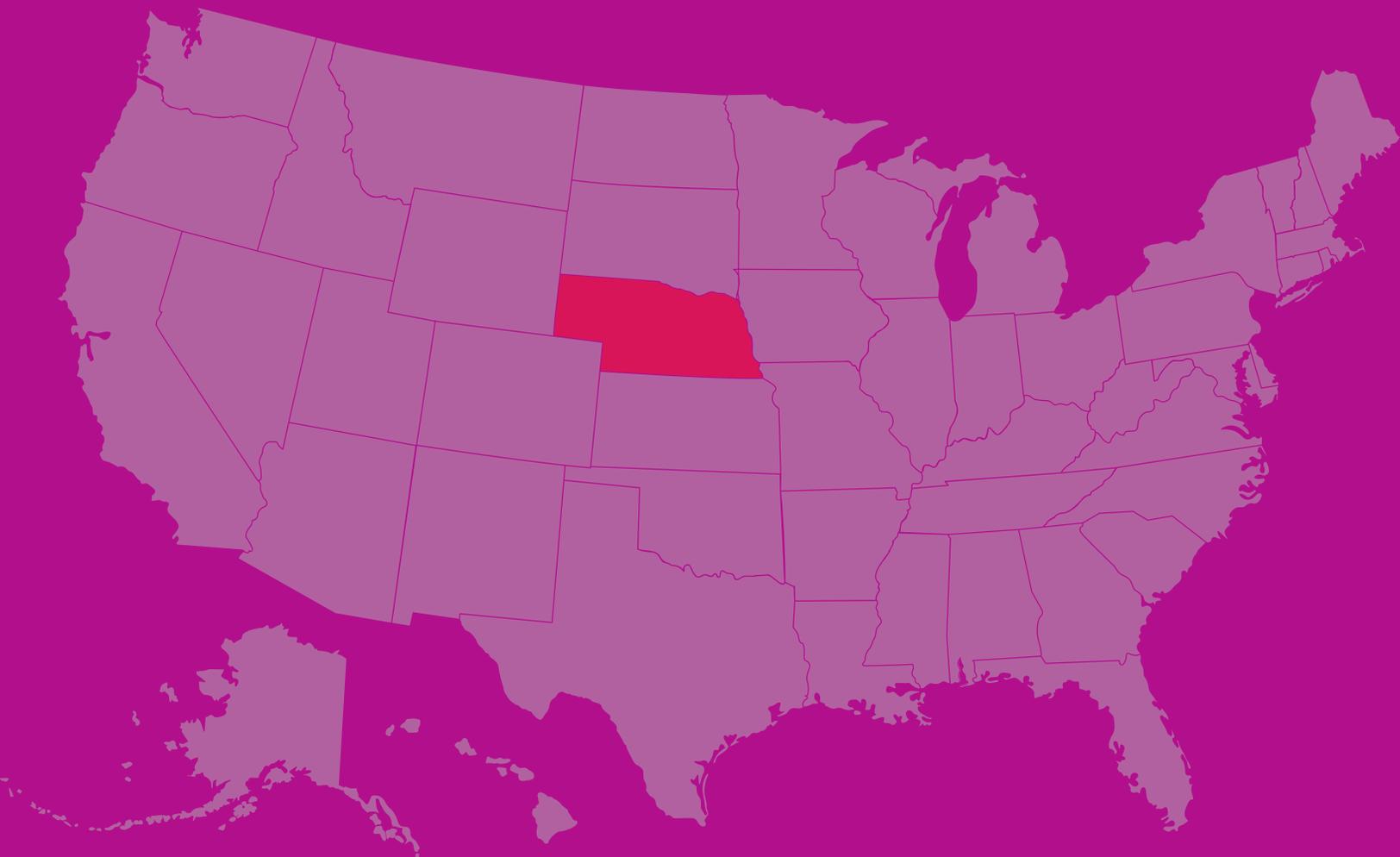
# INSTRUCTORS PROFILE

Five instructors participated in interviews to share their experiences teaching RESPECT Scholars within their early childhood education programs.

The instructors represented three institutions: *two from the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), two from the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), and one from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL).* Collectively, they teach across multiple early childhood education degree pathways and course delivery formats, including online, hybrid, and in-person modalities.

These instructors were intentionally selected for the evaluation to help the research team better understand how RESPECT Scholars, many of whom are non-traditional, full-time early childhood professionals, were integrated into their respective programs. The interviews explored instructors' perspectives on teaching this group of students, the supports and challenges involved, and any broader programmatic or systemic issues that may influence the scholars' experiences.

All participating instructors had substantial experience working with early childhood educators and were well-positioned to provide insight into the intersections between academic preparation and professional practice.

Their feedback offers valuable perspectives on how higher education programs can adapt to better serve working professionals, promote equitable access to degree completion, and sustain quality learning experiences for diverse adult learners.

