

BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation: 2018-19

FOURTH YEAR REPORT



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute

at the University of Nebraska



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BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation: 2018-19

Contents

Executive Summary	4
The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan: Overview	8
Three Levels of Implementation	8
The Fourth Year Full Implementation of the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 Approach	10
Evaluation of the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 Approach.....	12
Program Quality: Home Visiting and Classroom Practices	16
Birth – Age 5: Home Visiting and Family Facilitation	16
PreK – Grade 3: Classroom Teaching Practices	18
Family Processes	21
Family Support.....	21
Parent-Child Relationships.....	21
Family-School Partnerships	22
Child Development and Learning	24
Development and Learning: Birth – 5 Years.....	24
Developing and Learning: 3 Years – Grade 3.....	25
Social-Emotional and Executive Function Development	31
Social-Emotional Development: Birth – 3 Years.....	31
Executive Functioning: 3 Years – Grade 3	32
Full Implementation Insights: Collaboration in the School as Hub Approach	34
Family-School Partnerships	34
Building Connections Between School and Community Preschool/Child Care Programs	35
School as Hub Full Implementation Evaluation: Summary and Recommendations	38
Program Quality	38
Family Processes	39
Child Development and Learning.....	39
Next Steps for Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Full Implementation	41
Customized Assistance to Districts	42
Strengthening Classroom Practices and Environments: Gretna Public Schools.....	42
Supporting Language Development and Instructional Practices: Ralston Public Schools	43
Professional Development for All	46
References	49

TABLES

TABLE 1	SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS: FULL IMPLEMENTATION SCHOOLS 2018-19	9
TABLE 2	SCHOOL AS HUB FOR BIRTH THROUGH GRADE 3 FRAMEWORK	12
TABLE 3	HOME VISITING PARTICIPATION	17
TABLE 4	KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 3 SPRING 2019 MAP ACHIEVEMENT STATUS	27
TABLE 5	KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 3 MAP CONDITIONAL GROWTH PERCENTILES	29
TABLE 6	AGE 3 AND KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 3 MINNESOTA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SCALE	33

FIGURES

FIGURE 1	SCHOOL AS HUB FOR BIRTH THROUGH GRADE 3: THEORY OF CHANGE	12
FIGURE 2	CLASS DOMAINS AND DIMENSIONS	19
FIGURE 3	PREK – GRADE 3 CLASS DOMAIN SCORES 2016-19	20
FIGURE 4	PREK – GRADE 3 CLASS DIMENSION SCORES COMPARED TO NATIONAL BENCHMARK	20
FIGURE 5	QUALITY OF PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS IN HOME VISITING	22
FIGURE 6	CHILD DEVELOPMENT BIRTH – 5 YEARS ASQ-3	24
FIGURE 7	NWEA MAP MEANS: ACHIEVEMENT STATUS	28
FIGURE 8	NWEA MAP: ACHIEVEMENT GROWTH STATUS	30
FIGURE 9	CHILD SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT BIRTH – 3 YEARS	32
FIGURE 10	PREK GOLD LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION	44
FIGURE 11	PREK GOLD: “TELLS ABOUT ANOTHER TIME OR PLACE”	45
FIGURE 12	PREK GOLD: “USES SOCIAL RULES OF LANGUAGE”	45
FIGURE 13	PD FOR ALL: KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHING SKILLS AND PRACTICES	47

Executive Summary

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan offers an innovative, comprehensive approach for reducing income- and race-based opportunity and achievement gaps for children from birth through Grade 3 in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The plan was developed in response to legislation (LB 585) passed in 2013 that directed the Learning Community Coordinating Council to enact an early childhood program created by the metro Omaha superintendents for young children living in high concentrations of poverty. The plan is financed by a half-cent levy, resulting in annual funding of approximately \$2.9 million to be used for this purpose.

In 2013, the superintendents of the 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy Counties invited the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska to partner with them to prepare a plan for their review and, after approval by the Learning Community Council, to facilitate the plan's implementation. The plan was adopted unanimously by the 11 superintendents in June 2014 and approved by the Learning Community Council in August 2014. In-depth planning and initial implementation within the districts occurred throughout 2014-15. Implementation of plan components was launched in summer 2015, and continues.

The goal of the Superintendents' Plan is to reduce or eliminate social, cognitive, and achievement gaps among young children living in high concentrations of poverty. Translating research into practice, the plan provides for a comprehensive systems approach that transforms learning opportunities for children at risk for school failure by the end of third grade. Because of its systemic perspective, the plan is intended to elevate the capacity of the Omaha metro school districts to serve all young children.

The Superintendents' Plan engages in three levels of implementation through which school districts, elementary schools, and community-based professionals can strengthen efforts targeted at increasing educational opportunity and reducing achievement gaps among young children.

- 1. School as Hub for Birth through Grade 3 (full implementation)** is an approach in which elementary schools serve as a connector to build pathways of continuous, high-quality, and equitable learning experiences for children starting at birth and extending through Grade 3. Strong links between school, home, and community open up new opportunities for families' partnership and provide access to supports and resources as they navigate their children's learning experiences. A shared goal is the prevention and reduction of income- and race-based disparities in opportunity and achievement.
- 2. Customized Assistance** offers school districts technical assistance and consultation tailored to specific needs in birth through Grade 3 policies and

programming. In the 2018-19 school year, Gretna and Ralston school districts participated in customized assistance projects and related program evaluation.

- 3. Professional Development for All** provides a connected series of professional development institutes open to all school and community-based program leaders, teachers, early childhood professionals, and caregivers who work with young children from birth through Grade 3 in the Omaha metro area. PD for All introduces leading-edge research and innovative practices while promoting collaborative connections and shared commitments to strong early learning and family support systems. In the 2018-19 school year, sessions were offered in English and Spanish.

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan entered its fourth year of implementation and evaluation across six school districts in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. During this fourth year, the evaluation continued to assess school-level change, program quality, family processes, and child learning and development, and included a revision of previous years' evaluations, adjusting to align with program and evaluation shifts, including: (1) an increased focus on program quality and (2) child development and learning with screening in birth – 3 years, developmental assessment at 3 years, and inclusion of the entire PreK – Grade 3 population in full implementation schools for achievement and executive functioning. With this revised approach, we were able to include data for more than 2,000 children in the evaluation.

For the 2018-19 year, evaluation activities addressed the following questions:

What has been learned about the processes and outcomes related to program quality, family processes, and child learning and development?

- *Are family supports and classroom practices related to program quality improving?*
- *Do family interaction processes reflect support and engagement?*
- *How are children in full implementation schools learning and developing?*
- *How are schools implementing School as Hub?*

A variety of methods were used in the current evaluation approach, including observations in schools and family homes, direct child assessments, and family surveys. Principals, school staff, and educational facilitators were interviewed about their work supporting school connections with families and communities. In all evaluation processes, efforts were made to understand how schools and families partner to create contexts that support children's learning and development, and how schools can be supported in leading that engagement. Specific findings about the processes and outcomes related to program quality, family processes, and child learning and development are highlighted below.

Are family supports and classroom practices related to program quality improving?

- ***Classroom quality***, assessed by an observational measure of instructional, emotional, and organizational support, has increased significantly over the course of the four years. Coaches and teachers, supported by principals and schools, are refining their classroom climate and interactions with students.
- ***Home visiting*** and personal visit participation is increasing with implementation of *Growing Great Kids* curriculum. While implementing home visiting can be challenging for schools, efforts to engage families are increasing.

Do family interaction processes reflect support and engagement?

- ***Family engagement***, as connected to interaction with the home visitor and measured via the *Home Visiting Rating Scales (HOVRS)*, improved over the course of the school year, reflecting increased quality relationships among home visitors and families.
- ***Parent-child interaction***, as assessed by the *KIPS* assessment tool, reflected that most parents involved in the home visiting evaluation were interacting with children in ways that supported early learning.
- ***Family perceptions of school engagement***, as assessed using an adapted version of the *Road Map Family Engagement Survey*, reflected relatively high family perceptions of engagement with schools. Future efforts aim to increase the number of families who provide feedback using the survey.

How are children in full implementation schools learning and developing?

- ***Development and learning from birth – 3 years*** were assessed using a screening tool completed by parents. Most children enrolled in home visiting were developing typically, according to parents.
- ***Development and learning at 3 years*** were assessed for children transitioning out of home visiting. Using a standardized assessment, children demonstrated language, pre-academic skills, and executive functions in the low average range.
- ***Academic achievement in Kindergarten – Grade 3*** was assessed using school-based achievement assessments. On average, children's reading and mathematics achievement status were below the expected levels, and varied by family and child demographics related to income, race, and ethnicity.
- ***Executive functioning in Kindergarten – Grade 3*** was evaluated using a standardized assessment. Children's executive functions were in the average range, and improved over grades.

How are schools implementing School as Hub?

- ***Family partnerships*** are increasing. Schools are shifting their perspectives related to engaging families from birth, and learning what it means to prioritize the work in the landscape of competing priorities.

- **Community partnerships** are perceived as important and growing. Some full implementation schools are exploring the value of partnering with community-based child care.

The work of shifting school systems is complex and labor intensive. As the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan enters its fifth year, program and school staff have learned to identify essential elements of school systems change and are implementing at more intensive levels each year. Schools and districts are more intensively and intentionally engaging families and communities from children's birth through Grade 3. Evaluation efforts are capturing how efforts are implemented and how they manifest in program quality and family processes. We anticipate that identifying improvements at these levels will manifest in improvements in children's development and learning. Most importantly, we hope to detect decreases in achievement disparities.

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan: Overview

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan offers an innovative, comprehensive approach for reducing income- and race-based opportunity and achievement gaps for children from birth through Grade 3 in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The plan was developed in response to legislation (LB 585) passed in 2013 that directed the Learning Community Coordinating Council to enact an early childhood program created by the metro Omaha superintendents for young children living in high concentrations of poverty. The plan is financed by a half-cent levy, resulting in annual funding of approximately \$2.9 million to be used for this purpose.

In 2013, the superintendents of the 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy Counties invited the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska to partner with them to prepare a plan for their review and, after approval by the Learning Community Council, to facilitate the plan's implementation. The plan was adopted unanimously by the 11 superintendents in June 2014 and approved by the Learning Community Council in August 2014. In-depth planning and initial implementation within the districts occurred throughout 2014-15. Implementation of plan components was launched in summer 2015, and continues.

The goal of the Superintendents' Plan is to reduce or eliminate social, cognitive, and achievement gaps among young children living in high concentrations of poverty. Translating research into practice, the plan provides for a comprehensive systems approach that aims to transform learning opportunities for children at risk for school failure by the end of third grade. Because of its systemic perspective, the plan is intended to elevate the capacity of the Omaha metro school districts to serve all young children well.

THREE LEVELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The Superintendents' Plan engages in three levels of implementation through which school districts, elementary schools, and community-based professionals can strengthen efforts to increase educational opportunity and reduce achievement gaps among young children.

Level 1: Full Implementation of the School as Hub for Birth – Grade 3 Approach

In this systems-level implementation, schools serve as hubs that connect young children and their families to a pathway of continuous, high-quality, and equitable learning experiences for children starting at birth and extending through Grade 3. This continuum includes home visiting for children birth to age 3, three times per month, personal visits in the context of transitions to high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, and aligned Kindergarten through Grade 3 educational experiences. Educators,

families, and communities work together to attain new levels of excellence in children's early learning experiences, from birth through Grade 3. Table 1 displays demographics for the schools participating in the full implementation.

