

NEWS RELEASE

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**NEW REPORT SHOWS OMAHA-AREA PLAN IS WORKING
TO REDUCE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS AND BETTER ENGAGE AND SUPPORT FAMILIES**

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Shows Continued Progress

Omaha, Neb. — The largest, most comprehensive birth – Grade 3 demonstration program in the nation is making positive gains in closing the achievement gap for hundreds of children in metro Omaha. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska today released the findings of the *2017-18 Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation*.

At the heart of the Superintendents' Plan is the idea that schools can change the way they “do school” in order to reduce income- and race-based opportunity and achievement gaps for children from birth – Grade 3. This work is done by schools serving as “hubs” to connect young children and their families living in poverty to education and services. The plan also focuses on customized assistance for districts and professional development for educators, administrators, and family support professionals, all with support from state and national experts.

“Working with districts to change how school is done is complex work. The decision and dedication of school leaders, teachers, and families to enhance meaningful family engagement while supporting quality classroom instruction continues to show great promise towards realizing our goal of closing achievement gaps for our most vulnerable children,” said Samuel J. Meisels, founding executive director of the Buffett Institute.

In the most intensive work carried out through the Superintendents' Plan, principals, teachers, school staff, families, and children from 12 elementary schools in six school districts in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties continued implementation of a birth through Grade 3 approach in 2017-18. Innovations include voluntary home visiting for children birth to age 3, engagement with families of 3- and 4-year-olds, and aligned Kindergarten – Grade 3 curriculum, instruction, and assessment for 5- through 8-year-olds.

Participating districts are Omaha, Bellevue, Millard, Ralston, Westside, and DC West and include 127 families receiving home visits and 3,590 children enrolled in PreK through third grade. Six districts also received customized assistance in 2017-18 to advance their early education services and programs, while over 800 educators participated in professional development institutes through the Superintendents' Plan.

Findings from the 2017-18 evaluation report include:

- Classroom interactions and instruction are improving
- Children in home visiting whose home language is Spanish show increases in language development (with greater gains associated with more home visits)
- Language development improved for children in PreK through Grade 3, with greater gains for low-income and Hispanic children
- Early educational achievement increased over time, with greater gains for children who are black and children whose home language is Spanish
- Home visiting is reaching families with greater needs
- Families are increasing their access to supports that help reduce stress
- Schools are learning to welcome and engage families in meaningful and inclusive ways

“What we are learning is that when schools work hand-in-hand with families, there are positive results inside and outside of the classroom. After our third year of implementation, we are seeing gains for all children, improved classroom instruction and interaction with families, and families who now see schools as a positive and welcoming force in their lives,” said Kevin Riley, superintendent of Gretna Public Schools. “These are all meaningful and powerful results.”

The evaluation study 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. Research in the report was supported by the Learning Community Coordinating Council, 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.