# INTEGRATION OF RESPECT SCHOLARS INTO PROGRAMS

Instructors reported a variety of strategies to support RESPECT Scholars, including adapting assignments, integrating field experiences, and leveraging online tools to provide flexibility. Common course modifications included:

- Course Content Updates: Incorporating current early childhood resources and emphasizing practical applications of theory, such as connecting concepts to classroom experiences.
- Instructional Flexibility: Offering alternative assignments, adjusted due dates, and recorded lectures to accommodate full-time working students' schedules. One instructor noted:

> *I utilized more theory-to-practice connections…because I know they were practicing educators and they appreciated knowing what this would look like in their classroom.*
> *– RESPECT Instructor*

- Organizational Tools: Adding assignment FAQs, sequence-of-events tables, and discussion prompts tailored to scholars' professional contexts. These efforts reportedly reduced repetitive questions from scholars by over 50% and improved student engagement.
- Field Experience Integration: Assignments such as family interviews, functional behavioral assessments, and individualized education plan projects allowed scholars to apply classroom theory to real-world settings.

Instructors observed that the inclusion of full-time working scholars enriched classroom discussions, particularly in areas requiring practical application and reflection on culturally responsive teaching. Scholars' prior experience encouraged peer learning and fostered collaboration across different professional backgrounds.

> *"With the right support…they were able to complete the assignment…very well,"* noted
> *one instructor, emphasizing the positive impact of applied learning. – RESPECT Instructor*

# FEEDBACK & NEXT STEPS

*Instructors provided recommendations for improving the program experience for both scholars and faculty:*

## ENHANCED FACULTY SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION

- More opportunities for adjuncts and faculty to meet and share strategies, including course design, online teaching methods, and student support approaches.
- Advance notice of scholar enrollment and program requirements to allow course preparation and alignment with accreditation standards.
- Structured cross-campus collaboration to standardize experiences for scholars and reduce duplication of effort.

## INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES AND COURSE DESIGN

- Front-loaded course objectives and assignment alignment to provide clarity for faculty and students.
- Integration of applied, hands-on assignments linked to scholars' professional experiences.
  - Ongoing professional development for instructors on culturally responsive pedagogy, anti-bias education, and supporting non-traditional students.

## STUDENT SUPPORTS AND PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

- Continued navigator involvement and proactive guidance for scholars completing coursework alongside work and family responsibilities.
- Access to counseling and psychosocial support for students facing life challenges.

> **I want to make sure that my students are healthy emotionally and know what services are available to them from the beginning of the semester.** *– RESPECT Instructor*

## FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

- Observations and follow-ups on how scholars implement classroom learning in practice.
- Opportunities for reflection and discussion of professional challenges and successes with peers and instructors.

Instructors expressed optimism about the program's future and the value of supporting full-time professional scholars. They emphasized that the combination of applied learning, flexible course delivery, and institutional supports is essential for sustaining scholar success and maintaining program quality.

# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS
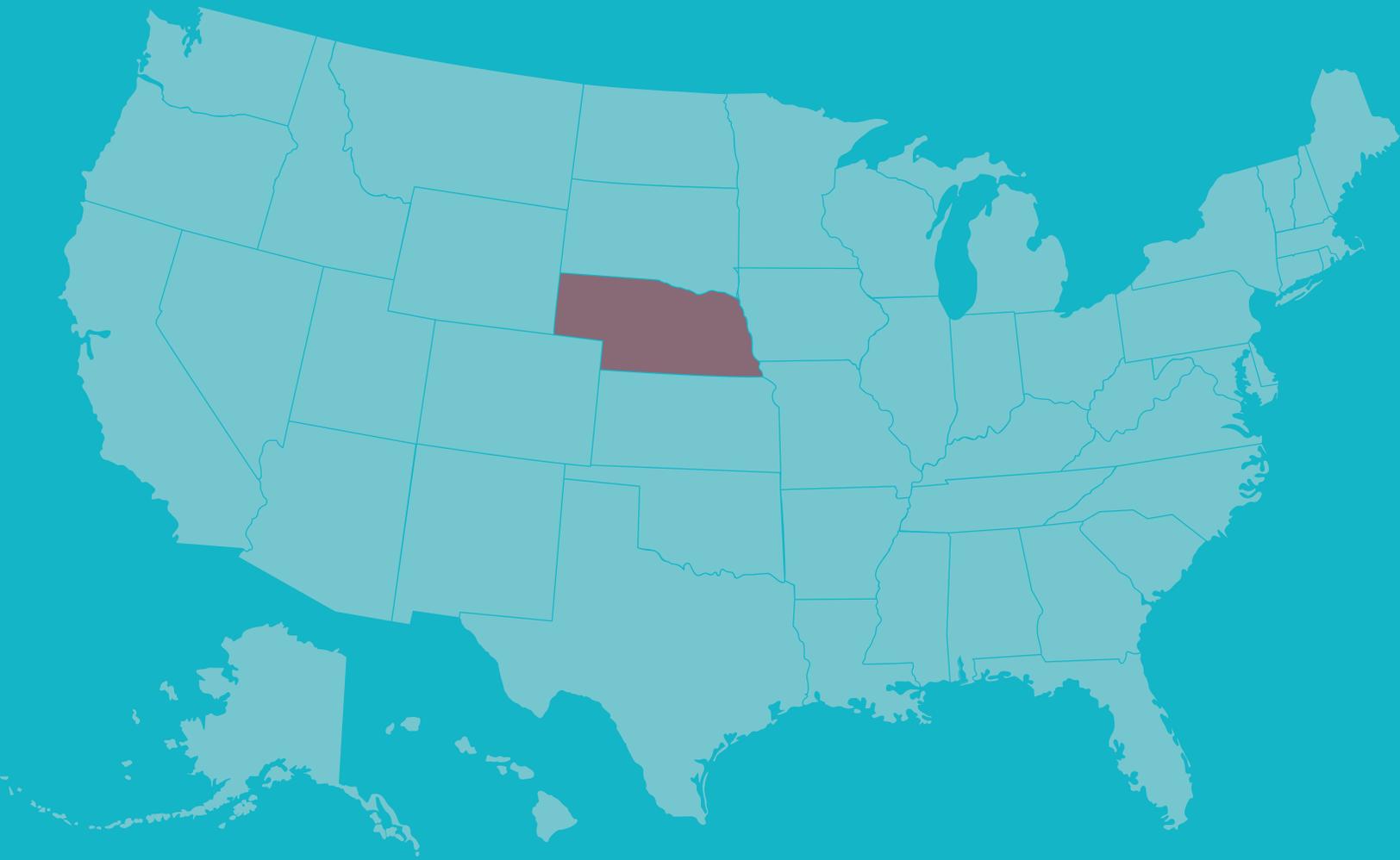
# CONCLUSION & KEY TAKEAWAYS