TABLE 1. | SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS: FULL IMPLEMENTATION SCHOOLS 2018-19

District and Schools	2017-19 Student Enrollment	% Free/Reduced Lunch	% Racial Ethnic Minority Population	% At or Above Proficient 3rd Grade Language Arts*	% At or Above Proficient 3rd Grade Math*
Bellevue	9,801	38.98%	31.14%	48%	40%
Belleaire	295	68.81%	43.39%	40%	19%
DC West	958	35.18%	10.44%	42%	43%
DC West	484	39.46%	9.30%	42%	43%
Millard	24,018	20.76%	22.20%	64%	63%
Cody	297	52.86%	42.76%	30%	33%
Sandoz	367	49.59%	46.87%	56%	44%
Omaha	52,836	76.66%	72.95%	34%	32%
Gomez Heritage	840	89.52%	92.98%	29%	25%
Liberty	728	92.99%	89.97%	14%	17%
Mount View	390	91.54%	88.72%	16%	16%
Pinewood	224	71.43%	72.77%	39%	48%
Ralston	3,407	56.53%	47.99%	45%	35%
Mockingbird	383	75.46%	66.58%	45%	33%
Westside	6,066	33.88%	29.31%	59%	55%
Westbrook	544	55.33%	46.69%	39%	38%
Total school enrollment	4,552				
Total district enrollment	97,086				

*Based on 2017-18 proficiencies

Level 2: Customized Assistance to Districts

Customized Assistance offers school districts technical assistance and consultation tailored to specific needs in birth through Grade 3 policies and programming. In the 2018-19 school year, Gretna and Ralston school districts participated in customized assistance projects and related program evaluation. Gretna's initiative focused on developing teachers' capacity to support children's social-emotional competence, while the Ralston school district made efforts to continue fostering high-quality PreK practices, particularly around language development.

Level 3: Professional Development for All

PD for All provides a connected series of professional development institutes open to all school and community-based program leaders, teachers, early childhood professionals, and caregivers who work with young children from birth through Grade 3 in the Omaha metro area. PD for All introduces leading-edge research and innovative practices while promoting collaborative connections and shared commitments to strong early learning and family support systems. The theme for the 2018-19 PD for All series was "Harnessing the Power of Language and Communication to Build Children's Literacy Success." Five institutes (including two in Spanish) provided professional development to 498 early childhood education professionals.

Evaluation activities specific to each of the three interconnected levels of implementation in the Superintendents' Plan are described in the sections that follow.

THE FOURTH YEAR FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHOOL AS HUB BIRTH – GRADE 3 APPROACH

School as Hub for Birth through Grade 3 is a leading-edge approach in which elementary schools serve as a connector to build pathways of continuous, high-quality, and equitable learning experiences for children starting at birth and extending through Grade 3. Strong links between school, home, and community open up new opportunities for families' engagement and provide access to supports and resources as they navigate their children's learning experiences. A shared goal is the prevention and reduction of income- and race-based disparities in opportunity and achievement.

According to the theory of change for the School as Hub for Birth – Grade 3 (see Figure 1), continuity, quality, and equity for children are the lens through which practices and policies are shaped and evaluated at all levels of educational systems, including classrooms, elementary schools, districts, and communities. Only by addressing all levels of the system can we expect this approach to be effective in reducing or eliminating income- and race- based disparities in opportunity and achievement.

Continuity

Continuity refers to the commitment to provide children with seamless learning and educational experiences from birth through Grade 3. Continuity and seamless transitions across the full birth through Grade 3 continuum promote stability and long-term educational success for children (Stipek, Clements, Coburn, Franke, & Farran, 2017; Takanishi, 2016).

Quality

Quality refers to the commitment to implement practices with families, children, and educators that are evidence-based, produce developmentally and educationally important outcomes, and are informed by continuous improvement. High-quality classroom and family support practices are based on two-way relationships that enhance interactions between educators, children, and families; they promote social-emotional well-being and stimulate learning and thinking; they are tailored to individual needs; and they are culturally and linguistically affirming (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016; Pianta, Downer, & Hamre, 2016).

Equity

Equity refers to the commitment that every child receives what is needed to succeed in school and life (Blankenstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016). An explicit focus on equity throughout School as Hub practices and policies provides an essential catalyst for progress toward the goal of preventing and eliminating income- and race-based disparities in opportunity and achievement by starting early.

An essential feature of the School as Hub approach is a guiding integrated framework that combines educational experiences for children with opportunities for family engagement and parenting supports. The School as Hub framework identifies three essential dimensions, requiring schools to: (1) implement a continuum of birth through Grade 3 practices; (2) strengthen organizational environments; and (3) build professional capacity. These dimensions highlight the School as Hub for Birth through Grade 3 approach as a systems approach through which multiple components work together interactively. While changes in practices to enhance children and family supports are at the forefront, school organizational environments and professional capacity are equally influential dimensions that must be intentionally cultivated as part of the transformation from traditional elementary school to School as Hub for Birth through Grade 3 (Fullan, 2010; Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006). As the School as Hub approach is implemented, strategic and interdependent changes are promoted to build professional capacity through leadership and collaborative learning. Organizational environments, such as school culture and family-school partnerships, also are strengthened (Figure 1). Table 2 describes the three dimensions and their components.

FIGURE 1. | SCHOOL AS HUB FOR BIRTH THROUGH GRADE 3: THEORY OF CHANGE

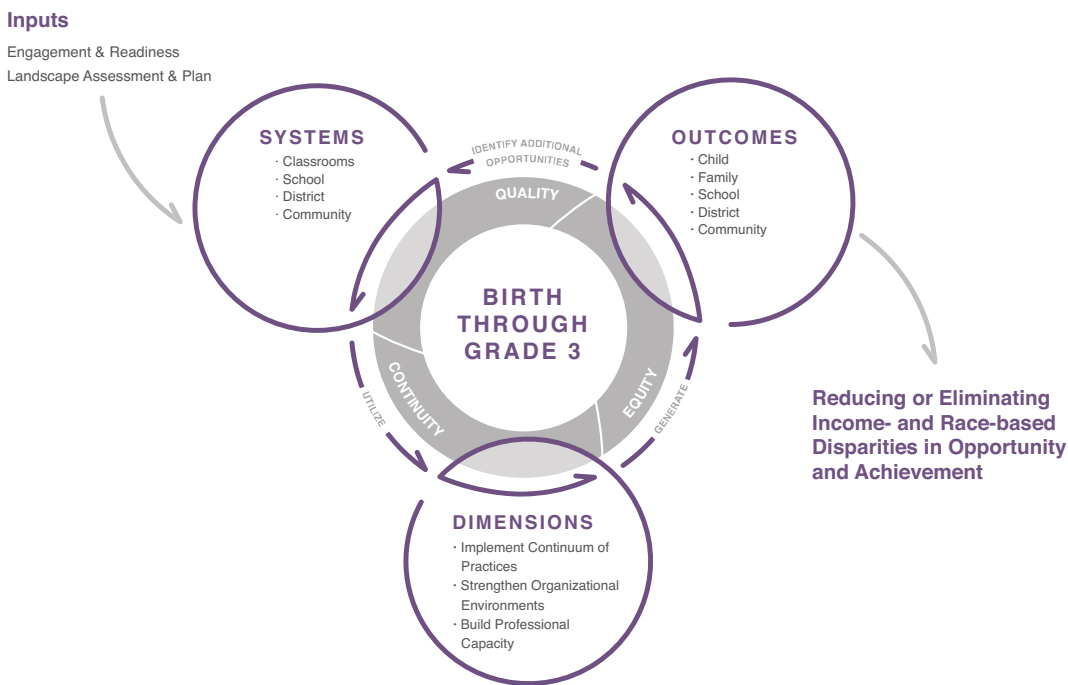


TABLE 2. | SCHOOL AS HUB FOR BIRTH THROUGH GRADE 3 FRAMEWORK

DIMENSIONS		
Implement Birth – Grade 3 Continuum of Practices	Strengthen Organizational Environments	Build Professional Capacity
COMPONENTS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child-Centered Teaching and Learning • Child-Centered Parenting and Learning • Cross-Cutting Practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture and Climate • Family-School Partnerships • Community-School Connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Professional Learning • Collaboration

EVALUATION OF THE SCHOOL AS HUB FOR BIRTH – GRADE 3 APPROACH

The Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan Evaluation aims to capture the degree to which the School as Hub for Birth through Grade 3 framework is being implemented and observed across a range of districts and schools. In the following sections, we describe the methods used to evaluate the approach, findings related to program quality, and what is being learned about efforts in the full implementation. Subsequent sections describe engagement in the customized assistance and professional development for all programming.

The evaluation of the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 approach (full implementation) includes evaluation from four system levels:

- Program quality in home visiting and classrooms
- Family engagement processes
- Child development and learning outcomes
- Program implementation within school systems

For the 2018-19 year, evaluation activities addressed the following questions:

What has been learned about the processes and outcomes related to program quality, family processes, and child learning and development?

- *Are family supports and classroom practices related to program quality improving?*
- *Do family interaction processes reflect support and engagement?*
- *How are children in full implementation schools learning and developing?*
- *How are schools implementing School as Hub?*

The full implementation approach is designed to bring about significant shifts in how “schools do school” over time. Principals, teachers, school staff, children, and families participate in the program. In addition to principals and teachers, school staff include a home visitor and family facilitator employed by each school to provide early parenting supports and promote family-school-community partnerships. Table 1 describes the characteristics of the children enrolled in the full implementation districts and schools.

Evaluation Overview: Full Implementation

The evaluation was designed to document, measure, and support implementation of the Superintendents’ Plan, and to provide information about shifts in practices and progress in school systems, family processes and engagement, and child learning and development. In 2018-19, the evaluation was revised to accommodate shifts in program components and to be responsive to feedback from district and school partners. The goals for the evaluation plan for 2018-19 were revised to:

- Align the evaluation with the updated change strategies and theory of change for the School as Hub approach including:
 - Implementation of the *Growing Great Kids* curriculum for the parents of children ages birth to 5
 - Addition of personal visits for families after children age out of home visits up to age 5
 - Focus on school-based system change via the School as Hub approach
- Increase the number of children included in the evaluation in order to draw more meaningful conclusions about the quality and effectiveness of program components

- Maximize the scope of the evaluation while reducing the assessment burden on children, schools, and families

Our partnerships are essential to the ongoing evaluation. Evaluators from the Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI) at the University of Nebraska Medical Center managed the data collection processes for (1) family surveys, (2) for the 3-year-old children who were transitioning out of Home Visiting, and (3) children in Kindergarten – Grade 3 who participated in the evaluation. Evaluators from the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln managed: (1) data collection training for the home visitors and family facilitators, and (2) video coding and analyses for children birth – age 3, their parents, and home visitors.

To more effectively align with program shifts and participating school needs, revisions to the 2017-18 evaluation design and processes were implemented in 2018-19, and will be continued in subsequent years. The quality of home visiting and classroom practices was assessed using the same observational measures as in previous years. An additional observational time point was added for home visiting to facilitate feedback to program improvement. Family process assessments included observations of parent-child interactions and a modified survey to assess aspects of family engagement, aligned with the theory of change dimensions. Child development and learning outcomes were assessed with standardized measures of educational achievement and executive function. The measures chosen were either currently being utilized by the schools or could be implemented with all children in the same manner as the current school-based measures so that data could be used for multiple purposes. Data sharing agreements were negotiated with participating districts to facilitate the efficient use of school-based data. General methods by child age group are described below. Specific methods for program quality, family processes, and child learning and development are described in the following sections.

Birth – Age 3

Children under 3 years who were enrolled in home visiting and whose families consented to participate in the evaluation are represented in these results. Families completed developmental screening and home visiting observations that included home visitor interaction quality and parent-child interaction.

Age 3 (Transitioning out of Home Visiting)

To allow the evaluation to examine a similar “starting point” or baseline for all children enrolled in home visiting, evaluation staff used direct assessments of academic skills, language, and social-emotional (executive function) for children at age 3 who were transitioning out of the home visiting program.

