

NEWS RELEASE

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NEW REPORT SHOWS THAT SCHOOLS IN SUPERINTENDENTS' PLAN IMPROVING CLASSROOM QUALITY AND ENHANCING CAPACITY TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

More Metro PreK – Grade 3 Students Included in 2018-19 Evaluation

Omaha, Neb. — The largest, most comprehensive birth – Grade 3 demonstration program in the nation is making positive gains in schools that serve hundreds of children in metro Omaha. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska today released the findings of the *2018-19 Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation*.

The Superintendents' Plan completed its fourth year of full implementation and evaluation across six school districts in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties in 2018-19. The evaluation showed an increased focus on program quality and child development and learning with screening in birth – 3 years, developmental assessment at 3 years, and inclusion of nearly all PreK – Grade 3 children in full implementation schools. This revised approach allowed for the inclusion of more than 2,200 children in 153 metro classrooms.

“The ability to study the learning and development of a large population of PreK – Grade 3 children in the Superintendents' Plan schools will advance understanding of how growing family partnerships from birth and enhanced classroom instruction can support our efforts to reduce disparities in children's opportunities and achievement,” said Kate Gallagher, director of research and evaluation at the Buffett Institute.

At the heart of the work are efforts by principals and school staff to better engage and partner with families to produce better outcomes for children. In the 2018-19 school year, Buffett Institute researchers also engaged in two small evaluation studies to investigate (1) how family-school partnerships are developing, and (2) how the work to build meaningful connections among school and community-based programs is emerging.

Participating school districts are Bellevue, DC West, Millard, Omaha, Ralston, and Westside. Across the districts 94 families received voluntary home visits and 2,241 children in Kindergarten through Grade 3 participated in the evaluation. The Gretna and Ralston school districts participated in customized assistance projects in 2018-19 to advance their district-wide early education services and programs, while 490 early childhood professionals participated in professional development institutes through the Superintendents' Plan.

Findings from the 2018-19 evaluation report include:

- Classroom quality has increased significantly over the course of four years.
- Home visiting has been an area of intensive effort; increasing staff support will impact even more children.
- Family partnerships are increasing as schools continue to shift their perspectives related to engaging families from birth.
- Implementation insights show principals recognize the importance of building relationships one family at a time and family-school partnership work is valued and evolving.

“I just received a holiday card from the mother of one of our students, and she included a photo of a sonogram to share the good news that she is expecting another baby. I called the mom to congratulate her and to offer our home visiting services. We have already begun to work with our future student prenatally,” said Tyler Hottovy, principal of Westbrook Elementary. “Among other successes, the Superintendents’ Plan has helped our school build even stronger relationships with our families, and it’s a two-way street. We see more engagement with families at school, and that has a powerful outcome: students who have a parent and school partnership working to support them.”

The work of shifting school systems is complex and labor intensive. With the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan in its fifth year, program and school staff are continuing to learn how to identify essential elements of school systems change and are focusing on implementing more strategically each year. The goal over time is to see decreases in achievement disparities.

The evaluation was conducted jointly by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools, and the Interdisciplinary Center for Program Evaluation of the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. Evaluation activities were supported by the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Lozier Foundation, and the Weitz Family Foundation.

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The Superintendents’ Plan was created in response to 2013 state legislation directing metro Omaha area superintendents to enact an early childhood plan for young children living in high concentrations of poverty. The plan was developed by the Buffett Institute in partnership with the 11 school districts of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, which provides funding. The Buffett Institute continues to facilitate implementation of the plan.

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska promotes the development and learning of children from birth through age 8. Our vision is to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby. Visit buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu for more information.