



Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Strategic Master Plan

2014 - 2019

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I. Executive Summary

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute is a four-campus, university-wide, multidisciplinary, education, outreach, and policy institute of the University of Nebraska. Committed to applied research, its goal is to transform early childhood development and education for at-risk children, birth – age 8, and their families in Nebraska and across the nation.

The Buffett Institute represents a new model of how public higher education can be engaged with children and families in the first years of life. It builds on the land grant and metropolitan college philosophy and experience of the university campuses and combines basic and applied research, training, policy development, and outreach to all corners of the state—urban, rural, and suburban. In order to achieve its goal, the Institute will create a remarkable and unprecedented opportunity for scholars, practitioners, community members, and policy makers to come together 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.

This document presents a strategic master plan for the inaugural five years of the Buffett Institute’s functioning. It is a product of more than six months’ deliberation by a broad-based strategic planning commission composed of stakeholders from throughout the university system and the state. It also reflects the observations of the Institute’s national Board of Advisors.

The plan begins with a brief rationale for the rapidly accelerating interest of researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and the general public in the first eight years of life. Next, we provide a definition of “children in need,” describe the status of at-risk children in Nebraska, and give a brief picture of services available to vulnerable young children and families in the state. Following this is a description of the Institute’s formation and a statement of its principles, as well as a presentation of its vision, mission, values, and major audiences. The next section presents the five major strategies that reflect the Buffett Institute’s mission and vision, as well as a number of tactics that illustrate these strategies. The concluding section addresses the Institute’s potential impact, recognizing that ours is an adaptive process that will undergo change over time based on experience. Three appendixes provide an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relevant to the Institute achieving its goals, and lists of the membership of the strategic planning commission and the national board of advisors.

II. Why the Early Years Matter

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute was created in response to evidence about the efficacy of early intervention accumulated over the past 50 years, evidence that assures us that the early years of life are the most critical years of all for building intellect, strengthening social and emotional skills, and setting a positive trajectory for school and life success. Highlights of this research suggest the following:

Investing in early childhood makes sense. We have learned that investments in young children—especially children at-risk and children with special needs—can have a significant return on human capital expenditure—a return of at least \$7 for every dollar invested¹.

Early childhood not only makes sense—it’s the first step in a lifelong process that can lead children to mastery and achievement. We know from James Heckman, the Nobel laureate in economics at the University of Chicago, that “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”²—and in life.

The human brain is self-correcting and thrives on new experiences that lead to mastery of new learning. Developmental psychologists inform us that “The young mind is astonishingly active and self-organizing, creating new knowledge from everyday experiences.”³ Because of their dramatic pace of learning and development, it’s almost impossible to be a pessimist when you work with babies.

For children at risk—children living in poverty—early childhood programs are nothing less than a lifeline. One of the reasons for this, as we know from the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child at Harvard, is that in the first few years of life, 700 new neural connections are formed every second. Neural connections are formed through the interaction of genes and a baby’s environment and experiences. These are the connections that build brain architecture – the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior, and health depend.

It’s more efficient, both biologically and economically, to get things right the first time than to try to fix them later. We’ve learned that brains, skills, and health are built over time, but starting early is what counts⁶. Neuroscientists tell us that the window of opportunity for development remains open for many years, but the costs of remediation grow with increasing age⁷.

Positive relationships and meaningful adult-child interactions are essential for later learning, behavior, and health. For children to achieve their full genetic and neurological growth, they need nurturing relationships and responsive interactions with adults⁸. Babies can’t do it alone. They need committed parents and well-trained caregivers to connect the resources of the world to their interests and aptitudes. This is how their potential is realized and their future growth ensured.

It’s only when all of these elements are in place that we can feel confident about raising happy and successful children. We know that if children are to enter school ready to learn, it’s critical that every element of the developmental context be ready for them: the family and community in which children live, the schools children attend, and the services that support healthy growth and development⁹.

Early childhood is an area of greatly expanding interest. The knowledge base about early intervention continues to expand. We can point to more than 150 high-quality, scientific studies from all over the world that demonstrate that starting early can have major short- and long-term effects on cognition and social-emotional development, as well as on school progress, earnings,

reduction in antisocial behavior, lowered welfare participation, and even reduction in trouble with the law¹⁰.