Kindergarten – Grade 3

Evaluation staff used direct assessment of children, video observation of classroom practices, and a family survey. All children in Kindergarten through Grade 3 were asked to participate in the evaluation through a passive consent process. The passive consent process involved a letter sent to each family within each of the schools that provided an overview of the evaluation activities and the use of student assessment data. Families were given the opportunity to decline participation in the evaluation if the form was signed and returned within a two- to three-week time frame. This process resulted in 2,376 Kindergarten through Grade 3 children, across 10 full implementation schools, participating in the evaluation. The total number of children for whom families declined participation in the evaluation was 170 across the 10 schools.

Following Children From Previous Cohort Design

The previous cohort design was modified to allow for children's learning and development to be studied at a population level after PreK; however, children included in the original design continue to participate in the evaluation. Moving forward, these children will be followed through third grade in order to differentiate them from children added to the evaluation. For children enrolled in Birth – Age 5 programming (e.g., home visiting and personal visits) future evaluations will consider the number of years children were enrolled in programming and participation in School as Hub components. This will be particularly valuable as we consider children in the original Birth to Age 3 cohort who experience multiple years of home visiting.

Data Analytic Approach

Descriptive and inferential data analytic approaches were used to address the evaluation questions. Statistical analyses were conducted to test for differences across time points and groups as well as to account for clustering of data (e.g., children and teachers within schools). Sample sizes (of classrooms and students) were often sufficient for determining the statistical significance of group differences and change over time, something not possible in previous reports.

Program Quality: Home Visiting and Classroom Practices

BIRTH – AGE 5: HOME VISITING AND FAMILY FACILITATION

Schools Continue to Learn How to Partner With Families From Birth

School-based, voluntary home visiting is a key program component for the School as Hub Birth to Grade 3 approach. Consistent, high-quality home visiting in the early years has been shown to increase children’s outcomes over time by: (1) increasing parents’ capacity to support their child’s learning and development (Caldera et al., 2007) and (2) enhancing families’ relationships and engagement with their child’s school (Wessels, 2013). The home visiting program includes three one-hour visits per month with each participating family, throughout the school year and summer months. As children age out of home visiting at 3 years old, family facilitators continue to perform personal visits with most families once per month to provide continuity of educational experiences for children until they enter school-based PreK or Kindergarten.

Leaders at each school identified criteria for recruiting families into the voluntary home visiting program, with an emphasis on including children and families with the highest needs. To encourage early and continuous engagement with families, schools were encouraged to prioritize recruitment of families with children under age 1 or those expecting a child. Other priorities for recruitment included low income, teen parent(s), low birth weight, low maternal education level, and home language other than English. When home visitors enrolled families in the program, they invited them to participate in the evaluation. Evaluation activities in the 2018-19 year focused on the process of home visitation and parent-child interaction. A typical home visit was recorded for each family, lasting approximately 60 minutes.

In the 2018-19 year, 122 children received home visiting services from their school (95 families). Of these children, 81 participated in the evaluation. Table 3 provides a description of program and evaluation enrollment by district and school.

As of May 31, 2019, 14 children had turned 3 years old and transitioned out of the home visiting program. Of this group, eight children were accepted into school-based PreK/Head Start classrooms, and the remaining six children will stay home or attend community programs.

We use the term “parent” in this report to refer to the family member (parent, grandparent, guardian) who served as the primary contact and participant in the evaluation. Parents provided demographic and other information about their family and children. More than 49% of parents self-identified as Hispanic, 23% White, 18% Black, and 9% Asian/Pacific Islander. All parents reported that their children qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch participation.

TABLE 3. | HOME VISITING PARTICIPATION

School	ENROLLED		CONSENTED TO EVALUATION	
	Families	Children	Families	Children
Belleaire	9	10	6	7
Cody	8	9	4	4
DC West	8	11	8	8
Sandoz	9	13	9	13
Gomez	15	18	8	10
Liberty	12	15	10	10
Mockingbird	11	13	8	8
Mount View	6	9	3	3
Pinewood	11	14	11	12
Westbrook	6	10	6	6
Totals	95	122	73	81

School-based home visitors and family facilitators implement the *Growing Great Kids* curriculum (GGK; Elliot, Flanagan, Belza, Dew, 2012). With a focus on understanding family assets and cultivating resilience, home visitors engage and empower parents in their role as educators of their children. GGK is relationship-based and supports families in building secure attachments.

The quality of home visiting practices was assessed using the *Home Visiting Rating Scales (HOVRS; Roggman et al., 2017)*. The HOVRS assessment includes a videotaped observation containing two subscales: *home visiting practices* and *family engagement*. Individual items are scored using anchors that indicate the quality of the interaction (1 = needs training, 3 = adequate, 5 = good, 7 = excellent), and each scale is assigned an overall score (1 – 7). *Home visiting practices* refers to the home visitor’s responsiveness, relationship with the family, facilitation of parent-child interactions, and non-intrusiveness and collaboration. *Family engagement* refers to how the home visitor supports developmentally appropriate parent-child interactions (see section on Family Processes).

Home visiting quality is evaluated twice per year as part of the professional development for home visitors and family facilitators. Families are asked to consent to participating in the evaluation process. Families received \$25 gift cards each time they participated in the HOVRS, which includes the home visitor video recording their interactions during the home visit. These confidential recordings are uploaded via secure school servers into protected online research folders. An external evaluation team scores the home visiting quality and shares reports with the home visitors and program team to support learning.

HOVRS coders participate in a rigorous training and reliability process. Coders must

achieve 85% reliability and submit to ongoing reliability checks on every fifth video to continue coding. Individualized reports are shared with the program staff for professional development and self-assessment purposes. Compilations of these data are utilized for evaluation aims.

Recorded observations were evaluated from 10 home visitors and five family facilitators for a total of 15 school-based professionals. Ninety-seven completed observations included 81 from home visitors and 16 from family facilitators. Observations were split roughly between baseline ($n = 47$) and follow-up three months later ($n = 50$). Sixty different families participated in these recorded evaluation observations. The process of using technology to observe home visiting was not an easy one, and some data were lost in the collection process.

The *Home Visitor Practices* subscale was used to assess home visitors based on four items, each of which is assigned a rating of 1 – 7. The items include: *responsiveness to family*, *relationship with family*, *facilitation of parent-child interactions*, and *non-intrusiveness and collaboration*. The four items are summed to provide the summary score. Most summary mean scale scores were within the “adequate” range (11 – 18). Mean *Home Visit Practices* quality summary scores were 14.70 ($SD = 4.26$) at baseline and 15.16 ($SD = 4.37$) at follow-up. Scores for the individual item *Relationship with the Family*, a foundational element for building trust in the context of home visiting, were positively rated in the “good” range at 4.98 at baseline and 4.78 at follow-up.

PREK – GRADE 3: CLASSROOM TEACHING PRACTICES

Classroom Interactions and Instruction Trends Are Strong and Increased Over Time

The quality of teachers’ practices and interactions in the classroom is associated with higher academic and social interactions throughout the elementary school years (Hamre & Pianta, 2003). To enhance quality instructional practices, the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan employs methods and instructional content grounded in child development and learning. Educational facilitators provide coaching and professional learning opportunities for PreK – Grade 3 teachers and work with all school staff to promote school climates that support evidence-based strategies to support children’s optimal learning and development.

The *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)* is an observational tool that assesses the quality of classroom practices in the domains of *emotional support*, *classroom organization*, and *instructional support* (see Figure 2). *CLASS* scores (scaled from 1 to 7) have evidence-based associations with student achievement across classrooms and can also predict gains in student achievement (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). PreK through Grade 3 classrooms across all 10 full implementation schools participated in the *CLASS* assessment and were videotaped for an hour during

January through March, 2019. Trained evaluators reviewed and scored the videotapes. Teachers and coaches received their score reports and had access to videotapes to observe their teaching.

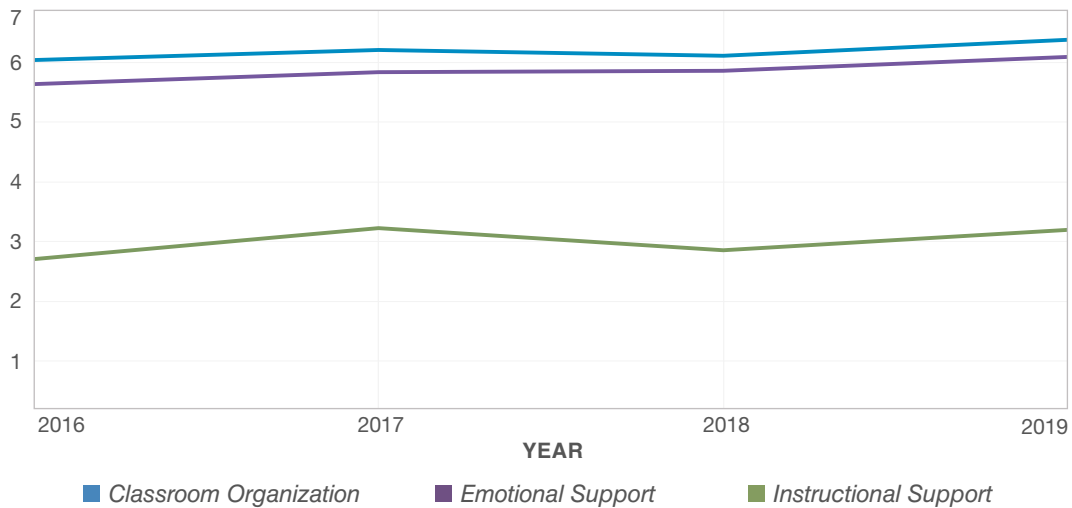
FIGURE 2. | CLASS DOMAINS AND DIMENSIONS

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION	INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Climate • Teacher Sensitivity • Regard for Student's Perspective • Negative Climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior Management • Productivity • Instructional Learning Formats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept Development • Quality of Feedback • Language Modeling

- *Emotional Support* reflects positive teacher-student relationships and communication patterns. PreK – Grade 3 teachers in the full implementation schools exceeded national benchmarks on three of four *Emotional Support* dimensions including positive climate ($M = 6.29, SD = .77$); absence of negative climate ($M = 6.95, SD = .17$); and teacher sensitivity ($M = 6.38, SD = .82$).
- *Classroom Organization* reflects settings in which teachers establish structures and opportunities for student engagement in learning, including facilitating student discovery and supporting attention through clear expectations and routines. Scores for *Classroom Organization* are in the high-quality range and exceed national benchmarks, for behavior management ($M = 6.57, SD = .69$), productivity ($M = 6.51, SD = .63$), and instructional learning formats ($M = 5.81, SD = .89$).
- *Instructional Support* reflects how the teacher uses language and activities to scaffold children’s learning. *Instructional Support* scores in the full implementation PreK – Grade 3 classrooms are mid-range, and reflect national trends (Hamre, 2014; Moiduddin, Aikens, Tarullo, West, & Xue, 2012). However, these scores exceed national Head Start averages across all dimensions, including concept development ($M = 2.74, SD = .99$), quality of feedback ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.4$), and language modeling ($M = 3.57; SD = 1.06$).

CLASS scores in all three domains improved over the first four years of the full implementation and were significantly higher in 2019 relative to 2018 and 2016 across all three domains. Average *emotional support* scores increased from year to year, with statistically significant score improvements occurring from 2016-17 and 2018-19. *Classroom organization* and *instructional support* scores also showed an overall positive directional trend (See Figure 3).

