

SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN

Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska

OVERVIEW

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan is designed to eliminate or reduce income-based social, cognitive, and achievement gaps among young, at-risk children living in the 11 school districts of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. Development of the plan was mandated in 2013 by LB 585 of the Nebraska Legislature and focuses on services for young children living in areas with a high concentration of poverty. The plan is funded through the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

Developed by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska in collaboration with the district superintendents and a workgroup appointed by them, this initiative proposes intensive, continuous, evidence-based services for young children who are most at risk in their communities. To accomplish this, we are establishing, implementing, and evaluating a set of interlocking programs and supports across the first eight years of life designed to improve the social/emotional and cognitive outcomes of young, at-risk children living in the Learning Community. We will use the information we acquire to adapt and refine the approach implemented as part of this plan so it can eventually be taken to scale.

Our focus is on three areas of programming:

- Home visiting for birth – age 3
- Intensive preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds
- Aligned preschool through Grade 3 for ages 3 – 9

Through the plan, elementary schools serve as hubs or connectors for early childhood services in school attendance areas. Family engagement and support is emphasized, as are children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Professional development and technical assistance are integral to this work, as are strong ties to community-based organizations. Implementation began gradually with a detailed planning and start-up period throughout 2014-15. All plan components were launched in summer 2015 and implementation has continued over the next two years (2015-16 and 2016-17).

We intend to enhance, deepen, and more fully integrate implementation of the programs described below during the plan renewal period, 2017-18 through 2020-21. Findings from the comprehensive program evaluation currently underway will guide ongoing plan implementation and refinement.

BACKGROUND

LB 585 was signed into law on May 8, 2013. This legislation directs the Learning Community Coordinating Council to enact a plan developed by the Metro Omaha superintendents "to establish early childhood education programs for children in poverty." The plan is financed by a new half-cent levy, resulting in annual funding of approximately \$2.5 million to be used for this purpose. The superintendents from the 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy Counties invited the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska to prepare a plan for their review and, after approval by the Learning Community Council, to facilitate the plan's implementation. The plan was adopted

unanimously by the 11 superintendents in June 2014 and approved by the Learning Community Council in August 2014 for initial implementation during the period from September 2014 through August 2017.

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute is a four-campus, university-wide, research, training, outreach, and policy institute of the University of Nebraska. Its purpose is to help transform early childhood development and education for at-risk and vulnerable children, birth to Grade 3, in Nebraska and across the nation.

This document describes how funds generated by the new levy are applied to implement the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. The plan begins to put in place one of the Institute's two signature programs, the Achievement Gap Challenge, and it also reflects the Institute's second major initiative, the Early Childhood Workforce Development program. The Buffett Institute is committed to these programs statewide. Over the course of the next several years, the Institute will adapt these programs to meet local resources and needs, collect data on implementation and effectiveness, and share its experience with educators, policymakers, and researchers in Nebraska and beyond.

GOAL

To create a comprehensive program within the Learning Community designed to eliminate or reduce income-based social, cognitive, and achievement gaps among young children at risk.

STRATEGY

Using the resources and expertise of the 11 metro Omaha school districts, community-based organizations in those districts, and the staff and faculty of the University of Nebraska and the Buffett Institute, we will collaborate to implement a comprehensive birth through age 8 approach to early intervention for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and Kindergarten – Grade 3 children. Our principal target will be children living in poverty and those growing up under conditions of high stress and significant familial challenge.

Our intention is to create comprehensive systems of early education and support to increase opportunities to learn and eliminate income-based achievement gaps for children most at risk for school failure by the end of third grade. We draw upon national, evidence-based programs in order to promote a birth through Grade 3 approach, rather than a one-size-fits-all model. The districts and schools engaged in plan implementation represent different community contexts with differing child and family demographics. The specific details of plan implementation are therefore tailored to fit local needs, strengths, and resources.

We will evaluate whether all elements of the plan are being implemented with fidelity, collect outcome data about the programs we are involved with, and engage in efforts to encourage state and local policies and public and private resources that can provide sustained support for this initiative. Our intention is to have a long-term impact on children's achievement by leveraging, improving, and increasing new and existing resources in schools, families, and community-based organizations.

ASSUMPTIONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The assumptions and guiding principles that shape the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan reflect what research tells us about young children's development and learning. The program of work undertaken through the plan revolves around six evidence-based ideas.

1. **Birth Through Grade 3:** Although intervention at any point during the first eight years of life is helpful for children placed at risk, research teaches us that we must go beyond a single year of preschool, or even birth – age 3 or birth – age 5 programs, for the benefits of intervention to endure. The foundations for building children’s brain architecture, language and skill acquisition, and relationships with others are established early but take time to reach their full potential. If we can maintain continuity through the end of third grade, children are more likely to achieve lasting success in school and beyond.
2. **School as Hub:** At the core of the plan is the idea that schools can serve as the “hub” for complex learning systems, connecting children and families to resources within and beyond school walls. Schools have the potential to span conventional silos, overcome traditional barriers, and become connectors across communities and different age groupings. They can help families navigate and access early education services and community resources and become a source of long-term continuity for children and families.
3. **Developmental Change:** We are committed to helping children negotiate the ongoing biological, neurological, psychological, and social pathways of development, through which they evolve from a newborn infant to a competent and confident third-grader. Sustained learning doesn’t occur in isolated fragments. Only when skills and emerging capabilities are followed up, supported, and extended is it likely that new skills and new capacities will be acquired and become reliably present over time.
4. **Parent and Family Support:** Parents and families are key to children’s success and our most powerful allies in supporting and enhancing their children’s strengths and abilities. But families know too well the personal stress and toxicity that can accompany poverty and social inequality. Whether in-home visiting, preschool, or K – Grade 3, active family engagement and support are central to our work and to children’s growth.
5. **Professional Growth and Support:** Enhancing the skills of teachers, caregivers, and those supervising and directing them is crucial. Educators equipped with research-based knowledge about children’s development and early learning can maximize effectiveness of educational experiences for children with diverse learning needs. When the ability of caregivers, teachers, and administrators to translate development research into practice is enhanced, children thrive.
6. **Persistence:** Evidence assures us that the earlier we begin working with children and families placed at risk, and the more persistent, consistent, and well-designed our efforts are, the more likely it is that children will be launched on a path toward life success. It’s a long-term commitment, and one that can lead to a lifetime of accomplishment and fulfillment. Persistence of effort yields persistence of effect.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan is guided by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and implemented in full partnership with the 11 school districts that comprise the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The plan is intended to be a work in process. It describes how new options and opportunities for young children at risk and their families can be created in the Learning Community and it articulates a set of assumptions, aspirations, and specific means for improving the school achievement of children growing up amidst poverty. Below we describe the basic parameters of the plan.

Who We Work With

- We envision the school as the hub or connector for birth – Grade 3 efforts.
- We collaborate with existing early childhood programs in the Learning Community districts.
- We support the creation of programs if they are not in existence and the need is high. These programs are “owned” and managed by Local Education Agencies (LEAs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and others. The Buffett Institute does not “own” or manage programs directly.
- We work with programs that are willing to make a long-term commitment to improving practice.

What We Do

- We focus on three areas of intervention and educational programming: home visiting for birth – age 3; intensive preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds; and aligned curriculum and instructional practice for preschool – Grade 3.
- We promote continuous family support and engagement, preschool – Grade 3, building upon the family partnerships that are established in the birth – age 3 period.
- Our programs take into account the needs of dual language learners and non-English-speaking families.
- We are committed to creating programs that respond to the interests and desires of differing cultural and community contexts and build upon cultural and community strengths.
- In addition to cognitive skills, we emphasize non-cognitive or social-emotional skills such as confidence, curiosity, intentionality, self-control, and capacity to communicate.
- Language development and enrichment is central to our curriculum planning, especially in the early years.
- We monitor and evaluate program outcomes and implement valid, formative child assessment programs (birth – Grade 3) based on teacher observation, recording, and evaluation.

