

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is there a need for additional child care capacity now?

Not every child in town is in child care, nor does every child need full-time care outside of the home. However, 2018 census data shows that there are 245 children in Gothenburg under the age of 6 years old with all available parents working and there are only 176 licensed child care spots available. That leaves a gap of 69 children who are in need of care without a place to go. Oftentimes these children are left with family members, friends, or neighbors who are able to meet the child's physical needs, but often their early educational needs are not addressed. Many of the child care providers in town have a waiting list of up to a year or more and are not able to take any more children at this time. The two child care centers in town have reached the capacity for their available space and a new center is the only way for them to serve more families.

Why is this such a crisis now?

There are currently no open spots for infants with Gothenburg's licensed child care providers, and most waiting lists are at least a year out. Working mothers are leaving the workforce because of this lack of care.

Gothenburg is different from many other rural communities in a number of ways, one being that more than half of our population (52%) is under the age of 40. This means many young adults stay or move to town and start their families. In fact, 27% of women in Gothenburg age 25-29 gave birth in the past year.* We are fortunate to have such a young population base and workforce, because that isn't the case in many other Nebraska communities. These young adults are the best resource we have for keeping our community strong and growing, but in order to attract and retain these workers and their families, we must be able to offer quality child care. A December 2020 survey of community businesses indicated lack of child care was the factor that most affected employees and 50% of employers identified an increase in available child care as their number one priority.

*<https://censusreporter.org/profiles/97000US3171100-gothenburg-public-schools-ne/>

My children are older and I don't need child care anymore. Why should I be interested in early childhood care and education in Gothenburg?

Caring for our littlest citizens and providing quality educational experiences from birth through age 5 benefits the entire community!

- Employers, both those already in town and those looking to locate here, rely on their employees having dependable child care to create a stable workforce. These employers create the economic foundation of our community, and the availability of reliable, quality child care helps recruit and retain the employees on which these businesses depend.
- Studies show that the return on investment in quality early childhood care and education is up to \$13 for each \$1 invested. This means that for every dollar a community spends on providing care and education to its youngest citizens, it saves up to \$13 on special education services, correctional services, social services, behavioral health services, and health care services - most of which are funded by tax dollars. Investing in early childhood education will decrease these expenses and give children a strong foundation for all future learning and interacting.
- While the primary function of any child care center is to care for and educate the children, quality programs also work with the parents to encourage the continuation of learning and the healthy behaviors the child is taking part in during the day. Parents are given support and provided resources that make a positive difference in their family and help strengthen the community as a whole.

The bottom line is that providing quality child care in town is the best thing you can do to ensure the quality of life we enjoy in Gothenburg will continue for generations to come. After all, "success tomorrow depends on choices today."

How will this center benefit me if I don't have small children?

The community as a whole will receive numerous benefits from **The Impact Center**.

- High-quality early childhood education better prepares children for school, making every student a better "classroom citizen": better able to listen, follow directions, and cause less disruptions for the class.
- It is possible that the State of Nebraska will mandate every school district to implement preschool programs for underserved children in the future. Investing in an **Early Learning Center** able to handle this mandate will help save Gothenburg Public Schools approximately \$1.2 million in construction costs for preschool space on its campus.

- Having a large Event Center that can host wedding receptions, family celebrations, corporate meetings and gatherings, and many other events will mean more guests in local hotels, more patrons at local restaurants, more business for local shops, and more tax revenue for the city. Keeping this business in town will be “good for the business of Gothenburg.”

How does this project fit with “The Gothenburg Way”?

“The Gothenburg Way” means engaging many community partners to accomplish goals for the good of all in the community. Examples abound of Gothenburg residents coming together, identifying a challenge, and taking a collective step towards a solution for the benefit of the community. The challenge of providing high-quality, accessible early childhood care for every family has been approached in the same way. The City of Gothenburg, Gothenburg Public Schools, and Gothenburg Health have all stepped up as partners in this effort. These three entities entered into an interlocal agreement to support current early childhood work, with the assurance that their support will continue through the construction of the new center. These partnerships are important and show how far-reaching the impact of quality early childhood education is.

Shouldn't we be helping families instead of just children?

Studies and common sense tell us that parents will always be the most important and formative factor in a child's life. Parents have the most impact on a child's emotional, social and cognitive development, regardless of the time the child spends in child care. Plans for The Impact Center include intentional ways to support parents in their role of raising healthy children.