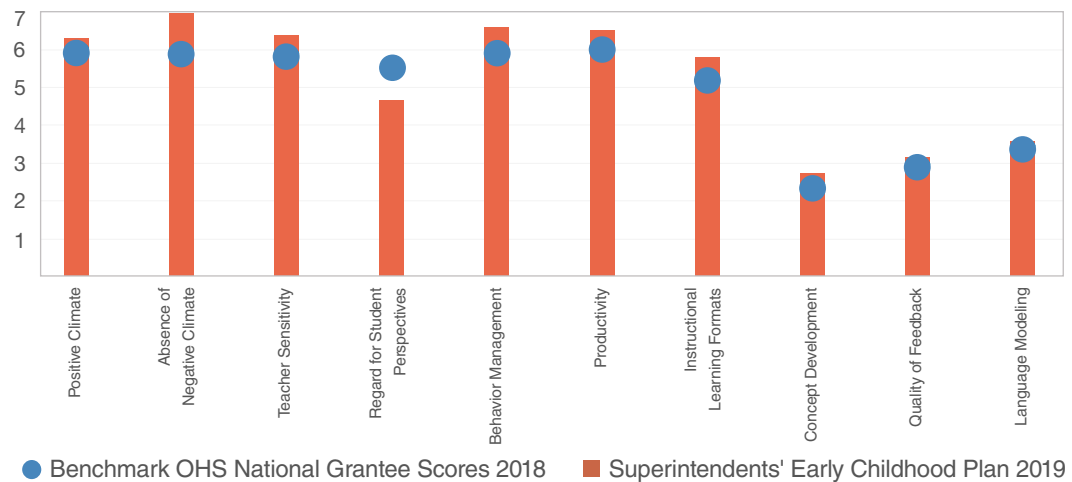
FIGURE 3. | PREK – GRADE 3 CLASS DOMAIN SCORES 2016-19



Teacher Practice Scores Surpass National Benchmarks

To situate the quality of classroom interactions in a national context, CLASS dimension scores from the 2018-19 academic year were compared to national grantee benchmarks from the national Office of Head Start (A National Overview, 2019). Overall, classroom quality, as measured by CLASS, outperformed national benchmarks across domains and over most dimensions. Figure 4 represents PreK – Grade 3 CLASS dimension scores compared to the national benchmark.

FIGURE 4. | PREK – GRADE 3 CLASS DIMENSION SCORES COMPARED TO NATIONAL BENCHMARK



Family Processes

The Superintendents' Plan works with schools to re-examine and address how to support families of young children, birth – Grade 3. Schools can support families by helping families connect with other families, school staff, and helpful community resources (Min, Anderson, & Chen, 2017). Through intentional interactions with every family, such as those taking place in the context of a home visiting relationship or parent-child interaction group, schools can provide information about child development and learning and promote healthy relationships. These trusting relationships often offer families an opportunity to ask questions, express opinions, and learn about school processes. Schools can listen and be responsive to families as a part of this partnership and shift their practices related to partnering with families, communication, school culture, and trust. To learn about family processes in the full implementation, we examined parent-child engagement, observed parent-child interaction, and surveyed families about their partnership with schools.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Home Visiting and Family Facilitation Foster Positive Parent-Child Interaction

Connecting families to early education knowledge, other families, and the schools in their communities are the sources of family partnership and a major goal of home visiting in the School as Hub Birth to Grade 3 approach. The quality of family processes is assessed using the *Home Visiting Rating Scales (HOVRS)*; Roggman et al., 2017), focused on the *family engagement* subscale. The *family engagement* subscale assesses the degree to which the home visitor supports developmentally appropriate parent-child interactions. Home visitors ($n = 9$) and family facilitators ($n = 3$) video recorded parent-child-home visitor/family facilitator interactions as part of the home visit and these were coded by trained evaluators. Analyses focused on the 33 families that participated in the evaluation at baseline and follow-up.

The three *Family Engagement* items, Parent Engagement, Child Engagement, and Parent-Child Interaction, are each rated between a minimum of 1 and maximum of 7 and are summed to get the summary score. *Family engagement* subscale scores at baseline ($M = 13.74$, $SD = 3.04$) and follow-up ($M = 15.21$, $SD = 2.79$) improved significantly ($t(33) = 2.31$, $p = .027$), and reflected movement from “adequate” to “good” ratings of engagement. By follow-up, two of the three items (Parent Engagement and Child Engagement) were meeting or exceeding “good” quality standards, with the third item (Parent-Child Interaction) also showing gains.

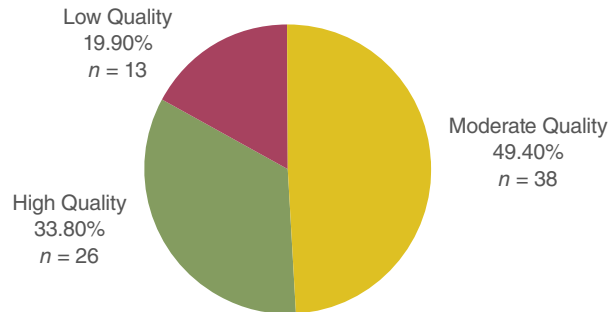
PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Positive Parent-Child Interactions Support Learning and Development

The parent-child relationship contributes in essential ways to young children's development and learning (Richter, Griesel, & Manegold, 2004). A primary goal of home visiting is to help the parent develop and maintain a positive relationship with their child (Sama-Miller et al., 2017). In the context of the home visit, the home visitor or family

facilitator video records the parent and child engaging in play for 10 minutes. Trained coders observed how the parent and child interacted in play and used the *Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS)* (Comfort & Gordon, 2006) to observe how the parent responds to the child in ways that promote trust and acceptance, scaffold child learning, and encourage the child's self-confidence. The 12-item scale is rated on a 5-point scale (1 = rarely, 3 = usually, and 5 = consistently). Seventy-seven observations were recorded and rated for 53 families; some families had multiple children enrolled in the program. Most families participating in home visiting demonstrated moderate to high-quality parent-child interactions ($M = 3.65$, $SD = .65$), suggesting that on average, parents are responsive and supportive of their children's development and learning (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. | QUALITY OF PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS IN HOME VISITING



FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Assessing Family Perceptions Informs Family-School Partnerships

When schools engage meaningfully with families, children demonstrate better educational achievement and social outcomes (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Child, 2004). To support schools' practices engaging families for continuity, quality, and equity, an adaptation of the *Road Map Family Engagement Survey (FES)* (Ishimaru & Lott, 2015) was used to assess families' perceptions about collaboration among families, communities, and schools. Twelve items addressed six domains: Parent/Family Knowledge and Confidence, Welcoming and Culturally Responsive School Climate, Parent/Family Influence and Decision-Making, Family-Educator Trust, Family-Educator Communication, and Principal Leadership for Engagement. Parents rank items on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Surveys were distributed to families enrolled in home visiting or family facilitation and in PreK to Grade 3 full implementation schools, in either online or paper format, based on school preference. Families enrolled in home visiting or family facilitation also received the surveys.

A total of 731 families responded to the survey across all 10 schools, with 189 of these families reporting speaking a language other than English in the home. The majority of the families reported their race as White ($n = 433$) with the next-largest race category reported being Black ($n = 87$). Over half of the families ($n = 372$) reported qualifying for Free or

Reduced Lunch. Descriptive statistics were obtained for each of the items in the survey. As a whole, families responded very positively to the items with mean item scores ranging from 5.98 to 6.49 (out of 7).

Child Development and Learning

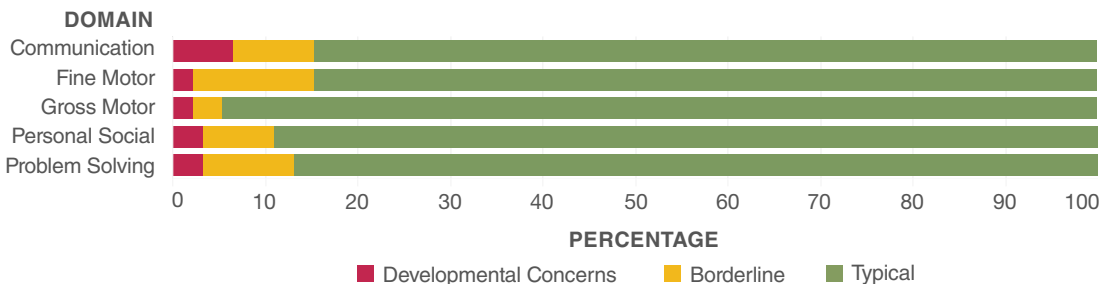
Over time, a focus on continuity, quality, and equity in the context of the School as Hub Birth to Grade 3 approach is expected to manifest in improved development and learning for all children and reduced disparities based on race and income. Children’s development and educational achievement are being assessed annually to investigate changes in learning and disparities over time. Measures used in the 2018-19 school year were revised to (1) better identify development concerns in the birth to 3-year-old population participating in home visiting, (2) establish a baseline measurement for 3-year-olds’ language skill and early academic skill related to math and reading, and (3) allow for population-level examination of development and learning for children using school-based assessments for reading and math, PreK to Grade 3.

DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING: BIRTH – 5 YEARS

Children’s development was assessed using the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Third Edition (ASQ-3)*; Squires, Bricker & Twombly, 2009). A screening tool, the ASQ-3 includes 21 age-specific questionnaires for 3 – 60 months, with items assessing five developmental areas: *communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, and personal-social*. Scores for each developmental area are assigned one of three ratings meant to indicate risk of developmental delay and need for referral: Developmental Concerns (lowest) Borderline (mid-range), and Typical (highest). Families complete the questionnaires in the context of the home visit or personal visit; home visitors and family facilitators score and discuss any concerns families may have about their child’s development. Due to the ongoing recruiting of families into home visiting and family facilitation, children’s ages at first assessment varied. Ninety-one children were assessed at least one time, with the youngest child measured at 1.08 months and the oldest child measured at 61.22 months ($M = 17.03$ months, $SD = 12.86$ months).

Due to the variability in the number and timing of assessment points, children’s initial enrollment questionnaire served as the focus of these analyses. A majority of children in home visiting were developing typically (85% – 95% across five areas), and a very small number presented developmental concerns (two to six children across five areas). Figure 6 illustrates the proportion of children rated in each developmental category.

FIGURE 6. | CHILD DEVELOPMENT BIRTH – 5 YEARS ASQ-3



DEVELOPING AND LEARNING: 3 YEARS – GRADE 3

An indicator of children’s early academic achievement includes the ability to understand written language and acquire fundamental math concepts. In the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan, educational facilitators work with classroom teachers to support academic instruction in PreK – Grade 3 classrooms.

Language, Cognitive, and Academic Skills at 3 Years

Children’s language develops rapidly in the first three years of life and continues to predict academic achievement through the school years (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000). Receptive language skills develop first and are demonstrated in children’s ability to understand language and use it to reason and solve problems. Expressive language skills develop next and are reflected in children’s ability to use gestural and verbal, and eventually written language, to communicate with others and demonstrate understanding. Language serves as a linchpin for ongoing learning. When children are delayed in their language learning or are not exposed to language-rich environments, they often struggle with social development and academic achievement as well (Scarborough, 2009).

Children’s language development and early academic skills at 3 years were assessed in the home using the *Expressive Language* subscale of the *Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Early Cognitive and Academic Development (ECAD)* (Schrank, McGrew, Mather, LaForte, Wendling, and Dailey, 2015). This assessment is a battery of early development tests that measure general intellectual ability and early academic skills. It is designed for children from ages 2 years, 6 months to 7 years, 11 months and for children with cognitive delays up to age 9 years, 11 months. The *Expressive Language* subscale is made up of tests of picture vocabulary (child is shown an image and given the correct object label, child is asked to point to the object, child is asked to say the object label aloud) and sentence repetition (child is asked to repeat words, phrases, and sentences exactly as heard). Thirteen children were assessed at age 3 from six of the full implementation schools. Children who spoke Spanish as their home language, as reported by parents, were assessed using the *Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey III (WMLS III)* (Woodcock, Alvarado, Ruef, and Schrank, 1993-2017), but participant numbers were too small to report ($N < 10$).