How We Do It

- We reaffirm that strengths-based family support and engagement are essential for success and must be a prominent feature throughout all areas of programming across the birth – Grade 3 continuum.
- We actively encourage the adoption of developmentally informed practices that focus on both cognitive growth and social-emotional advance.
- We support and improve programs by providing professional learning opportunities, technical assistance, and coaching to teachers, caregivers, principals, and administrators.
- We encourage the use of evidence-based curricula, current research, high-quality intensive support for teachers and caregivers, thoughtful outreach to families, and careful documentation of effort. We have begun implementation gradually and will move to scale over time.
- We establish partnership agreements identifying the roles and responsibilities of schools, community partners, and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute in carrying out work within the scope of the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan.

How We Identify Schools and Partners

Working within the framework of LB 585, which calls for establishing “early childhood programs for children in poverty,” we consult with the Learning Community superintendents and their representatives to establish how the birth through Grade 3 approach to programming is applied within their respective districts. We are well aware that although there are high concentrations of poverty in specific Learning Community LEAs, poverty exists across the region. Our goal is to implement a plan that is relevant for a wide range of communities and child and family needs and that makes schools more

equitable for young children placed at risk. In so doing, the plan will elevate the quality and effectiveness of early education for all children.

Our overall criteria for school and community participation are as follows:

- Children living in high concentrations of poverty, as described by LB 585.
- Intentional focus on reducing opportunity and achievement gaps.
- Commitment to the birth – Grade 3 continuum.
- Key educational leaders, principals, and staff demonstrate a long-term commitment to the program’s goals and strategies.
- Willingness to devote time and other resources required for planning and implementation (e.g., active leadership participation, time for professional learning, collaborative cross-grade level program planning, assessment, and progress monitoring).
- Support for ongoing program evaluation activities.
- Participation in efforts to leverage resources and develop means for sustaining program processes and outcomes.

How We Include Professional Development and Customized Assistance

Professional development (PD) is concerned with assisting teachers, caregivers, and other providers—as well as principals, district level administrators, and community-based program administrators—in enhancing their knowledge and skills so that they can perform their roles in promoting early childhood learning and development more effectively. PD is offered in response to needs assessments and is personalized to participants’ requirements and prior experience.

A Professional Development for All series is offered to all members of the Learning Community who serve young children, birth through Grade 3, and their families. Topics focus on research-based strategies to advance early childhood teaching, learning, and family-school-community connections in ways that reduce income-based opportunity gaps and achievement gaps.

The PD for All professional learning series will be progressively enhanced, extended, and targeted to meet the needs and interests of diverse professionals with varying roles and responsibilities. These extensions will include follow-up support for PD for All participants as they work to translate new knowledge into practice. Collaboration with other professional development providers will be pursued as a means of contributing to a stronger, more cohesive professional learning system for the early childhood workforce.

Leadership, including that provided by principals, district administrators, and community-based program administrators, is pivotal in cultivating and sustaining a comprehensive birth through Grade 3 approach. Professional learning opportunities will be provided to address the needs and interests of administrators and other leaders across the Learning Community as they seek to implement elements of the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan. This will include an extension of the PD for All Series designed specifically for program leaders.

