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BUFFETT INSTITUTE RELEASES REPORT ON ITS FIRST FIVE YEARS

Closing the Achievement Gap Remains Key Focus

Omaha, Neb. — The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska today released a report detailing progress and key accomplishments during its first five years. Efforts to close the achievement gap and to strengthen the early childhood workforce constitute critical areas of work during the Institute's life.

The Buffett Institute began operations in June 2013 and set itself on a fast trajectory under the leadership of Samuel J. Meisels, who serves as the Institute's founding executive director and is a nationally recognized leader in the field of early education. Shaped by the shared vision of the University of Nebraska and philanthropist Susie Buffett, the Institute focuses on early childhood development and education, especially for children in greatest need.

When the Institute got underway, approximately 40 percent of Nebraska's children from birth through age 5—in both urban and rural areas—were considered at risk for failing in school.

The Institute set out to change that statistic and the lives of young children, birth through Grade 3. Working on all four campuses of the University of Nebraska and in the areas of research, practice, policy, and outreach, Meisels and his leadership team established two signature programs: the Achievement Gap Challenge and the Early Childhood Workforce Development Program.

"From the moment I came to Nebraska, I had one big idea: to make Nebraska the best state in the nation to be a baby," said Meisels. "At the five-year mark, we are well on our way to meeting our goals and are deeply grateful for the partnership and collaboration of so many in Nebraska committed to improving the lives of young children and their families and the communities in which they live. We are also incredibly proud to be part of the University of Nebraska, whose unique commitment to early childhood development is unrivaled in America today."

Highlights of the Institute's work during its first five years include:

- **Understanding Nebraska's Needs and Views** – In 2016, the Institute partnered with Gallup to conduct the largest public opinion poll ever of Nebraska citizens concerning their attitudes about early care and education. It also commissioned an extensive study of more than 1,600 members of the Nebraska early childhood workforce. Key findings from the survey with Gallup show that the vast majority of Nebraskans support early childhood education. More than two-thirds of Nebraskans said that early care and education has a significant impact on the long-term success of children. Yet very few Nebraskans believe that high-quality care and education is available or affordable for all families in the state.

- **Launching the Largest Birth to Grade 3 Demonstration Project in the Nation** – In partnership with the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, the Institute works with 11 Omaha-area school superintendents and districts in the largest birth through third grade demonstration project in the country to reduce achievement gaps. The Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan began in 2014 and includes the participation of more than 15,000 children. Early evidence suggests promising results. An evaluation of the program in 2016-17 showed that there are 13 percent more PreK and 16 percent more Kindergarten-first grade students within the average range or higher on academic achievement, 14 percent fewer students in the lowest 20th percentile on academic achievement, and a 20 percent gain in instructional support among K-3 teachers in participating schools.

The Institute has also worked in western Nebraska with the Panhandle Partnership for Health and Human Services and Educational Services Unit 13 to map the region’s early childhood resources, needs, and capacity. A summary report will be released in spring 2019.

- **Focusing on the Early Childhood Education Workforce** – Based on research and a comprehensive blueprint for systems-level reform, the Institute in 2017 convened a statewide commission to develop an action plan for addressing critical challenges facing the early care and education workforce. Composed of 39 leaders from the public and private sectors, the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission is addressing issues that have long confounded the early childhood field, higher education, and policymakers: low wages, a shortage of qualified child care providers and educators, and the need for a sustained public commitment to strengthening early care and education in the state. The commission will release its recommendations and statewide action plan in late 2019.
- **Building Consensus and Collaboration** – Acknowledging that no single entity can close the achievement gap alone, the Institute has conducted and published research studies and hosted dozens of conferences and meetings, professional development sessions, and presentations across the state. The Institute has collaborated with hundreds of public and private educators, policymakers, community leaders, leaders in the field of early care and education, colleagues within the University of Nebraska, and families—all with a commitment to research and putting that research into action.

“The Buffett Early Childhood Institute is an integral part of the University of Nebraska and represents our commitment to ensuring that all children have the same opportunity to develop, learn, and thrive,” said Hank Bounds, president of the University of Nebraska. “The Institute is creating a new model for how public higher education can be engaged in the lives of young children. This is an audacious challenge and a brilliant opportunity, and I am proud of what has been accomplished in such a short time.”

In releasing the report, Meisels added that the Institute’s work has just begun. “We have set the course for this extraordinary institute through the partnerships we are forming, the work we are doing, and the knowledge we are developing. What we have started in Nebraska has relevance for every other state in the nation.”

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska promotes the development of children from birth through age 8. Our vision is to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby. Visit www.buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu to learn more and read the Institute’s five-year report.

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