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**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY DR. SAMUEL J. MEISELS
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**Education Committee Hearing – Nebraska Legislature
February 26, 2018**

RE: LB1033

Chairman Groene and Honorable Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Samuel Meisels. I am the founding executive director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today in opposition to LB1033, legislation proposed by Senator Murante that would result in eliminating the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. I am testifying today in my professional capacity as Buffett Institute director, and my testimony does not represent the official position of the University of Nebraska.

Independent evaluations demonstrate that the Learning Community’s programs and initiatives are effective. One prominent example is the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan, developed in 2014 by the superintendents of the Learning Community school districts in partnership with the Buffett Institute. This initiative is the nation’s largest, most comprehensive approach to reducing income- and race-based achievement gaps for children from birth through Grade 3.

Created with funding authority granted by the Legislature, the Superintendents’ Plan demonstrates what the Learning Community is meant to be. Eleven school districts that share geographic boundaries but vary in size, urbanicity, and demography have come together around the idea of supporting the learning and development of young children growing up in poverty. Decades of research demonstrate that early intervention can level the playing field for children placed in circumstances of risk and can change their life chances and trajectory.

The Superintendents’ Plan offers three options for school district participation. First, the Professional Development for All educational series provides free professional learning opportunities to all educators and child care providers who work with young children in the Omaha area. The events attract approximately 1,000 participants each year and are held on weekends as well as weekdays so as to be accessible to school district and community child care providers as well as others. Sessions are offered in Spanish and English.

Second, eight school districts receive intensive customized assistance and consultation tailored to specific district early childhood needs.

Start early. Start well.

Third, 12 schools representing six school districts are implementing a comprehensive approach for working with children from birth through third grade. Known as "School as Hub for Birth Through Grade 3," this effort involves more than 3,500 children and 500 educators. The underlying premise is that schools can serve as hubs that connect vulnerable young children and families to education and services throughout the first eight years of life. The birth through Grade 3 continuum includes voluntary home visiting for children birth to age 3, high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, and aligned Kindergarten – Grade 3 curriculum, instruction, and assessment for 5- through 8-year-olds. Family engagement is emphasized throughout.

Most recently, the Buffett Institute released a report evaluating the second year of the Superintendents' Plan. The report shows important progress being made by children, schools, and leadership. A link to the report is included in my written testimony. I am attaching to the testimony a front-page story and editorial from last week's *Omaha World Herald* that summarizes the report's findings and highlights the program's impact.

Key to our progress is cross-district collaboration and networking, which have proven important and effective in generating innovation, expertise, and consolidated support for sustainable educational improvements. The Superintendents' Plan has a synergistic impact as school districts and programs learn from and build upon each other's successes. Such a collaborative, focused effort would be impossible without the funding, organization, and unifying structure of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

Thank you for your past support of young children and the Learning Community and for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today.

Note: "Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation: 2016-17" can be viewed online at <http://bit.ly/2on8qgH>.