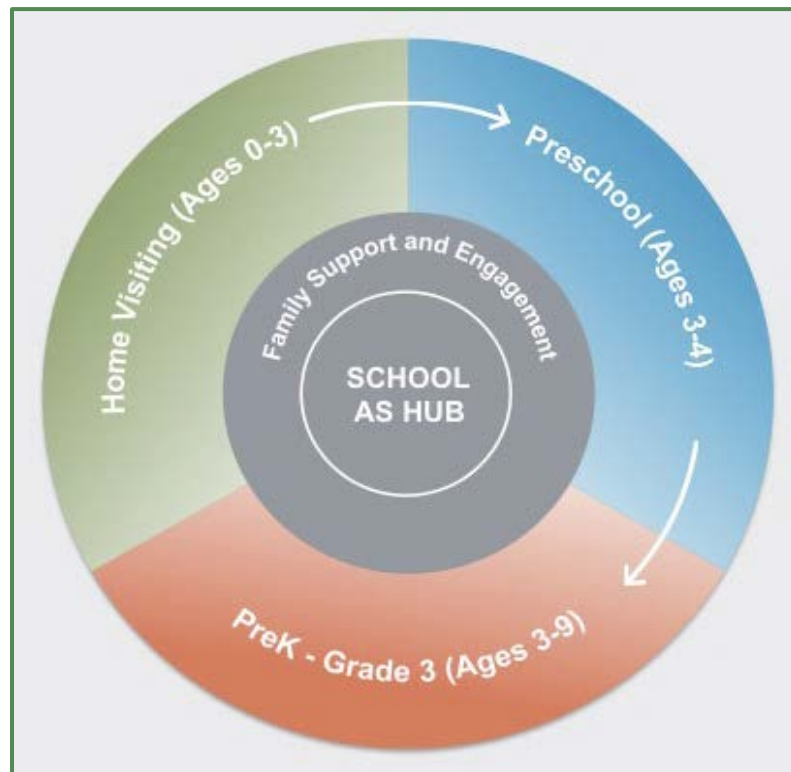
Customized assistance is provided to districts, schools, and school-community partners that are developing or increasing their capacity to participate in the plan described in this document. Customized assistance consists of specialized advice, consultation, and assistance to help LEAs and their partners make planning and implementation decisions or to identify solutions to specific challenges. A central

goal of customized assistance is to promote sustainable, systems-level advances in birth through Grade 3 policies and programming. Examples of such activities include the following:

- Consultative assistance in identifying and selecting high-quality, evidence-based early childhood curricula or assessments;
- Support in integrating a strategic focus on birth – Grade 3 into a district’s overall strategic plan;
- Assistance to a district or school leader in revising organizational structures and allocation of resources to more fully implement high-quality early childhood programming;
- Assistance in designing and implementing district-wide professional development in order to build capacity in key areas of birth – Grade 3 programming;
- Assistance in developing partnership agreements and procedures between multiple organizations collaborating in the delivery of services to children, birth – Grade 3, and/or their families;
- Advice about seeking public funds for birth – Grade 3 programs and braiding or combining funds from different sources; and
- Assistance in communicating about and advocating for the birth – Grade 3 approach.

BIRTH THROUGH GRADE 3 CONTINUUM

The birth through Grade 3 approach builds a comprehensive, connected system of supports with the school as the hub or connector of services. Key areas of programming include birth – age 3 home visiting, intensive preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, and aligned preschool – Grade 3. Continuous parenting support and family-school partnerships are promoted across the full birth through Grade 3 continuum. These areas not only reflect the fact that a great deal of neurological development occurs in the first five years of life, but that early efforts at intervention may fade out or diminish if they are not maintained and supported during the early elementary years. The birth through Grade 3 approach is depicted in the infographic below.



Full Implementation of the Birth – Grade 3 Approach

We will work with specific school sites in the Learning Community to fully implement a birth through Grade 3 approach. A description of the full implementation programming that is supported within each school site is given below. Although described separately, these areas of programming must function together in an integrated manner in order to create a comprehensive and connected system of quality supports from birth – Grade 3.

Home Visiting for Birth – Age 3

Overview: Birth – 3-year-old children and their families are best served in a “two-generation” home visiting program. This type of program promotes the development of strong parent/child relationships, child development skills, parenting education, and connections between parents and community resources. The home visiting program should have a strong link to the goals of the elementary school program so that home-school partnerships and parental engagement in education can be shaped from the beginning of a child’s life.

We develop and/or partner with comprehensive home visiting programs focusing on one or more of the following domains: (1) positive parenting practices; (2) child development and learning; (3) linkages and referrals to community resources and supports; (4) reductions in child maltreatment; (5) maternal health; (6) child health; and (7) family economic self-sufficiency.