The new Early Learning Center will be connected to a Healthy Families Center, which will coordinate with public and private service providers to give parents easy access to tools and resources for them and their children. Resources offered will encourage, support, and provide for any parents and families in town, giving just another example of how “all means all” in Gothenburg.

Don't the local churches already do this?

The local ministerial association has worked to address the physical needs of local families through a part-time food pantry and the Christian Charity Fund administered through the American Lutheran Church office. These funds offer assistance to those in need, but are limited. Families can only access the food pantry once a month and can only receive up to \$200 annually from this fund. While this assistance may be enough for some families or visitors to our community, there isn't the ability to work with the families to determine the barriers they are facing or offer resources for long-term change of the situation. It is our intention that the Healthy Families Center can work together with the local ministerial association to use the strengths and resources of each to better serve everyone in the community.

What impact do you hope to have?

Investing in parents and their children will show immediate benefits, but the long-term reward is in creating a cycle of positive parenting that will last in this community for generations. We hope to give ALL children access to high-quality child care and age appropriate educational opportunities before kindergarten. We want ALL parents to have access to services that encourage, support, and provide for them and their children. Families whose basic needs are met and whose children are cared for will be attracted to and anchored in our community, providing employees for the local workforce and greater potential for economic growth.

Do families in Gothenburg really need these services?

Yes! In fact, 38% of elementary students in town qualify for free or reduced lunch, which is income-based and indicates at least one risk factor for adverse childhood experiences in those children's lives.

Children who face risk factors and DO NOT receive a high-quality early childhood education are:

- 25% more likely to drop out of school.
- 40% more likely to become a teen parent.
- 50% more likely to be placed in special education.
- 60% more likely to never attend college.
- 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime.

Investing in early childhood care and education now will make these factors less likely to affect families and our community in the future, as well as allowing us to save money on needed ongoing services and support.

How can the cycle of positive parenting benefit our community?

Parents are the first and primary educators of their children, and those interactions impact children more than any others. The **Healthy Families Center** will support and encourage parents to learn best practices and providers will reinforce these skills as they interact with parents.

Children raised by parents with these skills will learn them naturally and will, in turn, be positive parents, raising children ready for success. The community of Gothenburg will benefit from this immediately, but children from families who grow strong in our community will be more likely to stay and raise their families here, providing a stable foundation for the future of Gothenburg.

What solution are you proposing?

In order to address the child care quality and capacity shortage, as well as the challenges affecting our community's families, we are proposing The Impact Center to effectively serve the needs and provide care for the entire community. The Impact Center will be one location to provide educational, physical, emotional, and social opportunities for all members of the community under one roof.

- An accessible, high-quality Early Learning Center to care for 250+ children.
- A connected Healthy Families Center to meet families' physical and social/emotional needs.
- An indoor Sports Training Center to be used by area sports teams and organizations.
- A 400-seat Event Center for banquets and conferences.

What will it cost to build?

The total cost to construct and furnish all four parts of **The Impact Center** is estimated to be \$10.95 million. Including many of the city's needs in one building will help reduce the overall construction and continued operation costs, while providing a greater base of support for the initial construction costs. The school and the city were both approached to build structures that are now included in **The Impact Center**. The land on which **The Impact Center** will be built is expected to be donated by the School Foundation. Other partners include Gothenburg Health and the Gothenburg Baseball Program.

Who will pay for the construction costs?

It will take a partnership of funders to cover the cost of construction, and the goal is to have 100% raised before construction begins. While private donations will be sought from local businesses, families and individuals, other funding sources will also be secured. There are state and national foundations that are very interested in what Gothenburg is proposing for our community and want to see this endeavor succeed. They will also be asked to support the construction of **The Impact Center** through grant funding. In addition to these sources, participation from local taxing authorities, such as the school and city, is expected. However, these commitments would be at a far lower level than if those public bodies were to construct standalone facilities for these needs outside of this project.

Doesn't one Early Learning Center mean less child care options?

Both child care centers in town are filled to their facilities' capacity and are unable to expand to serve any more families. They have agreed to join together into one new center in order to give more families in town the option to access child care. Local in-home child care providers have chosen to continue to provide care for families who prefer home-based care. Both have their place and will continue to work together to provide the best care possible to ALL families in Gothenburg. Families utilizing in-home care have asked for "more options" when an emergency arises or illness affects their in-home provider. Having a center with the ability to take these children on an as-needed basis gives all parents in town the option for reliable child care, even if that means having a back-up option.