Mean scores on the *Expressive Language* subscale were 87.50 ($SD = 21.30$). Generally speaking, scores on the *Expressive Language* subscale are highly variable in young children, but these averages suggest that in this small sample of 3-year-olds transitioning out of home visiting, language ability is in the low average range of the developmental level expected for children this age.

Children’s math and literacy skills were also assessed at 3 years old in the home using the *Early Academic Skills scale of the Woodcock-Johnson* (Woodcock, 1984). The *Early Academic Skills* measure is made up of tests of letter-word identification (identification of

letters or words and/or other images), number sense (knowledge related to counting, size, etc., e.g., *show me two hands*), and writing (drawing or tracing letters, shapes, and words). Mean scores on the *Early Academic Skills* subscale were 88.92 ($SD = 14.37$), considered in the low average range. Children's scores on the two scales of the *Woodcock-Johnson (ECAD)* were significantly related to each other ($r = 0.67, p = .016$), such that children with higher scores on the *Expressive Language* subscale also scored higher on the *Early Academic Skills* scale.

Academic Achievement in Kindergarten – Grade 3

The Northwest Evaluation Association's *Measures of Academic Progress Growth (NWEA MAP)* was used to examine students' academic achievement. *MAP Growth* is a computer adaptive, multiple-choice norm-referenced assessment that measures student proficiency and growth in the areas of Reading, Mathematics, Language Usage and Science. Schools participating in the Superintendents' Plan administer *MAP Growth* testing three times a year (Fall, Winter, Spring) in K – 3. For evaluation purposes, data obtained from participating schools were used to examine *status* and *status of student growth* for Math and Reading. Status refers to a student's achievement level at a specific point in time (e.g., the end of the school year). Growth refers to how much the student progressed across multiple points in time (e.g., fall to spring). We used achievement scores from spring 2019 to address evaluation of status and an NWEA metric calculated based on fall 2018 and spring 2019 assessments to address students' growth status. Data for nine of the 10 Superintendents' Plan schools were provided for Kindergarten and Grades 1 – 3; one school provided only data for Grade 3. Due to policies related to sharing information about students, Free and Reduced Lunch status (FRL) data were only provided by four schools.

Student Achievement Status

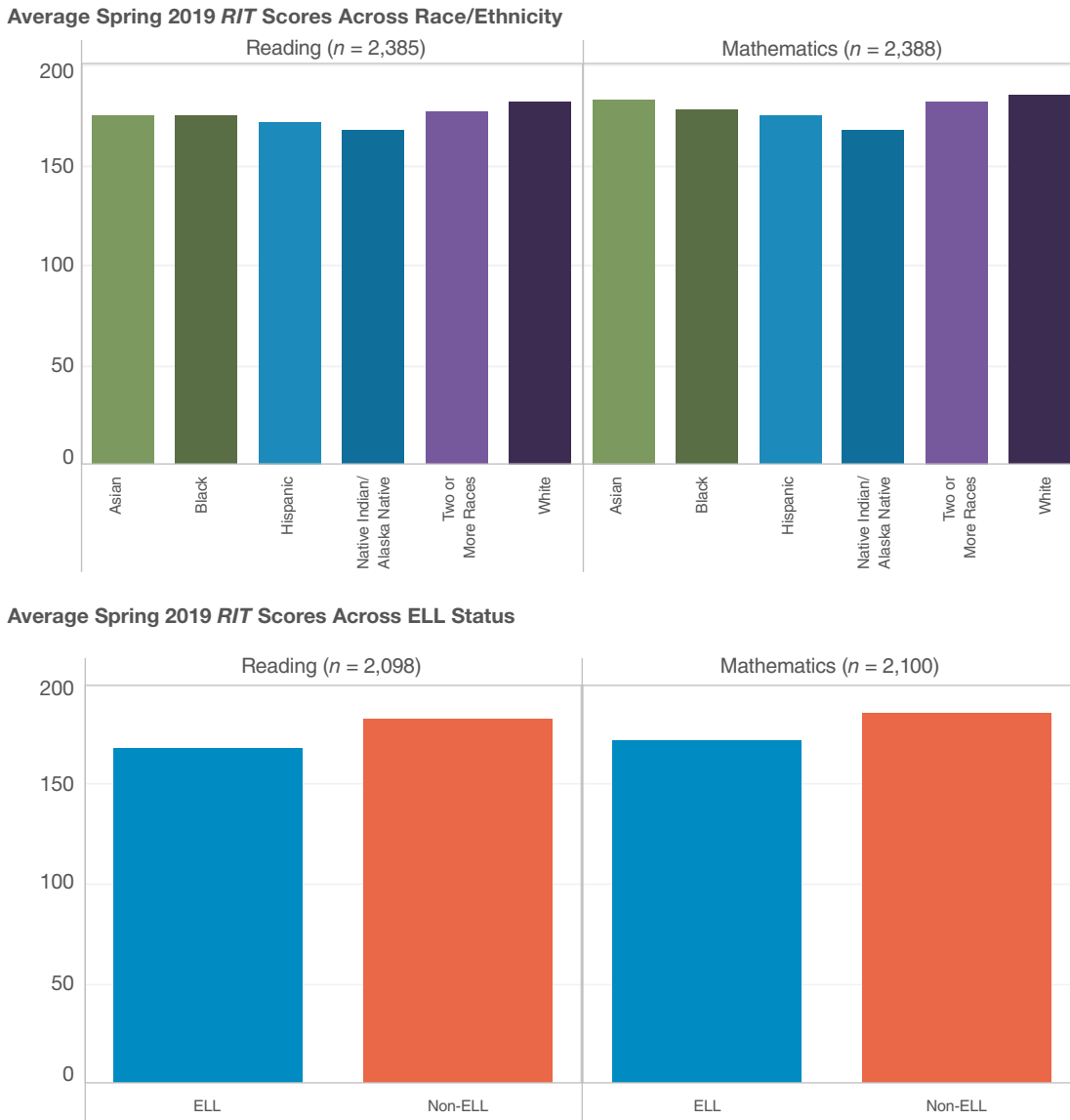
NWEA MAP uses a proprietary *RIT (Rasch Unit)* scale to measure student achievement status. The *RIT* scale is an equal-interval scale which is particularly useful for measuring student achievement in a variety of subject areas as well as tracking student achievement over time (<https://community.nwea.org/docs/DOC-1647>). Spring 2019 *RIT* scores were used to evaluate the status of reading and mathematics achievement of students in Kindergarten through Grade 3. Table 4 summarizes *RIT* Reading and Math scores across Superintendents' Plan schools and grade levels. Compared to the 2015 student status norms developed by NWEA (Thum & Hauser, 2015), aggregate scores were slightly lower for students from Superintendents' Plan schools, across grade level and subject area. Since aggregating scores across the Superintendents' Plan schools masks the number of schools that did meet or exceed student status norms, this information is also included in the Schools column of Table 4.

TABLE 4. | KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 3 SPRING 2019 MAP ACHIEVEMENT STATUS

Grade	READING				MATHEMATICS			
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	Schools Meeting	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	Schools Meeting
Kindergarten	654	153.74	13.74	4	654	154.62	15.69	4
First	600	173.41	14.80	4	599	178.57	15.09	5
Second	538	183.09	15.61	4	538	185.55	13.63	4
Third	658	192.03	17.79	4	661	197.29	15.60	4

Students' reading achievement status and mathematics achievement status were also analyzed by demographic groups. Figure 7 presents the demographic breakdown of spring 2019 mean *RIT* scores across race/ethnicity and English-language learner (ELL) status. The Nebraska Department of Education's Nebraska Student and Staff Record System definition of race/ethnicity was used for the demographic breakdowns (NDE, 2009). A similar pattern appears across reading and mathematics *RIT* scores for each demographic breakdown.

FIGURE 7. | NWEA MAP MEANS: ACHIEVEMENT STATUS



Student Growth Status

The *Conditional Growth Percentile (CGP)* is a percentile rank measure of student growth which indicates the amount of growth a student has made relative to the 2015 NWEA growth norms. (Conditional Growth Index, 2019). For instance, a *CGP* of 50 indicates a student met his or her projected growth exactly. We used the median of the *CGP* to summarize student growth percentiles by our groups of interest. In this instance, a median *CGP* of 50 indicates that half of the students in a group demonstrate growth above 50 and half are below 50. Table 5 provides the median *CGP* of students grouped by grade level for Reading and Mathematics growth from fall 2018 to spring 2019. Consistent with student achievement status findings, student growth status falls below projected

growth (i.e., median *CGP* less than 50) in most grades except for mathematics scores of Kindergarten and first grade students. Also similar to achievement status, a number of schools met or exceeded projected growth within each grade level (See Schools column, which represents the number of schools that meet or exceed projected growth at each grade level).

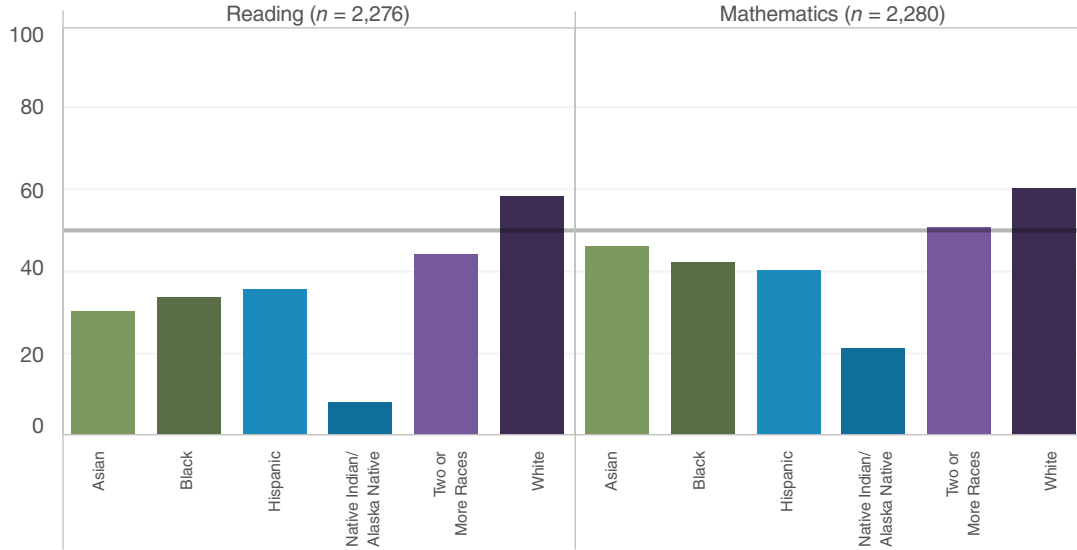
TABLE 5. | KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 3 MAP CONDITIONAL GROWTH PERCENTILES

Grade	READING			MATHEMATICS		
	<i>N</i>	<i>Median</i>	Schools Meeting	<i>N</i>	<i>Median</i>	Schools Meeting
Kindergarten	624	43.00	4	623	58.00	4
First	573	41.00	4	573	51.00	6
Second	511	41.00	3	511	37.00	3
Third	629	41.00	4	633	43.00	4

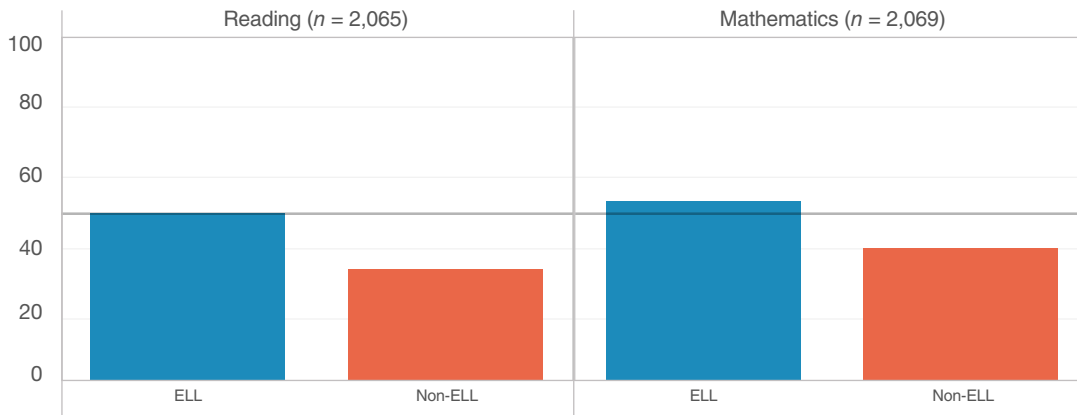
Figure 8 presents the demographic breakdown of fall 2018 to spring 2019 median *CGPs* across race/ethnicity and English-language learner (ELL) status.