Characteristics that Ensure Quality: Home visiting programs operate for the full calendar year (12 months) and serve pregnant families and their children up to age 3. The home visitor holds a bachelor’s degree in child development, family development, or a related field. Home visits take place at least three times per month. In addition, at least one parent/child group is held per month, usually at each participating elementary school, to enhance children’s socialization skills, help overcome parental isolation, and strengthen the school’s role as a hub or connector of services for children and families.

Families are recruited from the attendance area of the school that their child will most likely attend. Criteria for recruitment are to seek the youngest and neediest children in the area, with each school defining the neediest according to the characteristics of their population. An evidence-based home visiting curriculum that covers all early childhood domains, including social/emotional, cognitive, physical, and language and pre-literacy, is adopted. Child developmental screenings and observational assessments inform individualized practices and early intervention referrals as needed.

When children reach 3 years of age, they begin a transition into a preschool or child care program, if they are not already enrolled in such a program. Families continue to participate in a modified version of the home visiting program through parent/child groups until their child reaches Kindergarten. These parent/child groups are to be hosted at the school site of the birth – age 3 home visiting program.

If a school’s community has birth – age 3 services in place that it wishes to maintain, we will support a partnership with that program while also integrating and building on the approach and characteristics described here. If there is little or no birth – age 3 programming in the community, the school will select a birth – age 3 home visiting program model/curriculum with our assistance that meets the criteria set forth in our approach.

In keeping with our School as Hub approach, home visitors are hired and supervised by the local school principal or designee. In the case of a home visiting program that is provided through a school/community partnership, the home visitor will be jointly supervised by the CBO and the school

principal. Ongoing training, professional development, mentoring, and coaching for the home visitor are provided by a birth – age 3 specialist affiliated with the Buffett Early Childhood Institute.

Parenting Support and Family-School Partnerships, Preschool – Grade 3

Overview: A preschool – Grade 3 family facilitator sustains personalized connections with families and helps build strong family-school partnerships. A central function is to continue the parenting support and family-school partnerships initiated through the birth – age 3 home visiting program. When children and families complete birth – age 3 home visiting, the family facilitator assists them in transitioning their children into group preschool or child care programs. The family facilitator then conducts and promotes the families’ ongoing engagement in monthly parent/child groups until their children enter Kindergarten. These parent/child groups are held at the school site of the birth – age 3 home visiting program.

On a broader level, the family facilitator serves as a liaison between the full implementation school and families of young children, preschool – Grade 3. (S)he engages in family outreach to promote productive communication and collaboration among families, preschool – Grade 3 teachers, and elementary school administrators. The family facilitator organizes and facilitates parent groups to match family interests and needs in supporting their children’s development and learning at different age/grades along the preschool – Grade 3 continuum. This includes connections to relevant community resources for both children and adult family members.

Characteristics that Ensure Quality: Transition practices, parent/child groups, family-school partnership strategies, and other parenting supports should use research-based strategies. The parent/child group curriculum/model selected for families transitioning from the birth – age 3 home visiting program should align with the home visiting curriculum and should use an evidence-based model. If a school and its community already have parenting programs in place, we will support those programs while also integrating and building on the characteristics described here. If there is little or no preschool – Grade 3 parenting support and family engagement programming in place, the school will either select programming options and/or community partners with our assistance that meet the criteria set forth in our approach.

In keeping with our School as Hub approach, preschool – Grade 3 family facilitators are hired and supervised by the school principal or designee. The family facilitator holds a bachelor’s degree in a field related to child and family development, and demonstrates knowledge of the local community, parenting, and elementary school culture. The family facilitator works on a 12-month calendar to ensure that transition and parenting supports and opportunities for family engagement are extended continuously throughout the year. Ongoing training, professional development, mentoring, and coaching for the preschool – Grade 3 family facilitators are provided by a family and community engagement specialist affiliated with the Buffett Early Childhood Institute.

High-Quality Preschool for 3- and 4-Year-Olds

Overview: Once a child reaches 3 years of age, the importance of quality group early education and care experiences increases. As described above, full implementation of the birth through Grade 3 approach supports the transition of children into high-quality preschool programs in public schools or community-based preschool and child care settings.

