



All Children Deserve the  
Opportunity to Succeed

~~~~~

# The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan



Buffett  
Early Childhood  
Institute

*at the University of Nebraska*

**learning  
community**  
DOUGLAS  
SARPY

# All Children Deserve the Opportunity to Learn, Develop, and Succeed

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan is a collaborative initiative of the 11 school districts of Douglas and Sarpy counties to develop early childhood programs for young children living in poverty. The focus of the plan is on closing opportunity gaps so that all children can reach their full potential. In partnership with the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute provides leadership and support for the plan, which is an innovative and comprehensive approach to ensure early learning opportunities for all children.

The plan was mandated in 2013 by LB 585 of the Nebraska Legislature, which directed the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties to enact a program created by the Omaha-area superintendents "to establish early childhood programs for children in poverty." The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan was developed by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute in collaboration with district superintendents and their staff and launched in 2015. Today, more than 2,800 children are served through the Superintendents' Plan.

## The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan impacts thousands of children, families, and teachers.

**100+**

Children, birth through age 3, receive three home visits each month

**10**

Schools in six districts have fully implemented School as Hub programming

**500+**

PreK – Grade 3 educators are actively involved at full implementation schools

**3,500+**

Children and families from PreK – Grade 3 are enrolled at full implementation schools

**15,000+**

Children in PreK – Grade 3 are in districts with administrators and/or teachers who participate in professional development and Customized Assistance around early childhood programs and services



*“The School as Hub model has become the fabric of our school. Intentional consulting, focused coaching, and data-driven professional development have made a grand impact on our teachers, students, and families. As a result of our work, we have strengthened instructional practices, grown an understanding of teaching the whole child through best practice, and increased family involvement.”*

— Dr. Melissa Poloncic, Superintendent  
DC West Community Schools

## The Early Years Are Significant

Research confirms that the first eight years of a child's life are critical for building a strong foundation for success in school and beyond.

High-quality, coordinated early learning services from birth through Grade 3 reduce educational obstacles for children who live in low-income households; however, continuous programming is not yet in place in most communities. Without this continuum, gaps in children's learning based on family income show up as early as nine months and continue to widen. By Kindergarten, many children of color and children living in low-income households are a year or more behind their more economically advantaged peers of the same age—and this continues across early grades.

The Superintendents' Plan is built upon research-proven practices for children living in low-income households. The Buffett Institute has consulted with nationally renowned experts in all areas of the first eight years of life to construct a high-quality plan, and the long-term professional learning support and technical assistance provided to school districts ensure the ongoing development of local school (or district) capacity and leadership.



## Our Research-Backed Approach to Addressing Opportunity Gaps

### 1. Focus on the Early Years

Intervention at any point during the first eight years of life is helpful for children who experience risk factors for school failure, but we must go beyond a single year of PreK, or even birth to age 3 or birth to age 5 programs, for the benefits to endure throughout life. The foundations for building children's brain architecture, language and skill acquisition, and relationships with others are established early on but take time to fully develop. If we can maintain continuity through the end of Grade 3, children are more likely to achieve lasting success in school and beyond.

## **2. Make Schools a Hub for Resources**

At the core of our plan is the idea that schools can serve as the “hub” to connect children and their families to resources within and beyond school walls. Schools can help families navigate and access early education services and community resources from the moment children are born.

## **3. Provide Uninterrupted Support From Birth Through Grade 3**

Children develop physically, mentally, and socially as they grow from birth through Grade 3. During this important period of growth, all aspects of their learning should be continuous and connected—not isolated.

## **4. Engage the Whole Family**

Parents and families are key to children’s success, and they are our most powerful allies in enhancing their children’s skills. Low-income families are experts on the personal stress and obstacles that can accompany poverty and social inequality, so we must actively engage them throughout their child’s first five years to understand the best ways to support their growth and development.

## **5. Train Educators in Early Childhood Development**

It’s crucial that educators are knowledgeable about children’s development and early learning. When caregivers, teachers, and administrators have opportunities to learn about the latest in child development research, they can translate that research into practice in children’s early educational experiences.

## **6. Commit to Long-Term Efforts**

The earlier we begin working with children and families, 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 success. The Superintendents’ Plan is not an overnight solution. Many individuals, organizations, and school districts have worked together to implement this plan, and we will continue to evaluate and evolve its recommendations.



# The Superintendents' Plan in Action

The long-term goal of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan is to reduce or eliminate opportunity gaps for young children facing persistent economic and social disparities so that all children can reach their full potential. Short-term objectives focus on promoting positive outcomes for children and families by building the capacity of metro-area school districts to provide quality early learning opportunities to all children, from birth through Grade 3.