FIGURE 8. | NWEA MAP: ACHIEVEMENT GROWTH STATUS

Median Fall to Spring Conditional Growth Percentiles (CGP) Across Race/Ethnicity



Median Fall to Spring CGP Across ELL Status



Social-Emotional and Executive Function Development

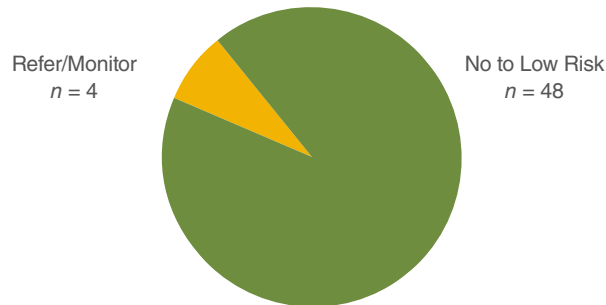
Social-emotional and executive function development in early childhood is strongly associated with children's academic progress through the school years. Learning to express and regulate emotions, develop empathy for others, develop relationships, make responsible decisions, and adapt to challenging situations effectively are key achievements during early childhood (Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018). In the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, children whose families participate in home visiting (birth – 3 years) and personal visits (3 – 5 years) complete regular screening questionnaires on children's social-emotional development. When children turned 3 years old and transitioned out of home visiting services, and again in Kindergarten through third grade, a child assessor from MMI completed a specialized screening for executive function.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: BIRTH – 3 YEARS

A program specialist with the Buffett Institute coached school-based home visitors to support their work with families of children birth to 3 years. Home visitors work with families to increase their understanding of children's social-emotional development, with a focus on enhancing parent-child interaction quality. Using the screening tool, *Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional (ASQ:SE)*; Squires, Bricker, & Twombly, 2002), families answer questions about their young child's expression and regulation of emotions, relationships, and interactions with others, and how the child explores her environment. Home visitors identify children who may need further assessment and/or intervention, and provide resources to families who may want to know how to support their child's social-emotional development. Offered in English and Spanish, parents completed the questionnaire for each child upon enrollment in home visiting and in regular intervals thereafter. The assessment takes about 10 to 15 minutes for parents to complete and is scored by the home visitor. Scores reflect the degree to which the child may be exhibiting delays and provides guidance for action: *No to Low Risk, Monitor, or Refer*.

During the 2018-19 school year, complete data were available for children whose families participated in home visiting in eight of the 10 full implementation schools, for a total of 52 children, aged 2 to 37 months. At the first visit of the school year, 48 children (84.2%) scored in the *No to Low Risk* category, three (5.3%) scored in the *Monitor* range, and one (1.8%) scored in the *Refer* range (see Figure 9). Children enrolled in home visiting were developing typically in terms of their social and emotional development (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9. | CHILD SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT BIRTH – 3 YEARS



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING: 3 YEARS – GRADE 3

In the first eight years, children’s executive function skills develop rapidly and are associated with how well children participate in activities and engage in learning. Executive functions support children’s ability to focus and shift attention, regulate emotions and behaviors, and follow directions. When children have well-developed executive functioning, they exhibit self-control, think creatively, and remember information while using it in thinking or planning. They regulate their behavior and emotions in order to learn well and get along with others. Children’s executive functioning supports cognitive, social, and psychological development, as well as success in school and in life (Diamond, 2014).

Children whose families participated in home visiting were assessed at 3 years of age, using the *Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS)*. In each of the full implementation schools, children in Kindergarten through third grade completed the *MEFS* in the 2018-19 school year. *MEFS* is a global measure of executive functioning for children 2 years through adulthood (Carlson & Zelazo, 2014). It is reported as a single standard score, with an average of 100 ($SD = 15$). The *MEFS* is administered on an iPad by a trained assessor, and takes 5 to 7 minutes to complete. For children in the home visiting program, the *MEFS* was administered at age 3 by an evaluator from the Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI) at the child’s home or elementary school, when the child was transitioning out of home visiting. For children in grades K – 3, a team of six evaluators from MMI spent one to four days at each participating school to conduct the assessments. The assessment was conducted in English or Spanish depending on the students’ preferred academic language. Fourteen 3-year-olds and 2,241 Kindergarten – Grade 3 children completed the *MEFS* in the 2018-19 school year. Means were in the average range across age, with slightly lower scores for 3-year-olds and kindergartners (see Table 6).

TABLE 6. | AGE 3 AND KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 3 MINNESOTA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SCALE

Grade	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age 3	14	90.57	9.71
Kindergarten	592	97.51	11.16
First	568	99.62	10.45
Second	503	99.38	10.05
Third	578	98.77	10.82

Full Implementation Insights: Collaboration in the School as Hub Approach

Small-scale qualitative studies provide an opportunity to examine the processes involved in implementing the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan School as Hub Birth to Grade 3 approach. By considering perspectives of people involved and examining how various systems—schools, families, and communities—are engaged in effecting change, we can learn more about how enhancements to quality, continuity, and equity are being supported. In the 2018-19 school year, Buffett Institute researchers engaged in two studies to investigate (1) how family-school partnerships are developing in full implementation schools, and (2) how the work to build meaningful connections among schools and community-based programs is emerging.

FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

This study spotlights school staff perspectives in working with families. While a family engagement survey captured families' perspectives of school engagement, this interview project allowed a multifaceted examination of school staff perspectives on how families were included in the School as Hub approach. Buffett Early Childhood Institute researchers conducted separate focus group interviews with Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan school staff (principals, home visitors, and family facilitators) in full implementation schools. Interviews were conducted at the Institute in spring 2019. Questions focused on beliefs and practices held by school staff on family-school partnerships.

School Staff Use Many Strategies to Engage Families in the School as Hub System

Principals recognize the importance of building relationships, one family at a time. As school leaders, principals are in a position to create larger cultural shifts in the schools. They contribute to informal and formal school-level policy shifts impacting family-school partnerships, such as elevating family engagement as a strategic planned goal or assembling a welcome packet for families entering the school. All full implementation schools have created welcoming spaces in their buildings for families to assemble. Principals frequently use technology to communicate with families, such as social media platforms, apps, and electronic newsletters. Finally, principals trust their staff for guidance on fostering relationships with families.

Home visitors and family facilitators are heavily invested in family-school engagement work and prioritize cultivating relationships with each birth – Grade 3 family in their school community. They often participate in the regular pattern of daily school activities, like greeting families at drop-off, as well as planning and leading parent-child groups and Kindergarten transition activities. Building on their rapport with families and guided

by the *Growing Great Kids* (GGK; Eliot, Flanagan, Belza, Dew, 2012) curriculum, home visitors and family facilitators conduct home/personal visits to increase parents' skills and knowledge of child development. Schools have come to appreciate that home visitors and family facilitators assume a leadership role in the building. Home visitors and family facilitators support families at school meetings, make connections to community services, and sometimes assist families by translating and/or interpreting. Home visitors and family facilitators support the annual program evaluation by enrolling families, scheduling data collection, recording data, and managing evaluation data.

School Staff Enact Quality, Equity, and Continuity

Home visitors, family facilitators, and principals value each other's roles in supporting children and families through the early education years. School staff appreciate the contributions early education can make to early child development and school readiness. Connecting families with young children into home visiting programs through schools and high-quality community child care or PreK programs can propel children forward, reducing the likelihood of educational disparities. As a result of a focus on early education in the full implementation schools, children and families have more opportunities to become acclimated with their community schools and with educators. Children and families are more likely to transition confidently from these early educational experiences to elementary school.

Family-School Partnership Work Is Valued and Evolving

Partnership work is guided by a perspective that each family must be understood and respected. Approaches to engagement are fluid and flexible. School staff implement sustained opportunities for families to engage with the entire school community. Home visitors and family facilitators are included in the fabric of the school, participate in meetings and assume school leadership positions. Partnerships to build mutually beneficial, respectful relationships with all families will continue to be developed over time through the work of all staff within the school community. These partnerships will promote shared work focused on elevating quality, continuity, and equity in teaching, learning, and family support.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PRESCHOOL/CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

This study documents the early stages of a collaborative initiative between schools and community-based early childhood programs. Research and evaluation staff interviewed an educational facilitator and a program administrator from the Buffett Early Childhood Institute in spring 2019. Topics included the emergence of partnerships, timelines, and the contexts of the participating schools and communities. Additional data sources included meeting agendas and minutes, staff activity logs, and informal interviews with program implementation staff throughout spring 2019.

Connecting Schools With Community Child Care Programs

The idea of connecting schools with community child care providers emerged through collaborative work with community schools in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. Buffett Institute program leadership identified early in the cooperative process that fundamental gaps in the early education pathway existed for children and their families. Starting strong with school-based, voluntary home visiting is a key program component of the School as Hub Birth to Grade 3 approach in Superintendents' Plan schools. Yet children often exit home visiting with limited options to transition to PreK and preschool. This finding among program staff elevated the need to establish the school-community child care provider connections. It became imperative to collaborate to build connections between the elementary schools and existing, "feeder" child care programs in the school community, in order to help build continuity and quality in the education pathway from birth to Kindergarten.

School-Community Child Care Connections Initiative

Buffett program leadership designated two schools, Gomez Heritage (Omaha Public Schools) and Mockingbird (Ralston Public Schools), as pilot schools to advance connections among elementary schools and community child care providers in spring 2018. Both schools had demonstrated interest in building connections with the broader child care community. Gomez Heritage is well integrated in the surrounding community and has developed strong trust with community members. The Ralston district, and specifically Mockingbird Elementary School, had expressed interest in linking the community and school, and had previously hosted two community forums, one in English and one in Spanish.

Buffett program leaders held meetings with the two elementary school principals to share the vision of the pilot project and gain their interest. The principals each identified a child care center that "feeds" into their school and invited the site directors from these child care centers to participate in a discussion to share perspectives about potentially meaningful areas of focus in forming partnerships between each school and community preschool/child care programs. Program leadership also consulted with other community child care stakeholders, including the Learning Community Center of North Omaha.

Buffett Institute educational facilitators working at Gomez Heritage and Mockingbird facilitated the initiative at their respective schools, expanding their role from instructional support within the school to collaboration across education settings to identify and develop relationships with community child care and preschool providers whose programs feed into the schools. Educational facilitators visited child care providers in the community to understand their values, curriculum, strengths, challenges, and needs. To introduce the initiative and get their thoughts and perspective on building connections with community child care centers, educational facilitators also engaged teachers in

discussion. Furthermore, the educational facilitators met with child care stakeholders to discuss the child care landscape and to brainstorm approaches to connect with providers.

School Contexts

Gomez Heritage Elementary School is located in South Omaha and serves 840 students from PreK to fourth grade. The school serves a large bilingual population and offers a dual language immersion program. Gomez Heritage is surrounded by the community where families who attend the school reside and work. Kindergartners at Gomez Heritage transition from child care centers, home-based centers, or their family home in the surrounding community. The school is well integrated into the community and has developed strong community trust, on which the school prides itself.