What happens if the child care centers consolidate and then another pandemic hits and things shut down?

No one could have been prepared for the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and it's hard to be prepared for every circumstance. However, recent events have shown the need to be flexible and ready to adapt. Having the space proposed for the **Early Learning Center** would allow for greater flexibility in the configuration of classes depending on need, and having the number of staff anticipated will help provide a pool of teachers to draw from in an emergency. It is our contention that taking the lessons learned from the recent emergency situation will lead to a better plan for the future, one in which consistent, on-going, quality care can be provided for families who need it, while being mindful of but not hindered by external circumstances.

How will child care be accessible to every family?

It is the goal of the **Early Learning Center** to serve all children and families in Gothenburg, regardless of income. The child care rates will be comparable to current local rates, and state subsidy payments will be accepted. The cost of child care can be a burden, especially to families who don't qualify for state aid but don't make enough to pay the full rate, and no child should be turned away from the opportunity for a better future because of cost. A part of the proposed operating budget is designated for tuition assistance and these funds will be used to supplement payments for families, ensuring access to quality education and care for all while maintaining a quality child care program. Current estimates show tuition assistance would allow 1/3 of students to pay 50% of the full tuition cost.

What will be done to ensure the care offered will be high-quality?

Classrooms will be arranged in neighborhoods of five classrooms, one of each age level, and a Lead Teacher who does not have responsibilities in a specific classroom will oversee, consult, coach, and maintain quality standards among the staff in their neighborhood. These teachers will have early childhood degrees and experience in early childhood care and education, and there will be close collaboration among Lead Teachers to maintain uniform quality teaching and care throughout the center. These Lead Teachers will also be responsible for the coordination of referrals and services for students.

How will children with special needs be served?

There are many organizations and agencies that provide services for children who need them, and the Lead Teachers will be responsible for being familiar with these service providers. Currently, consultants or therapists must go to the child's home or classroom for assessments and consultations. This can be time consuming for the consultants. Instead, these service providers will have office space available in the **Early Learning Center**, allowing them to assess and work with children on an individual basis as needed. Being able to connect support services to children and families on-site means assessments, sessions, and consultations are able to take place in the child's learning environment, making the services more effective. Services work best if all those working with the child, including the child care providers, know how to support the child's development. This also allows more children to be served because the consultant or therapist can see more children in one day, in one location, getting more services to more families in the community.

How will you find enough teachers to staff such a large **Early Learning Center**?

Adding classrooms to increase capacity means more teachers to care for these children. Qualified and interested teachers from the existing child care centers and private preschool programs will be offered positions at the new center first. Dawson County has a Professional Learning Series that offers quality classes to those interested in becoming early childhood professionals, and as we construct the building, we will focus on building our workforce through these classes. There are many parents in the community who have had to stay home because of lack of child care, and we anticipate some of these parents will take the opportunity to re-enter the workforce if there is care available for their children. The proposed operating budget is based on paying these teachers above-industry wages to encourage commitment and longevity to their profession. A teacher in charge of a classroom will make \$15.00 an hour, while an assistant teacher will make \$12.00 an hour. These wages are notably higher than current wages and will be attractive to those looking for a job.

Who will own and manage the operation?

The Gothenburg Early Childhood Learning Coalition board of directors will oversee the capital campaign and construction of **The Impact Center**. The physical structure of **The Impact Center** is proposed to be owned by an interlocal agency formed by the City of Gothenburg, Gothenburg Public Schools, and Gothenburg Health. The building will be leased to a to-be-formed operating entity that will oversee operations of **The Impact Center**. It will be a not-for-profit facility that will exist to serve the community, with any year-end net profit being put back into the services provided to children and families of Gothenburg.

Will my tax dollars be used to pay the bills and keep the doors open?

The proposed operating budget will allow **The Impact Center** to be self-sustaining beginning in year one. When the center opens, the public preschool at the school will be moved to **The Impact Center** to be a part of the **Early Learning Center**, allowing the dollars currently spent on that one classroom to be allocated instead to **The Impact Center** to support overhead. As the City of Gothenburg began to discuss building and staffing a conference center, it became apparent that the cost of a stand-alone building would be prohibitive. By building this **Event Center** at **The Impact Center**, a portion of this expense can be paid annually by the city to maintain this space for use by the community while the overhead and staffing costs will be covered by rental fees.