The evidence about the impact of positive early experiences is clear. Research on children in more than 70 different countries demonstrates that preschool enrollment can reduce the school achievement gap between poor and more affluent children. For every percentage point increase in preschool enrollment, the achievement gap between high and low income children declines¹¹. In other words, **as more and more students participate in early childhood programs, our society—our world—grows and prospers¹².**

III. Defining “Children in Need”

The primary emphasis and commitment of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, shall be with children who are:

- birth – age 8,
- living in poverty and at-risk for developmental problems,
- growing up in conditions of high stress and significant familial challenge, and/or
- at risk for or identified with developmental delays.

Nebraska’s At-Risk Children and Families¹³

According to the 2010 census, approximately 40%, or 59,825, of all children birth through age 5 in Nebraska meet the Nebraska Department of Education’s general at risk criteria of being low income, second language learners, having adolescent parents, or being born prematurely¹⁴. Although the proportion of Nebraska’s youngest children who are subject to these risk factors is high, the growth in the number of at-risk children over the past ten years is especially alarming. This increase is not specifically an urban phenomenon, although the majority of Nebraska’s youngest at-risk children are concentrated in the state’s major metropolitan centers¹⁵. A comparison of at-risk statistics derived from 2000 and 2010 census data suggests that the at-risk population of young children has grown faster in rural counties than urban centers¹⁶. The eleven Nebraska counties demonstrating the greatest proportional growth (15% - >28%) in young children at risk exclusively represented the rural, agricultural regions of the state where the infrastructure to support high quality early learning opportunities is least well developed. These regions, so critical to Nebraska’s agricultural economy, are among those with the lowest capacity to effectively sustain increased burdens on local educational systems, criminal justice costs, and reductions in available rural workforce.

Moreover, statewide high school dropout data correspond significantly to these concentrations of young at-risk children. Fourteen Nebraska school districts contain 70% of the state’s high school dropouts¹⁷. These districts are located in only eleven counties and they account for nearly two-thirds of the state’s at-risk birth-through-five population¹⁸. Since early childhood education opportunities are known to impact graduation, grade retention, and special education placements, these counties in particular, as well as Nebraska as a whole, stand to benefit from strong early childhood systems.

As a matter of context, the proportion of Nebraska parents of young children in the workforce consistently ranks in the top five in the nation and among the top five states for the highest proportion of employed mothers with children younger than age 5¹⁹. This is both a marker of economic necessity and an indicator of the magnitude of need for out of home care for young children in the state.

IV. Services to Vulnerable Young Children in Nebraska

Nebraska's youngest, at-risk children are currently served through programs provided by a variety of federal, state, local, or private funding sources. Nebraska's federally-funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide comprehensive child development, health, nutrition, parent education, and support services to approximately 6,600 children and their families through 21 programs statewide. A single migrant seasonal Head Start program serves an additional 65 children. Three American Indian Head Start programs located within Nebraska's geographic boundaries serve 285 preschool aged children each year. These programs are complemented by other federally-funded services including those provided through Part B and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). Other federal support goes to services provided by statewide home visitation programs (N-MIECHV) and state funds support Omaha-metro nurse home visitation programs.

The Nebraska Department of Education reports that a total of 17,163 children, aged birth - 8, received special education services through their school districts in 2012-2013. In addition, in 2012, 163 of Nebraska's 249 public school districts offered early childhood preschool programs to 10,382 three- and four-year-olds. Of these, 142 districts received either a preschool grant or state aid for their four-year-olds. Current data from 2013 show that an additional 30 school districts (totaling 193) offer Nebraska Department of Education-approved preschool programs. Supplementing these programs is Nebraska's Sixpence initiative, which serves approximately 600 infants and toddlers in school districts throughout the state. Sixpence programs, which are designed for at-risk birth – 3 year olds, are supported by grants made directly to school districts representing multiple local partners. The grants derive from a combination of public and private dollars leveraged through the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment.

Combined state and private funds also support the growing network of Educare centers in Nebraska. Two Educare sites in Omaha and one in Lincoln currently serve a total of 523 children. A fourth location in Winnebago will open later this year with capacity to enroll an additional 191 children.

