

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the mission of the Buffett Institute?

Our mission is to transform the lives of young children (birth through age 8) by improving their learning and development.

2. What does the Buffett Institute do?

The Institute works with schools, universities and higher education institutions, agencies, community partners, policymakers, and others to implement and support high-quality, evidence-based services, programs, and policies that support vulnerable young children and their families. We work to increase understanding of the needs of young children who are at risk and their families.

3. What is the relationship of the Buffett Institute to the University of Nebraska?

The Buffett Institute is an endowed Institute of the University of Nebraska. The university is the first public university in the nation to focus, in such a profound way, on improving the lives of young children at risk. The Institute partners with faculty on each of the campuses to mobilize university resources on behalf of vulnerable children and their families.

4. How did the Buffett Institute get its start?

The Buffett Institute reflects the shared vision of the University of Nebraska and Susie Buffett, a long-time philanthropist and champion of early childhood care and education. Their goal was to transform early childhood development—especially for children at risk—by leveraging the resources of the University of Nebraska and applying the best of what is known about the science and benefits of early intervention.

5. What are the long-term goals of the Institute?

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute seeks to:

- Enhance the overall development of young children at risk in Nebraska and beyond.
- Improve and evaluate systems of care and education for children birth – Grade 3.
- Select, implement, and monitor evidence-based early interventions.
- Influence development of policies and outreach programs that promote effective services for children and families.

6. Why are early childhood programs important for children at risk?

High-quality early childhood education and care can benefit any child, no matter the socioeconomic status. However, early childhood programs are vital for children who are vulnerable because of poverty, abuse, or developmental delay and other factors. These children face obstacles to learning and development that children from most economically advantaged families do not.

7. Why do the early years matter so much?

During the first years of life, children's brains are growing at a rate never again to be achieved in their lifetime. During the early years, more than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second, and the majority of brain growth occurs in the first five years. This is an extremely critical period of time for human development. More than 150 high-quality scientific studies from all over the world demonstrate that starting early can have major short- and long-term effects on cognition and social-emotional development. The experiences of these early years form the foundation for the people we will become.

8. Why does Nebraska need an institute that focuses on early childhood?

More than 55,000 children age 5 and younger across Nebraska are at risk for failure in school and lifelong struggles. Who these children are and what happens to them during the critically important early years matters to all of us. Investments in their future will strengthen Nebraska. High-quality early education and care has been linked to children's progress in school, increased earnings, and ability to build relationships, as well as reductions in special education placements, anti-social behavior, welfare participation, and even trouble with the law.

By working together to apply what the evidence tells us, we can make a difference for children, families, and Nebraska. It's the right thing to do.

9. How will the Buffett Institute improve early childhood practices in Nebraska?

With a major endowment, proven leadership, and the support of the state's only research university, the Buffett Institute is positioned to help lead the effort to improve early childhood practices in Nebraska. We will work collaboratively with partners to:

- Develop a shared vision for early intervention.
- Provide a common approach that can be used to improve early learning and developmental outcomes.
- Communicate and translate research findings and general knowledge about child development to parents, providers, policymakers, and the public.

10. What are the Institute's signature programs and why have you selected them as your initial focus?

Our goal is to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby. In order to begin to accomplish this, we have selected two signature programs that shape our efforts to improve the lives of children in our communities. These programs were designed to address critical needs for children at risk, as well as the educators and caregivers who work with them.

Through the *Closing the Opportunity Gap* program, we aspire to reduce or eliminate opportunity gaps, with a focus on children growing up in poverty or other conditions of high stress and familial challenge. The first initiative of this statewide program is the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, which was launched in the Omaha area in fall 2014. Over time, we will use what we learn to inform our work in other communities throughout the state and nation.

This effort is closely linked to our second signature program. *Elevating the Early Childhood Workforce* seeks to ensure the presence of a skilled workforce in all early care and education settings. It confronts such critical issues as professional preparation and qualifications, workforce compensation, funding, and sustained public will and commitment. Our goal is to help early care and education become recognized as a priority profession whose work is essential to the social and economic well-being of children, families, and communities.

11. How will the Buffett Institute make Nebraska the “best place to be a baby”?

For babies to thrive and reach their potential, they need nurturing relationships and safe environments. They need continuous, responsive interactions with loving families and well-trained caregivers and teachers. They need access to high-quality early childhood programs that take a “whole child” approach to early learning and development and support young children’s physical health, social-emotional growth, self-regulation, language, literacy, and cognitive development.

These needs will guide us as we work to create unprecedented opportunities for parents, practitioners, community members, and policymakers to come together with researchers and others to advance a unified approach to research, education, outreach, and policy on behalf of vulnerable young children and their families and the individuals and systems that support them in Nebraska, the U.S., and beyond.