Mockingbird Elementary School is located in Ralston and serves approximately 400 students from PreK through sixth grade. The school and surrounding community are learning how to best connect with the growing population of Spanish-speaking and refugee families. Kindergartners at Mockingbird Elementary transition from several child care centers throughout Omaha, shifting the initial plan to a focus on building relationships with family child care home programs. The principal and district have expressed interest in building connections between the school, community members, and the community child care providers.

Next Steps for Building Connections

This first year has been a necessary learning process for schools and program leaders, as they find out what can be gained from partnering with community child care providers in meaningful ways. Schools will continue to build capacity within the school by engaging school staff in collaboration and purposeful connections between school and community partners. Drawing in the community perspective and wisdom on early childhood education into these schools will continue to be a top priority as the initiative progresses.

School as Hub Full Implementation Evaluation: Summary and Recommendations

This year's evaluation represents a revision of previous years' evaluations, adjusting to align with program and evaluation shifts, including: (1) an increased focus on program quality and (2) child development and learning with screening in birth – 3 years, developmental assessment at 3 years, and inclusion of the entire PreK – Grade 3 population in full implementation schools for achievement and social-emotional learning.

PROGRAM QUALITY

Home visiting has been an area of intensive effort. It remains a challenging program for schools to deliver, in terms of recruiting families for program and evaluation participation. Several factors created barriers for implementation and evaluation of home visiting and family facilitation. Home visitors and family facilitators struggled to enroll families in the evaluation and had a steep learning curve for using the video technology used for assessments. Observation points were close together in time, limiting opportunity for using feedback for professional learning and coaching. In addition, home visitors and family facilitators did not include all families in the evaluation observations. Working with and enrolling a greater number of families in the evaluation, and improvements in the timing and sharing of observation assessments, will provide home visitors with information and practice needed to develop and grow skills, and increase capacity to influence and detect change over time. Increased district and school staff support to home visitors and family facilitators related to recruiting and consenting families with children birth – 3 years would greatly improve efforts to support and learn from families, and strengthen schools' abilities to engage with families during children's early years. The home visitation program for birth – 3 years is designed to serve 150 children and their families. In practice, 73 families consented to the evaluation; however, only 53 participated in the home visiting evaluation assessments. Schools can support staff and families in recognizing the value of this work; program specialists can collaborate to support schools in these efforts.

Classroom practices related to instructional, organizational, and emotional supports in the classroom climate have improved over the years of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, across all domains. Ongoing instructional coaching related to *emotional support*, *classroom organization*, and *instructional support* practices is an important focus in the full implementation schools. Strengths across areas can be leveraged to support a focus on areas of mid-range quality. For example, instructional quality should remain a programmatic priority because classrooms high in *Instructional Support* can serve as protective mechanisms for children placed at risk for school failure (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Howes et al., 2008). Educational facilitators can continue to provide evidence-based coaching and professional development to support teacher practices related

to instruction, such as higher order questioning and back-and-forth student-teacher exchanges. Similarly, reflecting on national benchmarks may help to raise “regard for student perspectives,” an *Emotional Support* dimension focused on teachers’ attention to their relational practice with students. Finally, to facilitate effective systems change, educators at all levels must recognize the value in the domains assessed. Principals and district instructional staff can prioritize classroom quality and support teachers’ efforts informed by the *CLASS* assessment tool.

FAMILY PROCESSES

Family engagement, as connected to interaction with the home visitor and measured via the *HOVRS*, improved over the course of the school year, reflecting higher quality relationships between home visitors and families. Technology demands for data collection during home visits posed challenges and are being addressed in the 2019-20 program year.

Parent-child interaction, as assessed by the *KIPS* assessment tool, reflected that most parents involved in the home visiting evaluation were interacting with children in ways that supported early learning. Home visitors and family facilitators will continue to build trusting partnerships with families with the aim of supporting parent-child interactions, while increasing efforts to support program evaluation.

Family perceptions of school engagement, as assessed using the *Road Map Family Engagement Survey (FES)*, reflected relatively high family perceptions of engagement with schools. However, the response rate was low. Understanding family beliefs and values regarding education is an ongoing commitment for schools. Collecting and using data to inform school decisions should remain a regular priority. Families should be able to see themselves reflected in these data as schools continue to develop partnerships based on trust. In order to effectively support high-quality school partnerships and family processes, more family perspectives are needed to support school-based staff reflection and processes for engaging with and supporting families, birth – Grade 3.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Development and learning from birth – 3 years were assessed using a screening tool completed by parents. A majority of children enrolled in home visiting and family facilitation were developing typically in all areas. Home visiting supports were in place to help children whose development was at risk. Children will continue to be screened, monitored, and supported using the *ASQ* and *ASQ: SE* in the context of birth – 3 years home visiting and family facilitation.

Development and learning at 3 years of age were assessed for children transitioning out of home visiting. Using a standardized assessment (*MEFS*), children demonstrated

Summary and Recommendations

language and pre-academic skills that were in the low average range. Similarly, children's executive functions were in the low average for 3-year-olds transitioning from home visiting. Program efforts, in particular home visiting, can put an emphasis on supporting parents in their interactions that can increase children's learning and development (cognitive, language, social-emotional, and executive functioning) in the first three years.

Academic achievement in Kindergarten through Grade 3 was assessed using the school-based *MAP* assessments. On average, children's reading and mathematics achievement status was below the expected levels and varied by family and child demographics related to family income, race, and ethnicity. Children's academic achievement will continue to be measured using *MAP* assessments in future evaluation years to examine how system-level changes may be associated with child outcomes. Efforts will continue to work closer with school districts to obtain essential data. Future analyses will compare baseline achievement status and growth across school years to examine how system-level changes might influence child development and learning over time.

Executive functioning in Kindergarten – Grade 3 was evaluated using the *MEFS* assessment. Children's executive functions improved over grades, as expected, and was largely in the average range. Executive functions will continue to be assessed with the *MEFS* at 3 years and again PreK through third grade to help provide learning and insight about how children's executive functions and academic learning progress over time. Efforts to improve young children's opportunities to develop executive functions will be examined, with particular efforts focused on children who may not have equal access to high-quality opportunities for learning. Increasing the number of children and families who have access to home visiting may be one way to address this learning opportunity gap. It will also be important to identify intentional instructional practices that can be integrated into the PreK – Grade 3 curriculum to support children's developing executive function skills.

Implementation studies examined how schools are engaged in the work of connecting with families and communities. Schools are shifting their perspectives related to engaging families from birth and learning what it means to prioritize the work in the landscape of competing priorities. Some full implementation schools are exploring the value of partnering with community-based child care. The evaluation will continue to examine the processes associated with enacting systems change using the School as Hub Birth to Grade 3 approach.

NEXT STEPS FOR SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN FULL IMPLEMENTATION

The current evaluation plan for the full implementation of the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 approach will continue into the 2019-20 program and evaluation year, with an emphasis on employing a systems-based perspective of ongoing program quality, family processes, and child development and learning. By engaging in intensive efforts related to home visiting and personal visits, using observational data with school staff, we anticipate that schools will enhance their connections with children from birth and their families, and experience increased capacity to engage in quality home visiting. We expect that ongoing coaching, supported by observational classroom data, will result in continued classroom quality improvement across all grades. Using multipronged approaches with family partnership (e.g., home visiting, personal visits, family group activities), schools will experience enhanced relationships with all families. By assessing children's learning and development at age 3, we hope to observe a "baseline" that reflects increasing developmental outcomes as a result of home visiting and provides a way to highlight the benefits of early investment related to school achievement. By tracking almost all children in Kindergarten through Grade 3, we hope to demonstrate improvements in learning and development for all children. In order to accomplish this, we will work to access necessary data from all Superintendents' Plan schools, across all time points. We hope to access data regarding Free or Reduced Lunch status (FRL) from all full implementation schools in order to establish how access to opportunities based on family income is associated with children's social-emotional development and academic achievement over time, and how School as Hub can support the learning and development of children from low-income families to address achievement gap disparities.

Customized Assistance to Districts

Customized assistance provides Learning Community school districts with access to state and national consultation as they engage in strategic planning and improvement efforts to affect system-wide early childhood education and services. Districts design and deliver sustained professional learning opportunities for staff, addressing key dimensions of birth – Grade 3 programming. Distinct evaluation plans are employed for each customized assistance plan. Measures are aligned with goals and expected outcomes for the specific plan and with the overall goals of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. The customized assistance plans of Gretna and Ralston Public School Districts are highlighted below.

STRENGTHENING CLASSROOM PRACTICES AND ENVIRONMENTS: GREтна PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Gretna Public Schools' plan focuses on enhancing teacher practices and classroom environments to support students' social and emotional development via coaching. The district uses the *Pyramid Model* to help teachers increase their support of students' social competence while preventing challenging behaviors (Hemmeter, Fox, Snyder, 2013). This plan extends across all elementary school buildings, provides professional development for PreK through third grade educators, and includes support staff such as counselors and resource specialists.

Findings for Teachers

In 2018-19, first, second, and third grade teachers were assessed for fidelity to the *Pyramid Model*. Teachers were observed on 14 indicators of the *Modified Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool*. As of spring 2018, teachers reached 99% proficiency, indicating an exceptional capacity to implement the *Pyramid Model*. Educators remained proficient in their ability to implement the *Pyramid Model* in their classrooms, despite a turnover in raters during the school year.

Findings for Children

For the social developmental domain, Gretna teachers documented student skills using an authentic assessment, the *Work Sampling System (WSS)* (Dichtelmiller, Jablon, Marsden, Meisels, 2013). Using the *WSS*, students demonstrate their competencies in four areas: (1) self-concept, (2) self-control, (3) approaches to learning, and (4) interactions with others. Children identified with social-emotional risks, as compared with their peers, were less likely to demonstrate proficiency in the fall. However, regardless of risk, children show gains throughout the school year, with larger proportions of children at proficiency in the spring.

Next Steps

Gretna district leaders will continue professional development activities to prepare new teachers and sustain veteran teachers' practices to support social-emotional

competence and prevent challenging behaviors. A curriculum committee of teachers and counselors developed standards for social-emotional learning in the early primary grades. The district adopted and field tested social and emotional learning curriculum materials that were endorsed by teachers in 2018-19.

SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES: RALSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Ralston Public Schools focused its professional development on language interactions between PreK educators and students. Targeted training sessions included classroom language practices for new educators and ongoing customized coaching for seasoned educators. Educators participated in professional development and individualized cycles of observation, coaching, and feedback.

Findings for Teachers

Ralston's goals for educators focused on supporting students' transitions through the school day, promotion of social and emotional development through relationships, and fostering awareness of how language influences children's learning. Evaluation efforts focused on how professional development is impacting instructional practices and students' development on targeted learning outcomes. Using the *Ralston Look Fors* tool, a coach observed and evaluated instructional practices related to routines, transitions, relationships, and types of language. Coaches summarized their observations and described educators' progress. Newer educators identified daily transitions as an area of ongoing focus for their coaching and feedback cycles. Veteran educators utilized a variety of transition strategies in their practice, such as verbal reminders, movement games, and songs. District-wide, educators created environments and spaces that reduced behavior issues and facilitated center activity. Notably, Ralston educators were rated highly in the respect and warmth they expressed in interactions with students in their classrooms, including relational affection is found in verbal (gentle tone of voice) and non-verbal behavior (eye contact, facial expression, appropriate touch). Educators employed language with intention, making specific and descriptive comments with students, reintroducing vocabulary, and using open-ended questions to support language development.

Findings for Students

Students' learning outcomes were assessed using *Teaching Strategies GOLD* (Burts et al., 2016). *Teaching Strategies GOLD* Assessment features 38 objectives designed to guide teachers through the assessment cycle, aiding them in linking observable behavior to essential early learning requirements and predicting likely next steps in development and learning. Three student learning objectives were selected from *Teaching Strategies GOLD* that aligned with the professional development goals on language: (1) Listens to and understands increasingly complex language (Objective

8), (2) Uses language to express thoughts and needs (Objective 9), and (3) Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills (Objective 10). Scored on a scale of 1 to 10, Figures 10 – 12 reflect scores for the three learning objectives.

