

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The Early Childhood Workforce Development Program is one of two signature programs of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. The program is designed to ensure that a skilled, informed, and diverse workforce is available to all children from birth through Grade 3.

### **Need**

Research and experience teach us that the first eight years of a child's life are crucial for lifetime success. The adults who provide care, instruction, and support during those years are fundamental to children achieving their potential and growing into confident and capable young people.

Like other states in the U.S., Nebraska has cause for serious concern about the early childhood workforce. Programs across the state report a chronic inability to find qualified staff to work in early care settings. This is deeply troubling, given that nearly 80 percent of Nebraska's children from birth through age 5 are in some form of paid out-of-home care. Moreover, in a recent statewide survey we conducted with Gallup, despite overwhelming recognition of the importance of early care and education, only 15 percent of Nebraskans report being very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs in the city or area where they live.

The problems are deep, they are systemic, and they require a comprehensive approach to solving them. The workforce development program of the Buffett Institute is committed to building a strong workforce of adults who care for, teach, nurture, and advance children's development through meaningful relationships and enduring experiences from birth – Grade 3.

### **Gathering the evidence**

Over the past two years, the Buffett Institute has undertaken multiple efforts to gather empirical evidence about the state of the workforce, higher education preservice preparation, and the regulatory and policy environments. Major surveys have been conducted (Nebraska Higher Education Inventory, Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey, Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education in Nebraska), and think tanks that served as listening sessions for professionals in higher education, policy, and regulation have been held. Summaries of these surveys and activities can be found on the Institute website. Together, they form the basis of our Blueprint for Transforming Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce, which provides the foundation for our ongoing long-term work.

### **Blueprint for Transformation**

The Blueprint for Transforming Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce shows that a skilled, informed, and diverse workforce requires a supportive professional environment, investment in the professional

role of early childhood educators and caregivers, competencies agreed upon by higher education, regulators, and practitioners, and varied systems aligned across early childhood settings. Success will entail collaboration and engagement among systems of higher education, early care and education, regulation and policy, and the business community and general public. Underlying all is a commitment to principles of equity, collaboration, evidence-based practice, responsiveness to local needs, and sustainability.

## **Plan**

Two teams are working with the Institute to begin the implementation of the Blueprint for Transforming Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce. They are the National Academy of Medicine Early Childhood Team (NAM Team) and the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission.

The NAM Team is working in cooperation with the National Academy of Medicine's Innovation to Incubation program to examine state and national efforts to implement recommendations from a recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) consensus report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. The 13 recommendations in this seminal report span local, state, and federal levels and can potentially have a significant impact on the field. Nebraska has joined a cohort of states including Colorado and Minnesota to compile and report on successful strategies used in other states, assess their applicability to Nebraska and assemble resources that may be useful to the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission.

The commission is co-chaired by Samuel J. Meisels, the Buffett Institute's founding executive director, and Marjorie Kostelnik, interim vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Commission membership is composed of a core group of leaders with decision-making responsibilities within organizations and institutions that can contribute to achieving the goals of the commission. Workgroups and ad hoc subcommittees from around the state will be formed as needed to carry out the work of the commission.

The commission will focus on four specific goals over a three-year span:

- Create a shared state vision for transforming and sustaining a skilled, informed, and diverse early childhood workforce for all children birth through Grade 3.
- Adopt the proposed Blueprint for Transforming Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce as the guiding framework for the planning and implementation process.
- Develop plans detailing effective strategies, actions, and those responsible for implementation.
- Facilitate and promote collaboration among stakeholders throughout the state and assist with public education and outreach.

## **Additional Information**

For more information about the Buffett Institute's Workforce Development Program, please contact Susan Sarver, Ph.D., Director of Workforce Planning and Development, at [ssarver@nebraska.edu](mailto:ssarver@nebraska.edu) or (402) 554-3762.

*The Buffett Early Childhood Institute is an innovative research, practice, and policy institute that draws on the resources of the four University of Nebraska campuses. The Institute is dedicated to promoting the development and learning of children from birth through age 8. The Institute's Workforce Development Program is funded in part by a generous grant from the Holland Foundation.*