In addition to the school-based/school-affiliated programs described above, Nebraska's at-risk children are served through 3,994 licensed child care providers statewide. These providers account for 28,610 children (birth - age 12) receiving services through the federal- and state-funded Nebraska Child Care Subsidy. Although such programs as Head Start, Educare, and other school-based programs are expected to meet quality criteria, providers who receive Child Care Subsidy funds have historically not been held to any such standards. With the introduction of a new Quality Rating Improvement System in 2013, Nebraska is now beginning to put mechanisms in place that will more effectively monitor the quality of state-subsidized child care.

In short, Nebraska is a low population state with concentrated pockets of children at risk and relatively few services targeted towards this population. Although the concentration of risk makes it possible to more easily identify and prioritize gaps in the state so that better and more innovative solutions can be implemented, the small number of services for at-risk young children and families represents a concern. Taken together, Nebraska's low population density and limited services suggest that the state can ill afford to sacrifice any of its youngest children by failing to provide the kinds of experiences and environments that form the basis for lifelong success. This is an issue of considerable urgency. As a largely rural state Nebraska must ensure that the quality of its future workforce can respond to the needs and expectations of the modern economy in the years ahead. Caring for all of our children is a critical step for achieving this goal.

V. Institute's Formation and Principles

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute came into being over a roughly three-year period beginning in 2010. In that year the president of the University of Nebraska, J. B. Milliken, asked Omaha philanthropist Susan A. Buffett to consider endowing a major statewide initiative in the area of early childhood development. Through her Sherwood Foundation and the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Susie Buffett had already established herself over the past decade as one of the nation's leading visionaries regarding services to young children at risk. One of her successes was support and development of the Educare Learning Network, a group of innovative early care and education model centers distributed across the U.S. Three Educare centers are currently operational in Nebraska with another about to open in 2014. There are more than 20 such programs located all across the country.

The university and the Buffett Early Childhood Fund agreed that they would establish a generous endowment to support a path breaking early childhood institute and attract a leader of national reputation. Intended to be multi-disciplinary, cross-campus, and to bring together researchers, practitioners, parents, policy-makers, and the general public, a distinguished panel of Nebraska faculty developed an initial plan for the institute. From this plan, and from the early deliberations between the Buffett Fund and the university, a set of principles for the future institute can be derived.

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute will:

- A. Attend to the first eight years of life, with particular attention to children at risk;
- B. Focus on transitions from birth (or prenatally) to preschool (0 – 3) and from preschool through elementary school (age 3 – Grade 3) in order to create continuous systems of care;
- C. Be known for research to practice *and* practice to research and for using evidence to guide interventions;
- D. Leverage relationships with local practitioners, knowledge-based institutions, funders, and the private sector to accelerate and "scale up" impact, disseminate knowledge widely beyond the state, influence policy, and build effective systems of care;
- E. Maximize use of the multidisciplinary resources of the four campus NU system to improve practice and engage others in making commitments to changing the life course of young children;

- F. Improve the quality, quantity, and preparation of teachers and other professionals in the state; and
- G. Create an unprecedented and innovative culture that will generate new ideas and practices about early care and education policy and practice, will emphasize translation and communication of research findings, and help us learn how to bring promising innovations to scale.

VI. Vision, Mission, and Values

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute’s vision, mission, and values are intended to reflect the needs of the state, the desires of its founders, knowledge about young children at-risk, and the resources and experience of the University. They are:

A. Vision

Nebraska will become the best place in the nation to be a baby.

B. Mission

The mission of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute is to transform the lives of young, at-risk children by improving their learning and development. The Institute makes use of the interdisciplinary resources and research of the four University of Nebraska campuses and works with schools, agencies, community partners, and policy makers to implement and support high-quality, evidence-based services, programs, and policies for young children and their families.

C. Values

The following values serve as a framework for the Institute’s actions and decisions and provide direction for its future operations.

Value	Definition
Excellence	Providing strong leadership in research, practice, and policy based on research evidence, developmentally informed practice, and child and family needs.
Innovation	Using, discovering, and disseminating new ideas and perspectives; leveraging new and existing knowledge; applying and translating knowledge and skills acquired from research and practice.

Responsiveness and Responsibility	Demonstrating integrity and responsibility for programs and actions by listening and responding to children, families, their communities and other stakeholder needs. Documenting, reporting and evaluating impact and outcomes.
Collaboration and Coherence	Creating productive alliances and partnerships among practitioners, researchers, and policy makers across disciplines, campuses, auspices, and geographic regions; establishing functional, comprehensive, continuous and sustainable services and systems to support children, families, and caregivers; overcoming isolation and incoherence through collective service planning and implementation.
Inclusiveness and Engagement	Incorporating multiple perspectives, cultures, communities, disciplines, and approaches; ensuring respect for all participants—parents, children, and professionals—through awareness, understanding, and appreciation of diversity; reducing the hazards of social inequality by strengthening support for children, families, communities, and the relationships among them.