From fall to spring semesters, students progressed into the range of developmentally appropriate language for 4-year-olds in a PreK classroom. Students' language comprehension improved. Language expression showed more variability, such that over 80% of students met or exceeded the objective benchmark by the end of the academic year. Over 90% of PreK students mastered the complex language skill of appropriately using social rules of language in conversation by the spring semester.

Next Steps

District leaders are developing guidelines aligned with the *Ralston Look Fors* and previous professional learning activities to support new Ralston PreK teachers. These new educators will receive additional coaching and support during 2019-20. Collaboration will continue among the PreK teachers and paraprofessionals to sustain implementation of effective practices. The team will also work toward more consistent planning with Kindergarten teachers to support students transitioning to Kindergarten.

FIGURE 10. | PREK GOLD LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION N = 124/133

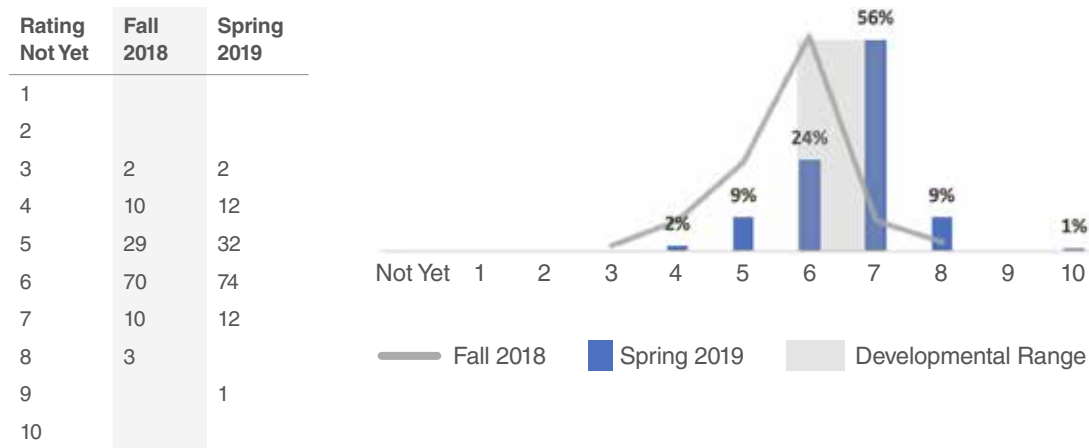


FIGURE 11. | PREK GOLD: “TELLS ABOUT ANOTHER TIME OR PLACE” N = 124/133

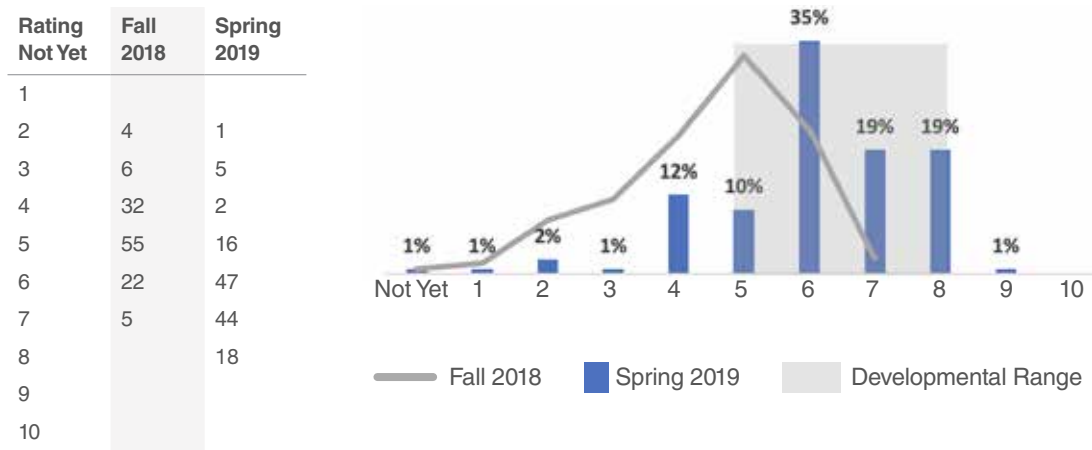
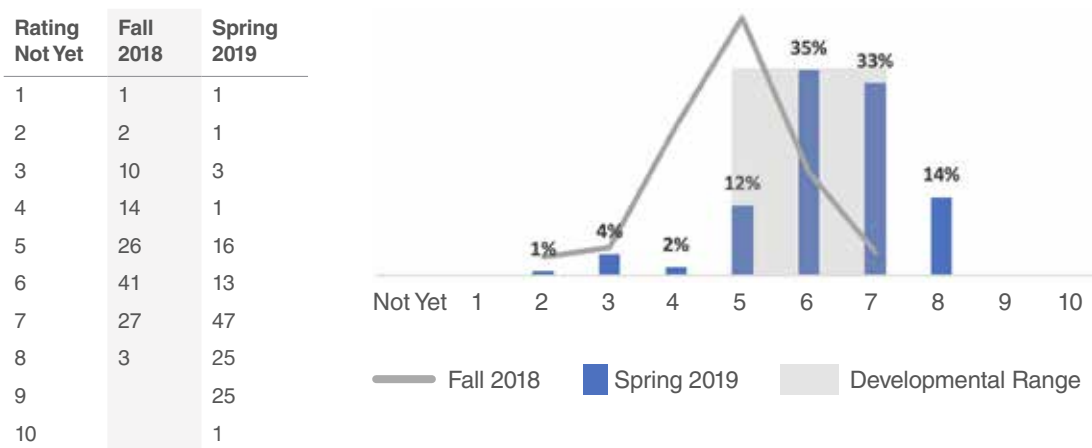


FIGURE 12. | PREK GOLD: “USES SOCIAL RULES OF LANGUAGE” N = 124/133



Professional Development for All

The Superintendents' Plan offers a Professional Development for All (PD for All) series for professionals who work with children from birth through Grade 3 and families in the Omaha metro area. The 2018-19 theme, "Harnessing the Power of Language and Communication to Build Children's Literacy Success," targeted research-based language and communication practices to support children's emerging literacy, classroom community, and social-emotional learning. Three English-language and two Spanish-language (in collaboration with the Learning Community Center of South Omaha) institutes provided professional learning on three topics: (1) High-Utility Practices for Developing Language, Promoting Literacy, and Achieving Equity, (2) The Art of Communication in Classrooms: Helping Children Find, Develop, and Use Their Voices for Learning, and (3) Children as Expressive Artists: Artistic Expression as a Powerful Vehicle for Communication (in collaboration with Joslyn Art Museum). Over 600 professionals registered for the events; 400 attendees participated in the English-language institutes, and 90 attended the Spanish-speaking institutes. Participation in one of the English-language sessions may have been lower than expected in January due to inclement weather.

METHODS

Participants from the first two English-language PD for All institutes ($n = 166$) and the first Spanish-language PD for All institute ($n = 12$) completed a survey (Time 1) of their knowledge and skills related to teaching practices explored through the PD for All series. Time 1 surveys were distributed ahead of the September and January English-language institutes and the December Spanish-language institute, via email, to the registered attendees. Paper surveys were available at the September institute for those who had not yet completed the electronic version. At the conclusion of the 2018-19 PD for All series, English-language attendees who attended two or more PD for All institutes ($n = 89$) and all Spanish-language attendees ($n = 66$) were invited via email to complete an online evaluation survey (Time 2). Reminders were sent out at least once; 29 (22 English- and seven Spanish-language) completed the Time 2 survey.

FINDINGS

Work Setting

Most survey respondents worked in school-based programs ($n = 124$, 65.3%), including elementary schools, PreK within elementary schools, and Head Start or Educare within elementary schools. A quarter of respondents ($n = 48$, 25.3%) were from community-based programs, including child care centers and preschools (not in elementary schools), religious-based programs, and the Omaha Learning Community Centers.

Age Group Served

The majority of the survey respondents worked primarily with preschool-age children (3- and 4-year-olds; $n = 80$, 43%). Sixteen percent worked with children ages birth to 3

years ($n = 30, 16.1\%$), 13.4% worked with children in Kindergarten through Grade 3 ($n = 25$), and a few worked directly with families ($n = 9, 4.8\%$). About a fifth of respondents worked with more than one age group ($n = 41, 22\%$).

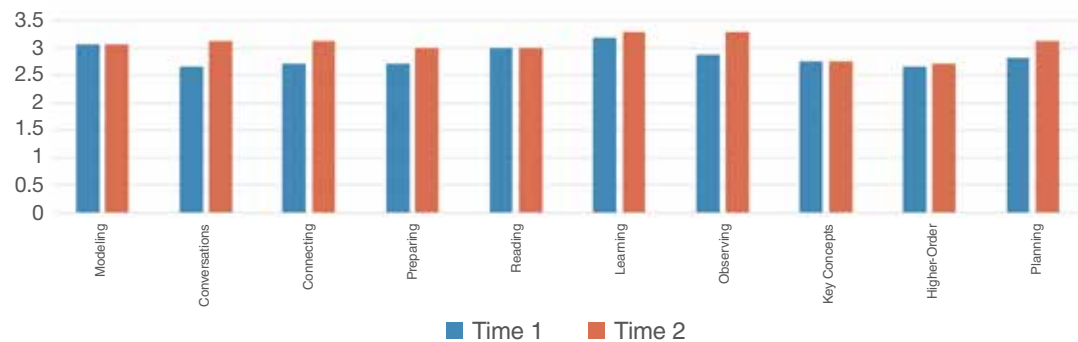
Job Title

Many respondents identified themselves as teachers ($n = 59, 30.7\%$). Other roles included home visitor or family facilitator ($n = 29, 15.1\%$), director ($n = 18, 9.4\%$), assistant teacher/paraeducator ($n = 15, 7.8\%$), and principal/assistant principal ($n = 3, 1.6\%$). Many respondents identified as “other” ($n = 63, 32.8\%$), and included speech language pathologists, coaches, early childhood coordinators and developers, individuals working with special education populations, and higher education professionals.

Do attendees who participate in two or more PD for All institutes report increased knowledge of effective educational practices?

Respondents rated their knowledge of teaching skills and practices, related to the institute topics, on a scale from 1 (starting learning) to 4 (in-depth knowledge). The average reported knowledge across all 10 items for all attendees was 2.79 at Time 1 and 2.99 at Time 2. Figure 13 shows the Time 1 and Time 2 scores for the 17 participants who completed both surveys, with an average of 2.84 for Time 1 and 3.05 for Time 2.

FIGURE 13. | PD FOR ALL: KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHING SKILLS AND PRACTICES



Did attendees who participated in two or more PD for All institutes apply the knowledge and skills that they gained in their professional work?

Twenty-five of 29 (86.21%) respondents indicated that they applied the knowledge, skills, and practices they learned during the PD for All institutes.

Do PD for All attendees share the knowledge and skills they gained with work colleagues?

Twenty-four of 27 (88.89%) respondents indicated they were sharing knowledge and ideas learned from the PD institutes.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Survey response rates were lower than in past years, possibly due to incentives for completion not being offered. It will be good to examine both method and incentives as possibilities for increasing participation in future years of PD for All. The impact of PD for All on building capacity and sustainability for future spread by developing local presenters also needs to be explored further in next year's evaluation. Opportunities for reaching a more diverse workforce audience include considering location of events, continuing to expand Spanish-language institutes, and scheduling. Ongoing evaluation and program improvement will allow PD for All to expand its reach as a resource for evidence-based professional learning for the birth – Grade 3 and early childhood-affiliated workforce in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

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