Findings from Year 1 demonstrate that the RESPECT BA Scholars Program is a beneficial model for supporting full-time, working early childhood educators. Scholars, navigators, and instructors described the program as transformative, reinforcing scholars' confidence, strengthening their professional identity, and allowing them to advance academically while remaining in the workforce.

The navigational supports emerged as a strong feature, providing consistent, relationship-based support that helped scholars manage challenges and persist through demanding periods. Flexible course structures and financial assistance further reduced barriers to degree completion.

At the same time, the evaluation identified structural and communication challenges typical of multi-campus initiatives. Enhanced coordination across institutions, clearer advising pathways, and additional tools for scholars and navigators will strengthen the program as it scales.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

*Scholar Key Takeaways*

- Flexibility, support, and clear communication are essential for scholar success. Scholars credited the program's flexible format, supportive faculty, and navigator guidance for helping them remain enrolled while balancing work and family demands. Many reported feeling motivated by their progress and the ability to apply learning directly to their classrooms.

*Professors were supportive and flexible, which helped them (scholars) manage heavy workloads and life changes.*

- Scholars value community but want more opportunities to connect. Cohort events and in-person gatherings were described as especially meaningful. Several scholars asked for more opportunities to meet peers and program staff to build relationships and reduce isolation.

*It was nice to connect with people who are on the same journey as you. – RESPECT Scholar*

# CONCLUSION & KEY TAKEAWAYS

*Navigator Key Takeaways*
- Navigators provide critical emotional and academic guidance through flexible relationship-based support. They used trauma-informed practices, personal experience, and informal communication to normalize challenges and keep scholars on track.

> *Navigators emphasized "normalizing the difficulty of their work" and building trust through encouragement and validation.*

- Clearer structures and stronger institutional coordination would enhance their effectiveness. Navigators reported that unclear advising processes, evolving program requirements, and limited access to systems caused confusion for scholars.

*Instructor Key Takeaways*
- Instructors value the presence and contributions of full-time working professionals. Scholars' applied experience strengthened discussions, increased relevance of course content, and enhanced practical learning.

> *They love that they can see what this looks like in their classroom. – RESPECT Instructor*

- Instructors need clearer expectations, more advance notice, and consistent communication to support this population. Challenges included adapting courses quickly, balancing practicality with academic rigor, and meeting the needs of nontraditional students. Faculty also emphasized a need for coordinated support across campuses and resources for high-quality online instruction.

> *Having [policies and program information] a little more in advance would be helpful just for planning. – RESPECT Instructor*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendations for year 2 of the RESPECT Scholars Program:*

**Strengthen cross-campus communication and coordination:** Create unified advising tools, course sequencing maps, and clear communication channels for instructors, advisors, and navigators.

**Expand navigator onboarding and institutional alignment:** Provide training on system navigation, generational differences, and balancing support with independence.

**Increase cohort-building opportunities:** Offer more in-person or hybrid gatherings to build community, connection, and peer support.

**Support faculty with time, resources, and clarity:** Provide earlier notice of RESPECT scholar enrollment, structured onboarding for adjuncts, and resources for online course development.

**Ensure course relevance and applied learning:** Continue integrating theory-to-practice connections, real-world assignments, and clear expectations for nontraditional learners.

**Improve long-term course planning supports:** Provide students with degree roadmaps and consistent advising to reduce confusion around requirements and sequencing.