VII. Audiences

Highest Priority

Children and their families; communities with high proportions of children and families living in poverty; caregivers, teachers, and other child and family practitioners; legislators and policy makers; the University of Nebraska

Schools, Colleges, and Universities

Local and state education agencies throughout NE; local and state school boards and stakeholders in NE; students, faculty, researchers, and staff on all four NU campuses

Business

Business leadership, chambers of commerce, economic development officials

Policy Makers

Elected officials, state legislators, state agency and program directors

Funding Sources

Local, regional, and national foundations; private philanthropists; local, state, and federal agencies

Media

Local, state, and national press; social media; broadcast journalists; other communications outlets

Geographic

Entire state of Nebraska, U.S., global

VIII. Strategies, Tactics, and Illustrations

The following constitutes the Buffett Early Childhood Institute's initial strategic master plan for 2014 – 2019. To create the tasks and purposes described in this plan and establish a set of strategic goals, the leadership of the Institute consulted with a wide range of experts from the university and the state, the Buffett Institute's strategic planning commission and national board of advisors, representatives of public schools and private and public agencies, and individuals active in philanthropic organizations.

The **strategies** highlight the essential roles the Institute will play in transforming early childhood care, education, and practice in Nebraska and in the nation and beyond. They are intended to clarify the nature of the Institute as an evolving organization that spans four campuses and a wide range of interests regarding young vulnerable children and their families. The numbered **tactics** that accompany the strategies are meant only to be suggestive. Many of them will be implemented over the course of the next five years, but not all of them will come into being. Other tactics not considered at this time may take their place or a smaller number of tactics with very high impact may dominate the Institute's activities. As a totally new organization, it will take some time before all of this is clarified. One factor that will influence which activities will be attempted concerns funding, as all programs of the Institute are dependent on securing adequate public and private financial support. **Examples** are intended to be illustrative of how the tactics might be implemented.

A. Convening. *The Buffett Institute will **convene** stakeholders from the NU system, public policy making arenas, public and private education, child health, mental health, families of young children, and Nebraska's early care and education community.*

1. The Buffett Institute will sponsor (alone and with others) seminars, lectures, workshops, and other formal and informal local, statewide, and national gatherings to describe, make accessible, and disseminate research and best practices concerning the first eight years of life.
2. The Buffett Institute will leverage its impact by creating a variety of annual or more frequent events that will bring together practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and other stakeholders committed to making Nebraska a leading voice in the care and education of young children in Nebraska and in the nation.

Example: Nebraska Symposium on Early Intervention. The Buffett Institute will sponsor an annual or bi-annual themed symposium, with associated annual publications, downloads, and podcasts, that will bring together practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and other stakeholders from the state and nation committed to issues in the lives of young children and families at risk.

3. The Buffett Institute will sponsor state and national legislative seminars, workshops, and policy briefings regarding young children at-risk and their families.

4. The Buffett Institute will create a shared vision about the importance of the first eight years of life by encouraging interdisciplinary and intercampus interaction.

Example: Institute cross-campus activities. The Buffett Institute will sponsor events that reach beyond the faculties of early education and child development (e.g., involving law, architecture, sociology, urban planning, nursing, kinesiology, public health, pediatrics, among others); initiate regular updates about its work across all four campuses; and use innovative and multi-media vehicles of communication including podcasts, downloads, public television, and so forth.

B. Bridging. *The Buffett Institute will **bridge** the issues, concerns, and problems that place the potential of young children and their families at risk by making available and accessible research-based, developmentally meaningful resources and knowledge already existing in the NU system that can help address these concerns.*

1. The Buffett Institute will conduct an inventory of early childhood interests and resources in the Nebraska system.

Example: Early Childhood Directory. The Institute will prepare and widely distribute an electronic directory or compendium of services, research, and other activities taking place on the four NU campuses that identifies faculty, staff, and programs with an interest in and commitment to the first eight years of life.

