Why the Early Years of Life Matter

Samuel J. Meisels
Buffett Early Childhood Institute
University of Nebraska

smeisels@nebraska.edu
Preschool Enrollment Reduces the Achievement Gap

(Data from 73 low- and middle-income countries)

Engle, P., Fernald, L., Alderman, H. et al., 2011
Early learning begets later learning

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Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success... Success or failure at this stage lays the foundation for success or failure in school...

James J. Heckman, 2000
Investment in human capital as a function of age

(Rates of Return to an Extra Dollar)

Source: Dr. James Heckman, University of Chicago
The foundations of brain architecture are established early in life
Synapse formation in the developing brain

BIRTH–5 YEARS

- Higher cognitive function
- Receptive language area/speech production
- Seeing/hearing

Source: Charles A. Nelson, From Neurons to Neighborhoods, 2000
Sensitive periods in the acquisition of language

From Johnson & Newport, 1989
Ability to alter learning and behavior decreases with age

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Although the window of opportunity for development remains open for many years, the costs of remediation grow over time.
The engine of change in early childhood

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Relationships

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Impact of relationships on the acquisition of phonetic skills in infancy

Kuhl P K et al. PNAS 2003; 100:9096-9101.
Nurturing relationships and responsive interactions provide the strongest foundation for later learning, behavior, and health.
Why some children don’t thrive

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Interaction of Poverty and Risk Factors (≥ 200% poverty)

- Low-Income Only: 12%
- Low-Income +1 Risk Factor: 34%
- Low-Income +2 Risk Factors: 32%
- Low-Income +3 Risk Factors: 22%

Impact of ACES

[Diagram showing the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) from conception to death, with levels including:
- Early Death
- Disease, Disability, and Social Problems
- Adoption of Health-risk Behaviors
- Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Impairment
- Disrupted Neurodevelopment
- Adverse Childhood Experiences]

Mechanism by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan
Estimated gaps in reading achievement between black and white and high- and low-income students, by birth year

Poverty can shrink a child’s brain beginning at birth
Brains of children from families in the lowest income bracket are up to 6% smaller than those of children from affluent families.

Noble et al. (2015)
Economic disparities can have long-term effects
Family income and the school-readiness gap

Closing the Gap
By Changing Children’s Early Life Experiences

Buffett Early Childhood Institute
Buffett Early Childhood Institute
at the University of Nebraska
Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education

Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Childhood Care and Education in Nebraska
Purpose of Survey

1. Understand Nebraskans’ attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about early childhood care and education.
2. Inform our investment in early care and education.
3. Gather opinions about the state’s support for young children at greatest risk.
Main Report
Takeaways

1. Early care and education is important to Nebraskans.
2. More affordable and available high-quality child care is needed.
3. Nebraskans believe the state should invest more in early care and education.
4. Nebraskans voice strong support for children in greatest need.
Concern for the Future

37% & 40%

OF NEBRASKANS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN
OF NEBRASKANS WITH NO CHILDREN

believe that children's lives will get better 10 years from now.
Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan
Learning Community Of Douglas & Sarpy Counties
The Goal

Increasing opportunity to learn and eliminating income- and race-based achievement gaps by the end of Grade 3
Three Levels of Support

1. Professional Development for all
2. Customized Assistance to selected school district, and community-based organizations
3. Full Implementation (Birth through Grade 3 at 12 school sites)
Achievement Gap Challenge:

Big Ideas
Parent and Family Support
School as Hub

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Developmental Change
Professional Learning and Support
Persistence of Effort Yields Persistence of Effect
The “Ready Child” equation

Ready Families + Ready Communities

+ Ready Services + Ready Schools

= Ready Children
Start early. Start well.