

BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE

2020-25

# Strategic Plan



Buffett  
Early Childhood  
Institute

*at the University of Nebraska*

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute became operational in June 2013, reflecting the vision and commitment of the University of Nebraska leadership and the inspiration and generosity of Omaha philanthropist Susie Buffett. Since then, my colleagues and I have dedicated ourselves to growing, shaping, and defining this four-campus, university-wide, multidisciplinary research, practice, policy, and outreach institute concerned with children from birth through Grade 3 and their families. We are committed to transforming the lives of young children placed at risk—those who have limited opportunities to learn because of educational inequities and other systemic barriers that have potentially life-long impacts.

This strategic plan represents the second such document that we have created. It represents what we've learned since 2013 and where we hope to be as an organization by 2025.

From the start of the Institute we dedicated ourselves to two signature programs. These programs and initiatives grew, changed, and matured over the years, and continue to represent our pursuit of solutions to two of the most pressing problems facing the field of early care and education today: equalizing children's opportunities to learn and strengthening the early childhood workforce by helping it become a priority profession in word and deed.

We are grateful to so many at the University of Nebraska and beyond for the opportunity to devote ourselves to increasing opportunities for children to learn, families to be supported, and caregivers and teachers to be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. Everything we do reflects these goals and the values and research that underlie them.

Much work remains ahead. We look forward to engaging with each of you as we continue to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Samuel J. Meisels". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Samuel" being the most prominent.

**Dr. Samuel J. Meisels**

Founding Executive Director

Richard D. Holland Presidential Chair in Early Childhood Development



# Vision

Nebraska will become the best place in the nation to be a baby



# Mission

Transform the lives of young children by improving their learning and development



# Values

What We Believe / How We Work

## Equity

We believe that all children should have the opportunity to reach their full potential, and we recognize that the predictability of who succeeds or fails based on race, class, or ethnicity must be eliminated. We are committed to promoting diverse perspectives, increasing our understanding of how we work with one another, and being sensitive to the ways in which we engage differing communities.

## Excellence

We believe in leveraging our collective strengths and partnerships in pursuit of high quality and rigorous standards of research, practice, policy, and outreach.

## Impact

We believe in taking bold and courageous steps to improve the lives of children and families in Nebraska and beyond.

## Innovation

We believe in embracing change and growth, creativity and diversity of thought, and taking calculated risks to achieve our vision. We respect the history of our work and profession while asking whether current and accepted solutions should undergo change over time.

## Relationships

We believe in putting people first. We recognize the inherent dignity of the people we work with and the people we serve. We celebrate our differences and strive to be honest, compassionate, and caring.

## Collaboration

We believe in working together as a team and understand that this perspective helps us achieve better results. By sharing knowledge and effort, we can have greater success and enrich and empower others in the process.



# Signature Programs

## Closing the Opportunity Gap

This program focuses on ensuring that all children have opportunities to develop, learn, and achieve their potential. Young children who are denied opportunities because of gender, racial or cultural bias, family economic status, or home language typically do not achieve their full academic or personal and social potential. Often they demonstrate achievement gaps in school, poor health outcomes over their lifetime, and unfulfilled quality of life overall. Our goal is to help all children thrive by enhancing their opportunities to learn from birth onward.

## Early Childhood Workforce Development Program

This program seeks to ensure the presence of a skilled workforce in all early care and education settings. It confronts such critical issues as professional preparation and qualifications, workforce compensation, funding, and sustained public will and commitment. Our goal is to help early care and education become recognized as a priority profession whose work is essential to the social and economic well-being of children, families, and communities.





# | Goals



## GOAL 1

# Support High-Quality Early Care and Education for All Children

Ensure that the professionals, organizations, and systems that serve young children and their families are as effective, supportive, and equitable as possible.

STRATEGY  
1.1

Support and develop the knowledge, skills, and well-being of those who care for and educate children, birth-Grade 3.

- INITIATIVES:
- 1.1.1 Generate and disseminate relevant, evidence-based information to support practice
  - 1.1.2 Build upon and enhance the knowledge and skills of parents and families
  - 1.1.3 Support early childhood professionals in developing and applying new skills to better serve children and families
  - 1.1.4 Enhance workforce well-being

STRATEGY  
1.2

Build the capacity of organizations to be responsive and effective in serving young children and families.

- INITIATIVES:
- 1.2.1 Build the capacity of schools and school districts to serve young children and their families
  - 1.2.2 Strengthen the capacity of community-based organizations to provide quality care and education
  - 1.2.3 Improve the capacity of community organizations that provide essential services for families

STRATEGY  
1.3

Promote the alignment of systems to support quality, continuity, and equity.