2. The Buffett Institute will work with practitioners and community stakeholders to identify critical issues and problems—for example, scarcity of programs for 0 – 3 year olds, inadequate knowledge of math pedagogy by early childhood teachers, or unresolved mental health issues facing families living in poverty—and will help match these defined needs to university capabilities, resources, and talents.

Example: Early Childhood STEM Initiative. The Institute will work with the NU faculties in science, math, technology, engineering, and education to adapt and improve the pedagogy in these areas for children in preschool – Grade 3.

3. The Buffet Institute will assist in gathering detailed survey data from the public, parents, caregivers, and schools.

Example: Gallup Survey. A statewide survey, will be conducted to obtain information from the public and other key audiences served by the Institute, including parents of young children about their perceptions of services and needs, accessibility and affordability, and rationale for early childhood care and education.

4. Buffett Institute staff will highlight gaps in research, overlooked areas of practice, and issues that do not lend themselves to ready solutions in order to elicit interest in them, develop modes of addressing them, and explore how to deliver information to diverse audiences beyond the university.

C. Partnering. *The Buffett Institute will actively partner with local and state agencies, mental health providers, school districts, and others to implement and evaluate meaningful interventions that are responsive to child, family, and community needs and resources.*

1. As practitioners, researchers, other stakeholders, and the Institute identify existing practices (from Nebraska and beyond) that hold promise for helping families, assisting teachers and caregivers, and enhancing children’s well-being, the Institute will collaborate with communities and agencies to implement and evaluate these practices and bring them to scale. It will also use knowledge from the emergent field of implementation science to study how evidence-based practices and programs are translated to different contexts in the field.
2. The Institute will work with others to create partnerships that fill gaps and respond to specific areas of concern in early care and education. Such concerns may include any of the following issues and others still to be identified:

- a. Reducing the achievement gap;

Example: Nebraska Early Childhood Achievement Gap Challenge. The Buffett Institute will collaborate with programs and agencies to reduce the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children by initiating intensive intervention in the years from birth to age 3.

- b. Enhancing the skills of early childhood teachers working with English Language Learners;

Example: Improving the Educational Outcomes of Young English Language Learners. The Institute will work with colleges of education and professional development providers to improve the skills and pedagogical knowledge of teachers who work with children in the first 8 years of life whose first language is other than English.

- c. Developing Pre-K – Grade 3 alignments and working with K – 12 principals and administrators to help them understand the importance of early intervention;

Example: Pre-K – Grade 3 Early Childhood Units in NE Public Schools. The Institute will assist school districts by helping teachers, administrators, and the public learn about the value, outcomes, and methodologies that follow from implementing aligned curriculum and instruction between ages 3 and 8.

- d. Offering home-based resources to parents of at-risk infants in order to prevent child abuse and neglect;

Example: Fussy Baby Network. In conjunction with public health resources, the Institute will provide assistance to families whose infants cry inconsolably and have eating and sleeping problems that can lead to parent - child relationship disorders.

3. The Buffett Institute will use the university Extension system and other means of distance technology and education to connect with a statewide audience of parents and providers;
 - a. Providing mental health consultation to rural early childhood programs;
 - b. Strengthening the productive use of technology by parents and providers in the first eight years of life.
4. The Buffett Institute will integrate new and existing Educare programs into the activities of the Institute;
5. The Buffett Institute will improve the overall pedagogical skills of teachers, caregivers, and home care and other service providers.

Example: Workforce Development Project. The Institute will collaborate with NU's Colleges of Education and with local school districts as well as community colleges to augment professional preparation programs, explore articulation agreements among community colleges and NU, develop engaging distance learning strategies, and highlight and sponsor effective training programs.

D. Innovating. *The Buffett Institute will **innovate** and create potential solutions to issues and problems confronting Nebraska's young at-risk children and families in collaboration with others.*

1. The Institute will leverage the intellectual resources of the NU system by encouraging the creation of new solutions to longstanding problems and will participate in testing them or engaging in further research with colleagues throughout the state and nation.

Example: Buffett Early Childhood Institute Fellows Program. The Buffett Institute will select and support a small number of faculty, and doctoral and post-doctoral students from a variety of NU schools, colleges, and campuses who can devote a portion of their time to working on and initiating BECI projects. Such fellowships will be time-limited but renewable.

2. The Institute will create an environment for large-scale deliberation about complex problems concerning early intervention and issues regarding services to at-risk children and their families in the first eight years of life.