Characteristics That Ensure Quality: The full implementation site’s preschool teachers participate in systematic professional learning experiences within their grade level as well as with the full preschool –

Grade 3 staff. This professional learning focuses on supporting a whole child/whole family approach and high-quality, developmentally informed early education practices. A professional learning cycle that includes teacher workshops and regular coaching for classroom teachers is developed and implemented in coordination with school and district early childhood initiatives.

A goal of this programming area is also to strengthen connections between school- and community-based preschool/child care programs. Opportunities are developed for school-based preschool teachers to participate in joint professional learning with preschool teachers from community-based early childhood programs that serve children in the school's enrollment area. Efforts will be made to create networks of community-based preschool and child care providers within participating schools' communities. The goals of these school-community preschool connections will be to facilitate child and family transitions across programs, as well as to strengthen professional support for community-based providers.

Aligned Preschool – Grade 3

Overview: Aligned preschool – Grade 3 educational experiences recognize the critical importance of the years 3 through 8 for establishing a strong foundation for future learning and school success. The intent is to maintain and increase the impact of earlier interventions by providing high-quality, aligned educational experiences, smooth transitions, and continued support through the early years of a child's formal education.

Characteristics that Ensure Quality: Aligned preschool – Grade 3 educational experiences encompass the following common characteristics:

- Recognition of a rigorous learning continuum beginning at age 3.
- Alignment and coordination of educational standards, including comprehensive and balanced curricula, assessments, and pedagogy within and across preschool – Grade 3.
- Effective, developmentally informed teaching based on knowledge of early childhood learning and development.
- Integration of supports for socio-emotional and academic growth.
- Collaboration and planning among teachers across age/grade levels.
- Teacher and administrator preparation and ongoing professional learning about early childhood.
- Connections among families, schools, and communities, including connections with preschool programs in the community when preschool is not offered onsite.

The plan promotes high-quality, aligned preschool – Grade 3 education by providing site-based support to each full implementation school implementing the birth – Grade 3 approach. A preschool – Grade 3 educational facilitator and other specialists affiliated with the Buffett Early Childhood Institute collaborate with school administrators and school staff in integrating the guiding principles of aligned preschool – Grade 3 into the school's curricula, pedagogy, and assessments. The focus is on the use of educational strategies that provide developmentally informed, intellectually challenging learning experiences to address disparities in the experiences and outcomes of young children placed at risk.

By explicitly embedding and highlighting the preschool – Grade 3 focus within each school's ongoing professional learning, instructional coaching, and other school improvement initiatives, our goal is to build self-sustaining capacity and to gradually release reliance upon educational facilitation provided through collaboration with the Buffett Institute team.

TIMELINE

We propose a four-year timeline that continues and extends initial work conducted through the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. In Year 1, we will deepen implementation of the birth – Grade 3 approach in existing full implementation school sites. Documentation of program efforts will continue, and data from the implementation phase of program evaluation will be used to make revisions and mid-course adjustments. Professional learning that builds shared knowledge, advances practices, and promotes sustainable leadership capacity will be more fully infused throughout the plan's program of work. This will be complemented by broader dissemination of information about implementation activities and progress, including site visits and information sharing about customized district initiatives.

Year 2 will continue with these activities and will include increased emphasis on community partnerships for building a comprehensive birth through Grade 3 continuum of services. Documentation of program efforts will describe the "story" of the Superintendents' Plan implementation through written and online media for those interested in exploring applications of the birth through Grade 3 approach in their own program settings. Evaluation data will continue to inform implementation and yield preliminary insights into the effectiveness of birth – Grade 3 programming areas. Evaluation efforts will expand to include analyses of policy implications at the state and local levels for providing long-term support for this initiative. Faculty from the University of Nebraska campuses, supported by funds external to the Learning Community, will be working with the program to provide expertise, research, and resources targeted at needs and interests identified through plan implementation. The second year will culminate with an intensive review of the preceding years' activities and outcomes.