The plan provides three interconnected levels of support for school districts, elementary schools, and community-based professionals to strengthen their birth through Grade 3 efforts:

## 1. Professional Development for All

Professional Development for All is an annual series of free learning opportunities available to early childhood professionals who work with children from birth through Grade 3 in Douglas and Sarpy counties. These opportunities introduce evidence-based instructional practices while creating a space for early childhood professionals to gather and learn from one another. Each series is designed in response to the emerging needs of metro-area early childhood educators, who help shape both the content and format of PD for All.

## 2. Customized Assistance for School Districts

Customized Assistance provides access to consultation services through the Superintendents' Plan to all 11 school districts in the Learning Community. These services are tailored to the unique strengths and needs of each district and are designed to help them build their organizational infrastructure and capacity for providing quality early childhood programming to all young children in their district. Consultation services are provided by Institute staff in collaboration with other state and national consultants.

### 3. School as Hub Programming for Birth Through Grade 3

School as Hub provides more intensive support to selected elementary schools in neighborhoods impacted by high concentrations of poverty. Programming is designed to establish the school as a “hub” that connects young children and their families with quality, comprehensive, and continuous early childhood services and resources from birth through Grade 3. Its four integrated components include:

#### **Home visiting and family facilitation from birth to school enrollment**

School-based family engagement staff provide regular, voluntary home visiting for individual families to support the development of strong parent-child relationships, child development skills, parenting education, and connections between parents and community resources. The home visiting programs have a strong link to the goals of elementary school programs so that home-school partnerships can be shaped from the beginning of a child’s life.

#### **High-quality preschool experiences for 3- and 4-year-olds**

Once children reach age 3, their families may choose to transition from home visiting into a school-based or community-based preschool. Family engagement staff continue the family support and education activities initiated during home visiting. In addition, ongoing professional development is provided for staff in School as Hub preschools to ensure high-quality learning experiences that build on the home visiting program.

#### **Aligned Kindergarten through Grade 3 instruction**

As children transition into Kindergarten, the School as Hub approach works to ensure that their early elementary education builds upon their preschool experiences to promote academic, intellectual, and social-emotional competence. Strong home-school partnerships and family support continue as well.

#### **Intentional family partnerships for children birth through Grade 3**

Schools collaborate with families and community partners to provide group activities and resources that are responsive to families’ interests and values. Together they build authentic partnerships among schools, families, early care providers, and community leaders to ensure all students have access to what they need to thrive—and to empower families to act as advocates and decision-makers in their children’s learning.

## Our Cornerstones

### **Quality, continuity, and equity are the three cornerstones that shape the recommendations of the Superintendents' Plan.**

Quality refers to a commitment that all practices used with children, families, and educators will be focused on producing developmentally and educationally meaningful outcomes. Research-based practices focus on the experiences of the child and benefit from continuous improvement.

Continuity is grounded in a shared understanding of child development and the critical recognition of progression and transition in early learning.

Equity involves prioritizing policies and practices that effectively promote the learning of all children and seeks to address disparities in learning opportunities, family supports, and child outcomes based on variables such as race, class, and income. Equitable teaching and learning reduce or eliminate the predictability of who succeeds and who fails.

## Learning Through Evaluation

Each year, the Superintendents' Plan is evaluated by a third-party consultant. An evaluation report with all results is produced and presented to the Learning Community Coordinating Council. The report is also publicly available.

- ▶ To view the most recent evaluation report, visit [buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu](http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu)







*“Through the work of the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute staff have helped us develop meaningful relationships with families and change outcomes for children. This is a continual focus around what really matters—ensuring high-quality curriculum, effective leadership, and relationships with families. The time dedicated to our youngest learners makes a real difference.”*

*— Dr. John Schwartz, Superintendent  
Millard Public Schools*

## Collaborators for the Superintendents' Plan

The Superintendents' Plan would not be possible without the collaboration of many agencies and individuals. Here's more information about the two main organizations that facilitate the plan.



Buffett  
Early Childhood  
Institute

*at the University of Nebraska*

---

### About the Buffett Early Childhood Institute

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska promotes the development and learning of children from birth through age 8 with the vision to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby. The Buffett Institute holds contractual responsibility for the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan.

For more information, visit [buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu](http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu).

**learning  
community**  
DOUGLAS  
SARPY

---

### About the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties

The Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties is an educational subdivision created by the Legislature to serve the 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy counties. It is governed by a council of 12 elected representatives who oversee annual funding for school districts and community organizations to serve children and their families. The Learning Community also facilitates collaboration on a number of educational issues.

For more information, visit [learningcommunityds.org](http://learningcommunityds.org).

Learn more about the  
Superintendents' Plan