Example: The Nebraska Early Childhood Collaboratorium. The Buffett Institute will create an environment for large scale deliberation about complex problems

concerning early intervention (a “collaboratorium”) that will be centrally located on one of the NU campuses, will make extensive use of electronic means of communication, and will seek to engage scholars and practitioners from within the state and across the nation.

3. The Institute will use such technologies as Pinterest and other collaborative methods for feedback about and occasional review of ideas and written communications and for creation of time-limited technical assistance groups.

E. Communicating. *The Buffett Institute will **communicate** information about the Institute and its work to the broader community of parents, providers, policy makers, researchers, and the general public and will actively engage in social marketing efforts to inform and support positive social change for young, at-risk children and their families.*

1. The Institute will design a communications strategy that will broaden the public’s interest in the first eight years of life, adopt a common language for talking about the issues and problems of young at-risk children and their families, and create a group of allies and supporters who will strengthen future efforts in this arena.
2. The Institute will integrate strategic communication strategies into the broader initiatives of the Institute so as to enable their success and help to position the Institute as a leading state and national player in the field of early childhood education.
3. The Institute will use public awareness and social marketing campaigns to create a climate that will encourage collective impact and that helps enable and support parents, families and providers in improving outcomes for at-risk children.

Example: *Helping Parents Help Their Children.* Multi-media and multi-language campaigns that popularize the specific steps that parents and family members can take to help ensure their children’s success in school and life, and that is relevant and accessible for the diverse populations of at-risk children in Nebraska.

4. The Institute will undertake public education initiatives that help policy makers better understand the issues that are at stake for at-risk children and the benefits of investing in early childhood education.

Example: *The Buffett Early Childhood Institute’s Public Interest Initiative.* The Institute will use targeted and focused strategic communications efforts to assist policy makers and others in ensuring and understanding that local, state, and national public policies are research-based, child and family-oriented, and likely to promote developmentally meaningful services for young children and their families.

5. The Institute will assemble research findings into easily understandable reports of best practices, success stories, and “best bets” and will tailor these reports to different audiences.

Example: Disseminating Educare Success Factors. The Institute will investigate success factors of the state’s Educare programs and of children and families who thrive in the face of adversity in order to better understand the elements of high quality programming and child well-being.

6. The Institute will explore new applications of technology (text messages, social media, etc.) to provide information to families, policy makers, and other audiences that do not typically search for or use research findings regarding young children.

Example: Program for Using Technology in Early Childhood. The Buffett Institute will strengthen the use of technology by parents and providers in the first eight years of life and will enhance the use of widely accessible technologies (text messages, social media, etc.) to provide information to families, caregivers, policy makers, and other audiences focused on young children at risk.

IX. Long-Term Outcomes: How We Will Recognize Success

Over the coming months and years the staff and faculty of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, in collaboration with stakeholders, advisors, community members, and others will select from among the rich variety of tactics and examples described here those that have sufficient resources and significant potential for achieving the following four long-term outcomes:

- A. Enhancing the overall development of young at-risk children in Nebraska by strengthening the capacity and improving the skills of parents, caregivers, teachers, and others who interact with young children;
- B. Assisting vulnerable young children and their families by strengthening and improving systems of care and the policies that govern them;
- C. Using evidence-based interventions to leverage the extensive capacities of the University of Nebraska system, scale up these interventions, and inform a broad set of audiences about their value and importance; and
- D. Influencing the creation of policies that will support families, improve young children’s functioning, and increase the availability of developmentally-informed services for vulnerable young children in the state of Nebraska, in the U.S., and beyond.

The achievement of each of these outcomes will be carefully documented and evaluated. Among the metrics we will use to evaluate our efforts are the following:

- Improvement of reading scores by the end of third grade;
- Increased numbers of children entering kindergarten prepared for academic success;
- Enhanced number of children and families participating in home-visitation programs;
- Expansion of prenatal care;

- Amount of time spent by parents reading to their children;
- Growth in measured vocabulary of three year olds;
- Expanded curriculum options for K – Grade 3 children, in particular, English language learners;
- Higher quality preparation for teachers of birth – age 5 children;
- More qualified personnel available to work with young, at-risk children;
- Greater alignment of curriculum for preschool through the early elementary grades;
- Greater engagement of University of Nebraska faculty and staff with children and families of young children at risk;
- Increased public understanding of the importance of early childhood issues;
- Expansion of state resources devoted to the first eight years of life;
- Reduction of the achievement gap.