The third and fourth years of operations will include an intensive focus on sustainability and expansion of the birth – Grade 3 approach and the plan's program of work. Refinement of the professional learning, capacity building, and leadership strategies required to implement and sustain the birth – Grade 3 approach at the building and district levels will be completed. Evaluation data will continue to inform the fidelity and effectiveness of program implementation.

EVALUATION

The evaluation has two purposes. First, it will provide information about the Superintendents' Plan's usefulness and feasibility to those participating in and with responsibility for full implementation sites. The second purpose of the evaluation is to give teachers, principals, directors, superintendents, the Learning Community Coordinating Council, and policymakers data about the impact of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan on children, families, teachers/classrooms, and schools.

Evaluation Team

The research and evaluation unit of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute manages the evaluation in collaboration with the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), and the Interdisciplinary Center for Program Evaluation of the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). UNL leads the birth – age 3 component and contributes to the overall design of the evaluation and the development of the database. UNMC leads the PreK – Grade 3 component of the evaluation.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation is designed to answer a series of questions that focus on implementation of the Superintendents' Plan and impact on child, family, teacher/classroom, and schools:

Implementation

- To what extent are core components of the Superintendents' Plan being implemented as intended and at the expected level of quality?
- How useful are the core components of the plan to achieving the goals of school and program leadership, their staff, and other participants?
- What are the enabling factors and the obstacles to implementing the Superintendents' Plan at the system, school, and family levels?

Evidence of Impact

- Child: What is the effect on children's outcomes in cognitive, language, academic, socio-emotional, and executive function domains?
- Family: What is the effect on families' positive parenting, school engagement, and social support outcomes?
- Teacher/Classroom: What is the effect on teachers' practices?
- School: What is the effect on schools' culture and practices?

Design

A large number of promising interventions have been dismissed over the years as ineffective because their impact evaluations produced effects that were small or not statistically significant. Among the various reasons for this, the most common are that the intervention was not implemented well, was tested too early, or was not sufficiently well understood to produce a valid test of effectiveness.

As a new program, the Superintendents' Plan requires an evaluation design that first focuses on how well it is being implemented. Putting in place a comprehensive, birth – Grade 3 initiative that will impact approximately 500 teachers and 4,000 students in 12 different schools representing six school districts is a very challenging undertaking. Because the schools vary in their environments, organizational structures, and communities served, the evaluation for the Superintendents' Plan is designed to first develop a strong understanding of how the core features of the plan are being carried out within the context of each of the schools. Following this, a rigorous impact evaluation will be conducted, with a focus on child outcomes.

Specifically, a three-phase evaluation design will be used, beginning with the collection of baseline data from children, families, classrooms, and schools. The evaluation includes approximately 350 children and their families, as well as approximately 200 teachers/classrooms in 12 schools in six districts over a six-year period. We will use a developmental, or formative, evaluation approach that uses observations, interviews, and focus groups to explore impacts, influences, facilitators, and barriers occurring at the various levels of the plan. Each phase will be two years in length and will build on the preceding phase, ensuring a process that will enable the evaluation findings to be used to refine the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan over time while also conducting an evaluation of its impact.

Phase I (2015-16 and 2016-17)

Table 1 shows that the first two years of implementation, or Phase I (2015-16 and 2016-17), is devoted to gathering information about the plan's usefulness and feasibility, including assessing implementation barriers and enabling factors. This phase will allow the Superintendents' Plan to be revised based on input from its users and sponsors.

Phase II (2017-18 and 2018-19)

During the next two-year phase, Phase II (2017-18 and 2018-19), data about the extent to which the

Superintendents’ Plan is being implemented as proposed and expected will be examined. This will include the collection of preliminary impact data to explore whether schools, teachers/classrooms, families, and children in the full implementation sites are showing change in key areas noted in the evaluation questions. This information can potentially lead to further modifications in the program.

