



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute

at the University of Nebraska

Our First Three Years





All children deserve the opportunity
to develop, learn, and succeed in life.

Several years ago
the University of
Nebraska, together
with partners across
the state, put forward
a game-changing idea:

What if Nebraska could be the national
model for marshaling the resources of a
public university to transform the lives of
young children and families, particularly
those placed at risk?

We had the right pieces in place: faculty and students across four diverse campuses with expertise in issues related to early childhood education and development; talented educators in our communities working daily to help children succeed; partners in business and the public sector who understand that when children start well, our state's economy and quality of life benefit.

We also had philanthropic partners who shared our vision—including Susie Buffett, whose generous gift allowed us to establish the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska.

Since then, the transformational idea we introduced to Nebraskans has only become more important. Too many children aren't getting the successful start they deserve because of poverty and other challenges. And science tells us that those early years—especially from birth through age 8—are enormously important when it comes to lifelong learning. Achievement gaps formed in the early years are not impossible to close, but it's much better to get it right from the start. At a time when Nebraska's success depends on an educated and engaged citizenry, we must ensure all children, and especially those placed at risk, have the same opportunities to achieve their full potential.

As you'll see in this report, the Buffett Institute is off to a remarkable start. You'll learn about the important work our faculty, staff, and external partners are doing to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children and their families. You'll hear examples of our early successes. You'll see evidence of our outreach and engagement across the state.



You're about to read the story of an institute that will—in the words of our founding executive director, Dr. Sam Meisels—make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby. Sam's leadership has been vital to our success.

I know from personal and professional experience that the first eight years of a child's life lay the foundation for success down the road. When it comes to ensuring quality learning and development opportunities for all children, the stakes couldn't be higher. That's why the University of Nebraska has made a more significant commitment to early childhood than any other university in the country. We have much to be proud of already. I am excited about what we can accomplish, together, in the years ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hank Bounds". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Hank Bounds
President, University of Nebraska

Start Early. Start Well.

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska is a start-up. But it's not a classic start-up. The Buffett Institute is a start-up in America's heartland, not in Silicon Valley. It's a start-up within a major public university, not in an entrepreneur's garage. It's a start-up about children and families placed at risk that builds on the passion of its founding donor and the Midwest values of doing the right thing. What's more, it's a start-up with resources and leadership — a start-up at scale.

In this report you'll learn about the first three years of this unique organization — how we came to be, what we've accomplished, and where we're going.

You'll learn that the Institute is mission-driven. Each of us at the Institute knows why we work here — to change the life trajectory of children placed at highest risk by society. None of us will rest until we have made headway on that goal. None of us will be satisfied until all children have a better life ahead.

This report tells you about our efforts to close the achievement gap, improve the qualifications and support for those working with children between birth and the end of third grade, engage all four campuses of a major public university on behalf of early childhood, collect policy-oriented data and use it on behalf of children and families, and grow support for the field of early care and development. All of this must be in place to achieve our bold vision: to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby.

We invite you to join with us on the journey that lies ahead.



Table of Contents

I. Introducing the Buffett Early Childhood Institute

The Birth of the Institute.....	8
The Challenge.....	10
Milestones.....	12
The Journey Begins.....	15
Vision, Mission, Goals, and Outcomes.....	16

II. Closing the Achievement Gap

Achievement Gap Challenge.....	20
Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan.....	21
Six Big Ideas.....	22
Three Levels of Implementation.....	24
By the Numbers.....	26
Evaluation.....	27

III. Creating the Early Childhood Workforce of the Future

Early Childhood Workforce Development Program.....	30
Laying the Foundation.....	30
A Blueprint for Transformation.....	32
Four Key Components.....	33
Critical Steps to a Statewide Plan.....	34

IV. Partnering With the University of Nebraska

Community Chairs.....	38
Graduate Scholars.....	39
Research Partnerships.....	40
Faculty Collaborations.....	42
Graduate Assistantships.....	43
The Collaboratorium.....	43
Communications.....	43

V. Public Education and Outreach

Nebraskans Voice Support for Early Care and Education.....	47
Statewide Community Visits.....	48
Events.....	49
Communications.....	50
State Voice. National Leader.....	51

VI. Financials

Income and Expenditures.....	54
Major Gifts.....	55
Contracts and Grants.....	55

VII. A Final Word..... 58

Appendix..... 60

Introducing the Buffett Early Childhood Institute

As we work to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby, we believe that we hold in our hands the potential to transform the trajectory of life for children in greatest need.





The Birth of the Institute

In February 2010, J.B. Milliken, then the sixth president of the University of Nebraska, proposed a bold, new idea to Susie Buffett, the Omaha-based philanthropist and civic leader. He suggested to her a “very important priority for the University:” the creation of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute.



President Milliken knew Susie Buffett was someone with a lifelong commitment to social justice, an extensive record of support for early childhood and public school education—especially for children raised in poverty—and a loyalty to the state that had nurtured her and her family. She had supported the development of Educare centers all across the U.S., developed and sustained early childhood and public school programs in Omaha and elsewhere in the state and nation, encouraged and funded national early childhood policy initiatives, and been a powerful spokesperson for the importance of starting early and starting well.