Information of this kind will represent critical markers of the Institute’s progress over the first five years of its existence. We are committed to monitoring our work, studying our implementations, and charting our progress. Future goals and successive strategic plans will be built on the experience we amass, the data we collect, and the commitment to accountability we demonstrate.

Ours will be an adaptive process. Although our goals may not change significantly, the means of achieving them will almost certainly undergo modification, reflecting altered conditions, new resources, and the growth in our knowledge concerning young at-risk children and their families. We look forward to using this knowledge to make an impact on the lives of children in Nebraska, the U.S., and beyond.

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- ¹⁴Nebraska Office of Labor Market Information, 2012.

¹⁵U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder. Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3). *Age by ratio of income in 1999 to poverty level.* and U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. *Age by ratio of income to poverty level in the past 12 months.*

¹⁶First Five Nebraska calculation based on U.S. Census data. For data methodology, visit <http://firstfivenebraska.org/why-it-matters-to-nebraska/content/children-at-risk-age-0-to-5-by-legislative-district/>.

¹⁷http://nde.ne.gov/ndepress/2012/NE_High_School_Graduation_Rate_4th_in_Nation.pdf

¹⁸U.S. Census 2010, Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2011 Progress Report. Accessed at <http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us/PublicDoc/Ccpe/Reports/progressReport/2011.pdf>.

¹⁹U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder. Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3). *Age by ratio of income in 1999 to poverty level.* and U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. *Age by ratio of income to poverty level in the past 12 months.*

Appendix I

Environmental Scan: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Direct Services	<p>-Positive statewide programming examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sixpence</i> dedicated 0 – 3 funding source with probable expansions • ELL programs in Lincoln • Educare Centers • <i>Helping Babies from the Bench</i> <p>-Full day kindergarten -<i>Building Bright Futures</i></p>	<p>-Emergent QRIS System</p> <p>-Shortage of quality EC care and education programs/resources, especially in rural areas</p> <p>-Low standards for child care: bottom tier</p> <p>-Inadequate services: Family support Mental health Wraparound Quality child care, including family child care</p> <p>-Current services are remedial and reactive</p>	<p>-Business community interest in early childhood</p> <p>-Expanded family involvement</p> <p>-Cross agency work in state (DHHS, NDE, higher education)</p> <p>-Beginnings of data system</p>	<p>-Lack of service coordination</p> <p>- Lost services in greater NE due to privatization</p> <p>-Inadequate state funding</p> <p>-Inequitable access to quality environment and experiences</p> <p>-Rural/urban disparity</p>
Early Childhood Care and Education	<p>-Increased funding for early childhood education leading to partnership and access</p> <p>-Strong school and university collaboration models</p> <p>-Good models of public/private partnerships and improvements</p>	<p>-Lack of adequate workforce to meet need/demand</p> <p>-Lack of training to serve diverse populations</p> <p>-Limited training in infant/toddler, early childhood services</p>	<p>-Override of veto on prenatal care for mothers</p> <p>-New child care regulations</p> <p>-Providers’ willingness to learn</p> <p>-Heightened visibility for early childhood education</p>	<p>-Inequitable distribution of resources for populations at risk and increasing competition for those resources</p> <p>-Large number of young children with</p>

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase in service to 3 – 4 year olds by public schools -Better Prepared workforce of EC staff/teachers and coaches: pre-service and in-service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of clarity and consensus on definition of “at-risk” -Geographic differences and disparities in educational and health care opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Funders committed to making investments in 0 - 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> multiple caregivers -Lack of understanding about the importance of excellent care for all children -Needs are diverse and pervasive -High risk populations are diverse (maybe more diverse than elsewhere) and masked by statistics
Political Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Legislature attentive to child welfare system -Change in Medicaid policy for mental health services -QRIS criteria developed and legislation introduced -Record number of positive early childhood bills in legislature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Balance of state to federal tips more to federal in Nebraska -Limited state contributions -Sustainability of funding for early childhood services Undocumented -ted families cannot get services (some improvement but risk continues) -Anti-immigration mind set 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unicameral is slightly less politically divided than some -NU system: land grant, metropolitan, rural, medical center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of political will to enhance early care and education -Political environment is divisive Sequestration -Loss of Head Start, child care, and Title I funding -Era of uncertainty about refunding from Federal government