- INITIATIVES:
- 1.3.1 Collaborate with state agencies to share relevant resources, expertise, and data
  - 1.3.2 Promote partnerships between school and community-based organizations
  - 1.3.3 Align state and local systems to support professional learning
  - 1.3.4 Empower and develop leadership within the early childhood workforce
  - 1.3.5 Address issues of equity, privilege, and power that impact early care and education



## GOAL 2

### Promote Expertise in Early Childhood Research, Practice, Policy, and Outreach

Use research, practice, policy, and outreach to positively impact young children, families, and the early childhood field.

STRATEGY  
2.1

Engage in rigorous applied research and evaluation.

- INITIATIVES:
- 2.1.1 Conduct and publish analyses, based on implemented pilot and field work protocols, that further the aims of the Institute's Signature Programs and incorporate Signature Program goals into the Institute's research agenda
  - 2.1.2 Ensure effective evaluation and documentation of Institute projects or programs
  - 2.1.3 Conduct and publish academic studies that inform scholars, state agencies, and/or the early childhood field regarding practices and policies that enhance child and family well-being
  - 2.1.4 Use data for the purpose of continuous improvement

STRATEGY  
2.2

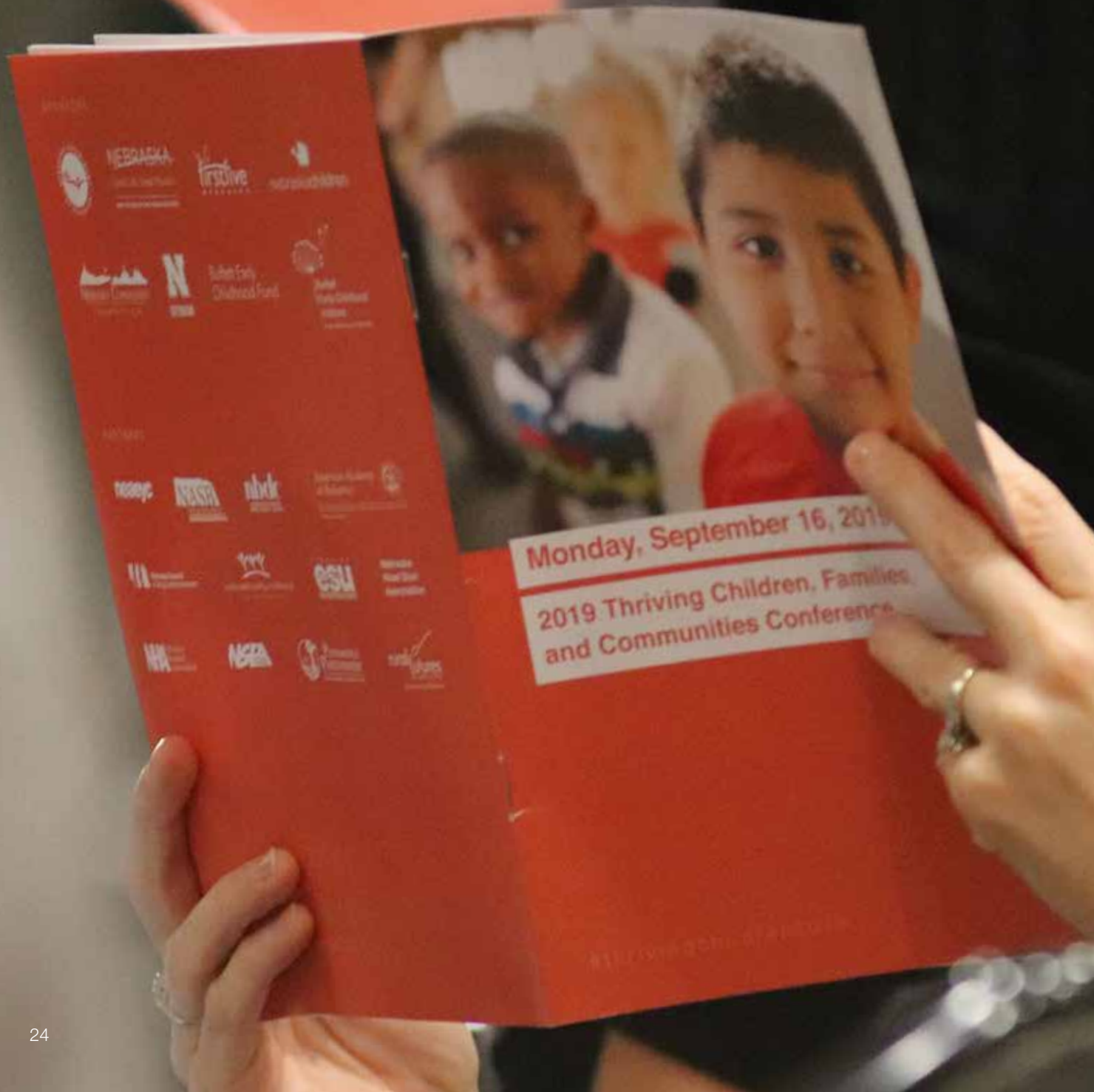
Recommend effective public policies that improve the lives of young children and their families.