Phase III (2019-20 and 2020-21)

The third two-year phase, Phase III (2019-20 and 2020-21), will focus on whether and how well the Superintendents’ Plan has been executed at the full implementation sites. Data will be collected in this phase to determine whether and how well implementation sites are showing change in key areas highlighted in the evaluation questions, using normative and administrative trend data to assess change in child, family, teachers/classrooms, and schools. Based on availability of funds, all of the children will be followed through the end of their third grade year. If possible, we will also examine the use of a matched-comparison group to further provide evidence of impact of the Superintendents’ Plan.

Table 1: Overview of Evaluation Phases of the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan

<u>PHASE</u>	<u>SCHOOL YEAR</u>	<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>GOAL</u>
I	2015-16 2016-17	Implementation Study	Usability and Feasibility
II	2017-18 2018-19	Fidelity of Implementation Exploratory Impact Study	Fidelity of Implementation Exploratory Evidence of Impact
III	2019-20 2020-21	Confirmatory Impact Study	Confirmatory Evidence of Effectiveness

Sample

Twelve schools at 10 sites within six Metro Omaha school districts will participate in the evaluation. The sample includes 350 children and their families, as well as 200 PreK – Grade 3 teachers, who are participating in the full implementation sites.

Table 2 illustrates how the sample will be constructed. All children, ages 0 – 3, and families who are participating in the home visiting program in 2015-16 (~150 children and families) are being recruited for the study. These children and families will be identified as “Cohort A.” Additionally, 200 children from PreK and Kindergarten classrooms who are in the full implementation sites during that year will be randomly selected for study. These children and their families will be identified as “Cohort B.”

Observational data will be collected from PreK – Grade 3 classrooms (~200 classrooms) and surveys and interviews/focus groups will take place with teachers and school leadership in the full implementation sites. All children will be followed through third grade once they enter the evaluation study using direct

assessment and available administrative data. Principals and other school leaders will also be interviewed and included in the study.

Table 2: Study Participants

CHILDREN (Ages/Grades):	N
Cohort A (0 – 3)	~150
Cohort B (PreK – K)	~200
FAMILY:	
Cohort A (0 – 3)	~150
Cohort B (PreK – K)	~200
CLASSROOMS/TEACHERS:	
PreK – Grade 3	~200
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS/PRINCIPALS	12

Data Collection Approach

A data-gathering approach that relies on multiple methods and multiple informants will be used. With the exception of Cohort A children, data will be collected only once per year. Data will be collected by experienced and trained data collectors. The following summarizes the type of measurement that will be used for each group or level of participants in the program:

Measures

A data-gathering approach that relies on multiple methods and multiple informants will be used. With the exception of Cohort A children, data will be collected only once per year. The following summarizes the type of measurement tactic that will be used for each group or level of participants in the program:

- Child: Direct assessment and teacher and parent surveys (Cohort A: ~ 20 – 30 minutes twice per year; Cohort B: ~50 minutes once per year).
- Family: Video observations, survey, and focus groups (Cohort A: ~45 – 80 minutes; Cohort B: ~90 minutes).
- Teacher/Classroom: Video observation and interviews/focus groups (Cohort B: ~2 hours video observations and ~90 minutes interviews/focus groups).
- School: Survey, observation, interviews, and focus groups (~1 hour observation, ~30-minute survey, and ~90 minutes interviews/focus groups).

SUMMARY

Relying on schools as the critical link between family, community, and children in the first eight years of life, the Superintendents’ Plan program of work seeks to reduce or eliminate income-based achievement gaps affecting children living in poverty by implementing a birth – Grade 3 approach that includes the use of national, evidence-based models; evaluating how well the approach is being implemented; and engaging in efforts with others to create policies at the state and local levels that provide long-term support for this initiative.

We will increase the impact of this work by leveraging and improving existing resources in schools and community-based organizations, emphasizing the importance of starting early and creating child-focused, developmentally informed programs, and demonstrating the effect of comprehensive efforts across the first eight years of life. Our basic belief, drawn from the research of the past half-century, is that persistent efforts in the early years will result in persistence of long-term effects for children. This plan is dedicated to demonstrating that ongoing, high-quality intervention across the first eight years of life will increase the likelihood that children living in poverty will experience life success and will grow to become active and productive contributors to society.