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Societal Issues			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Heightened awareness and interest in ECE throughout nation -President's Agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increasing numbers of mental health and behavioral challenges, e.g., autism, behavioral disorders -Minority health and educational disparities: race, ELL, poverty, family composition -Increasing numbers of ELL children -Food insecurity and insufficiency -Accelerating depopulation of rural areas leading to access consolidation -Increasing number of children living in poverty -Disparity in economics, achievements, health in all communities is growing -

Appendix II

University of Nebraska Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Membership of the Strategic Planning Commission 2013-14

Name	Title
Tonia Durden	Assistant Professor, Department of Child, Youth, & Family Studies, UNL
Nancy Edick	Dean, College of Education, UNO
Tracy Edgerton	Associate Vice President, Strategic Philanthropy, University of Nebraska Foundation
Carolyn Edwards	Professor, Department of Psychology, UNL
Sarah Edwards	Professor and Chair, Department of Teacher Education, UNO
Ayman El-Mohandes	Dean, College of Public Health, UNMC
Rosa Gofin	Professor, Department of Health Promotion, Social & Behavioral Health, UNMC
Gladys Haynes	Director, NE Early Learning Initiatives, Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Melody Hobson	Administrator, Office of Early Childhood, NDE
Barb Jackson	Associate Professor, Department of Education & Child Development, UNMC
ReNae Kehrberg	Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and Learning, Omaha Public Schools
Eleanor Kirkland	Head Start Early Childhood Systems Director, NE Head Start-State Collaboration Office, Nebraska Department of Education
Marjorie Kostelnik	Dean, College of Education & Human Sciences, UNL
Sarah Ann Kotchian	Director of Early Childhood Policy and Public Relations, Building Bright Futures
Lillie Larsen	Member, Nebraska State Board of Education
Michael Leibowitz	Director, Munroe-Meyer Institute, UNMC

Name	Title
Brian Maher	Superintendent, Kearney Public Schools
Chris Marvin	Associate Professor, Department of Special Education & Communication Disorders, UNL
Max McFarland	Professor, Department of Counseling & School Psychology, UNK
Gay McTate	Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Family Enrichment, Ltd.
Dawn Mollenkopf	Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education, UNK
Sue Obermiller	Vice President, NE Head Start Association; Early Childhood Programs Director, Central Nebraska Community Services
Thomas Pristow	Director, Division of Children & Family Services, NE Department of Health and Human Services
Helen Raikes	Professor, Department of Child, Youth & Family Studies, UNL
Jessie Rasmussen	President, Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Ed Scantling	Dean, College of Education, UNK
Susan Sheridan	Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, UNL
John Sparks	Stokes-Shackleford Professor and Chair, Department of Pediatrics, UNMC
Jane Stavem	Associate Superintendent for Instruction, Lincoln Public Schools
Ted Stilwill	CEO, Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties
Fawn Taylor	Executive Director, Early Childhood Services, Omaha
Becky Veak	Director, First Five Nebraska
Brian Wilcox	Professor, Department of Psychology, UNL
Debora Wisneski	Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education, UNO

Appendix III

**University of Nebraska
Buffett Early Childhood Institute**

Membership of the National Board of Advisors

Name	Title
Hiram Fitzgerald, Ph.D.	Associate Provost, University Outreach and Engagement, Michigan State University
Vivian Gadsden, Ed.D.	William T. Carter Professor of Child Development and Education, University of Pennsylvania
Eugene Garcia, Ph.D.	Professor of Education Emeritus, Arizona State University
Beth Graue, Ph.D.	Sorenson Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin, Madison
Lynn Kagan, Ed.D.	Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Early Childhood and Family Policy, Teachers College, Columbia University
Tammy Mann, Ph.D.	President and Chief Executive Officer, The Campagna Center
Jessie Rasmussen	President, Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Arnold Sameroff, Ph.D.	Professor of Human Development and Distinguished Research Scientist Emeritus, University of Michigan
Ross Thompson, Ph.D.	Distinguished Professor of Psychology, University of California, Davis
Kathy Thornburg, Ph.D.	Emerita Professor of Education, University of Missouri, Columbia
David Willis, M.D., FAAP	Division Director, Health Resources and Services Administration, HHS (Federal liaison to the BECI Board of Advisors)