- INITIATIVES:
- 2.2.1 Identify, prioritize, and advance public policies essential for high-quality early childhood services and programs from birth through Grade 3
  - 2.2.2 Ensure that appropriate and useful data and research are available and accessible to policymakers and others
  - 2.3.3 Establish a policy framework that builds on collaborative connections within the University of Nebraska system and reaches across Institute areas of activity

STRATEGY  
2.3

Use strategic communications and outreach to build support for high-quality early care and education.

- INITIATIVES:
- 2.3.1 Share early childhood information and research across all communication channels to build public understanding and support
  - 2.3.2 Serve as state and national spokespeople concerning the benefits of high-quality early care and education
  - 2.3.3 Convene leaders and stakeholders to advance and share early childhood research, practice, and policy, and build support for high-quality early childhood programs and services
  - 2.3.4 Undertake public outreach and education programs and initiatives that spur individuals to action and inform public policy discussions



### GOAL 3

## Build Powerful Partnerships

Engage in collaborative partnerships to improve early learning opportunities and outcomes for all children.

STRATEGY  
3.1

Identify, support, and sustain partnerships within the University of Nebraska system.

- INITIATIVES:
- 3.1.1 Develop and leverage the role of the Institute's Community Chairs
  - 3.1.2 Engage with faculty and staff to harness the multidisciplinary resources of all four campuses of the university
  - 3.1.3 Support and sustain the Institute's Graduate Scholars program

STRATEGY  
3.2

Build and sustain early childhood partnerships in Nebraska.

- INITIATIVES:
- 3.2.1 Develop partnerships critical to the Institute's Signature Programs
  - 3.2.2 Seek a shared vision and common outcomes with critical, close-in state partners
  - 3.2.3 Participate in local and statewide collaborative initiatives
  - 3.2.4 Share the Institute's work with partners and stakeholders

STRATEGY  
3.3

Build and sustain early childhood partnerships in the United States and beyond.

- INITIATIVES:
- 3.3.1 Conduct research and build programmatic initiatives that correspond to issues and problems facing the field at large
  - 3.3.2 Undertake partnerships and collaborative initiatives based on the Institute's Signature Programs
  - 3.3.3 Contribute to national and international conferences in order to share the Institute's work



#### GOAL 4

## Be an Effective, Efficient, and Healthy Organization

Help the Institute become one of the best places to work as it seeks to fulfill its mission.



STRATEGY  
4.1

Recruit and support mission-oriented team members who reflect diverse experiences and backgrounds.

- INITIATIVES:
- 4.1.1 Recruit highly qualified candidates to help the Institute achieve its mission
  - 4.1.2 Prioritize diversity and equity in the recruitment, selection, and onboarding of new staff
  - 4.1.3 Support new team members as they learn about the Institute's vision, mission, and values and begin contributing to the Institute's success

STRATEGY  
4.2

Support the development and well-being of Institute team members.

- INITIATIVES:
- 4.2.1 Identify and establish Institute-wide professional development plans and expectations
  - 4.2.2 Establish performance management processes that establish goals, provide support, identify areas in need of development, and provide performance feedback

STRATEGY  
4.3

Foster and grow an engaged, collaborative, and inclusive culture.

- INITIATIVES:
- 4.3.1 Identify the factors that enhance employee engagement and performance
  - 4.3.2 Improve communications across the Institute
  - 4.3.3 Implement collaborative supports to improve outcomes and increase engagement

STRATEGY  
4.4

Ensure that appropriate standards, procedures, and systems are in place to support institutional quality and effectiveness.

- INITIATIVES:
- 4.4.1 Develop and document standards, guidelines, and processes
  - 4.4.2 Implement effective and efficient workflows and systems
  - 4.4.3 Communicate, educate, and train team members about Institute standards, guidelines, and processes
  - 4.4.4 Develop and implement evaluation and accountability measures



# | Long-Term | Outcomes

1. | All children have opportunities to experience equity and excellence in their early learning and development.
2. | Public support for the importance of the early years markedly increases.
3. | Access to aligned, high-quality early care and education systems for all children and families grows.
4. | Families receive needed support in caring for their children.

5. | The early childhood workforce is a priority profession whose expertise is recognized, valued, and appropriately compensated.
6. | Public policies are in place to effectively support children and their families and the early education and care organizations they interact with.
7. | The Institute's collaborative work with practitioners, scholars, and policymakers has a significant impact on research, practice, and policy.

**Learn more**

[buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu](http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu)



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