

SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN PLAN AT A GLANCE

Summary

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan is a groundbreaking initiative that represents the nation's most innovative, comprehensive approach to reducing achievement gaps for children from birth through third grade living in the 11 school districts of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The plan is funded with enhanced levy authority of the Learning Community. It is the first initiative of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute's Achievement Gap Challenge, one of two signature programs at the Institute.

History

- 2013 The Nebraska Legislature (LB 585) directed the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties to enact a plan "to establish early childhood education programs for children in poverty." The metro Omaha superintendents invited the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska to develop the plan.
- 2014 The Buffett Institute collaborated with 11 school districts to develop the plan. The plan was unanimously endorsed by the 11 superintendents in June, and approved by the Learning Community Coordinating Council in August.
- 2015 The program is launched for the 2015-2016 school year, with 12 elementary schools implementing the birth-through-third grade approach and seven districts getting specialized professional development or technical assistance. A "Professional Development for All" series gets underway, with administrators, teachers, child care providers, and other early childhood professionals across the 11 school districts participating.

Six Big Ideas

The plan reflects what research tells us about young children's development and learning. Our work 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 PreK, or even birth – 3 or birth – 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 on 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 our plan is the idea that schools can serve as the "pivot" or center 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 and 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.

Three Levels of Implementation

The Superintendents' Plan provides three interconnected opportunities for school districts, elementary schools, and community-based professionals to strengthen early childhood efforts.

1. **Professional Development for All:** A connected series of professional development institutes open to all school leaders, teachers, early childhood professionals, and caregivers who work with young children from birth through Grade 3 in the Omaha metro area. "PD for All" introduces leading-edge research and innovative practices to those who work with young children and families and gives early childhood professionals the chance to come together and learn from one another.
2. **Customized Assistance:** Seven school districts are receiving intensive assistance and consultation tailored to specific needs. This professional development addresses such topics as social-emotional development, family engagement, and assessment and accountability. Technical assistance provides districts with access to state and national consultation as they engage in strategic planning and improvement efforts that will impact system-wide early childhood education and services.
3. **Full Implementation of Birth – Grade 3 Approach:** Twelve elementary school sites, all with more than half of their students eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch, serve as hubs that connect young children and their families with high-quality, comprehensive, and continuous early childhood education and services. The birth through Grade 3 continuum includes three integrated components: home visiting for children birth to age 3, high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds,

and aligned Kindergarten through Grade 3 curriculum, instruction, and assessment for 5- through 8-year-olds.

District-by-District

- Full implementation sites (birth through third grade) and number of schools:
 - Bellevue Public Schools - Belleaire Elementary
 - Douglas County West Community Schools - Douglas County West Elementary
 - Millard Public Schools - William Cody Elementary, Mari Sandoz Elementary
 - Omaha Public Schools - Gomez Heritage Elementary, Liberty Elementary, Mount View Elementary, Pinewood Elementary
 - Ralston Public Schools - Karen Western Elementary, Meadows Elementary, and Mockingbird Elementary (one site serving three schools)
 - Westside Community Schools - Westbrook Elementary
- Customized Assistance
 - Bellevue Public Schools
 - Bennington Public Schools
 - Elkhorn Public Schools
 - Gretna Public Schools
 - Papillion La Vista Community Schools
 - Ralston Public Schools
 - Westside Community Schools
- Professional development open to all administrators, teachers, early childhood professionals, and child care providers in the 11 school districts.

Numbers

- 150 children, birth to age 3, receiving home visitation
- 3,500+ children and families from PreK through third grade at the full implementation schools
- 500+ PreK through third grade educators at the 12 full implementation schools
- 15,000+ children in PreK through third grade in districts with administrators and/or teachers participating in the sustained, customized professional development, and technical assistance around early childhood programs and services

Long-Term Goal

Reduce or eliminate achievement gaps for children at risk living in the 11 school districts of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

Long-Term Results for Children, Families, Schools, and Communities

1. Students are able to learn at high levels.
2. Families are supported and know that their children are learning.
3. Teaching is more effective.
4. Schools are better able to serve all children.
5. Communities become stronger.