Over the years, President Milliken had become well-versed in early childhood issues and was deeply knowledgeable about the strengths, passions, and needs of the University, the state of Nebraska, and its citizens. He viewed the proposed institute as “a new core mission for the University of Nebraska in the 21st century, aligned with the strengths of our history and structure and our research, education, outreach, and policy functions.”

By 2010, early childhood education no longer had to fight for its place in the sun. The evidence was clear that the early years of life are crucial to the fulfillment of children's potential and society's goals. Parents, educators, and policymakers had come to recognize the importance of early learning for all children. From President Milliken's perspective, raising early childhood to a university priority would satisfy a host of valued objectives: educating the next generation in a rapidly growing field, providing access and enhanced knowledge to those already in the field, contributing leadership to state and national policymaking, and strengthening the vigorous research already underway in early childhood development on the various university campuses.

Susie Buffett's engagement with the Institute rested on three broad requirements. First, the Institute's highest priority — its emphasis on

vulnerable children — had to be clear. Second, the Institute had to provide value-added gains, rather than duplicating what was already in existence. Third, because Susie understood the importance of transforming the landscape nearest to her first — even as she reached for major national impact — the Institute had to have a powerful effect on the lives of children and families in Nebraska.

After further discussion with national experts and completion of a comprehensive planning document by university faculty, Susie made a pledge to provide funds to endow the Institute, contingent on the University matching her gift one-for-one. This agreement amounted to the largest commitment any university in the U.S. — public or private — has made to the field of early childhood development and education. This report tells the story of the Institute's first three years.





The Challenge

The challenge the University of Nebraska leadership and Susie Buffett set was to give shape to a four-campus, university-wide multidisciplinary research, practice, policy, and outreach institute committed to transforming early childhood development and education, especially for children placed at risk and their families, in Nebraska and across the nation.

But how does one state, one university, one institute account for generations of research and use that accumulated knowledge to meet the challenge of applying the best of what's known on behalf of children who need help the most?

How can one institute, intended to become a new model for how public higher education is engaged in the first years of life, accomplish this while also changing public perceptions, enhancing the quality of the early childhood workforce, engaging communities and policymakers, and reimagining the role of public education in the lives of young children and their families?

And how did the Institute grow from two people — the founding executive director, Samuel Meisels, and associate executive director, Renee Wessels — to a fully operational organization with nearly 30 staff on-site and another 20 affiliated staff off-site, active university partnerships, and innovative programs that apply the “best of what is known” about early childhood development and learning in just three years?

These are the questions we review in this document. The answers require an appreciation of five key planning and organizational strategies.

Key Strategies

Vision

The work of the Buffett Institute is clearly grounded in our vision — that Nebraska will become the best place in the nation to be a baby — and it is rooted in our mission that we will work collaboratively to improve the lives of young children by improving their learning and development. This vision and mission were embraced by the Institute’s Strategic Planning Commission in 2013 and serve as the basis for the daily work of the Institute. Our Strategic Master Plan lays out the ways in which we seek to operationalize this vision and mission.

Leadership Team

Finding the best talent to help lead the Institute and operate its programs and partnerships has been an extraordinarily important task from the earliest days of the Institute. National searches and hires of local professionals enabled us to build a talented staff for this evolving world-class institute.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning has been critical to our work and helped us define the assumptions, activities, and outcomes that are essential for the Institute to achieve its targeted goal of closing the achievement gap. Our “theory of change” and its attendant planning process have helped provide Institute leadership with an increasingly clear set of outcomes and indicators for

evaluating and measuring our efforts and our success. Significant energies were dedicated to this planning work once the leadership team was assembled. Our intended outcomes guide annual planning and priority-setting decisions.

Signature Programs

Our two signature programs speak to the goals of the Institute: to close the achievement gap for vulnerable young children and to ensure that a skilled, diverse workforce is available to care for and teach young children. Launching these initiatives has been an extraordinarily intense undertaking. The issues raised by these programs are complex and involve multiple systems of care, higher education, public policy, and regulation. Both programs will continue to emerge and evolve over time.

Financial Management and Growth

Managing an institute that effectively stewards resources and plans for future growth is an important priority for Institute leadership. We are grateful for the support provided by the University of Nebraska and the University of Nebraska Foundation. While we are fortunate to have a stable funding base through our endowment, new programs and initiatives require additional resources. Our aim is to plan for these areas of strategic growth in order to ensure their future success.

Milestones



2011

JANUARY

The University of Nebraska announces that Susie Buffett, Omaha philanthropist and longtime champion of early childhood development, has made a gift to the NU Foundation to help establish a generous endowment and create the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. The University of Nebraska commits to matching the founding gift, signaling the largest commitment to early childhood of any university in the nation.

2012

OCTOBER

NU President J.B. Milliken announces the hiring of Samuel Meisels as the Institute's founding executive director.

2013

JUNE

Institute operations begin when Meisels starts work in Nebraska. The Buffett Institute office is housed at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

OCTOBER

First annual meeting of the Institute's Board of Advisors, a distinguished national panel of highly respected educators and researchers.

DECEMBER

Meisels and the Institute's Strategic Planning Commission (composed of stakeholders from within the NU system and throughout the state) complete a strategic master plan, establishing the vision, guiding principles, and key strategies for the Institute's work.

2014

JANUARY

Meisels and the Institute are invited by the 11 superintendents of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties to develop an early childhood plan for children living in poverty. Meisels requests the superintendents designate senior staff to work with him and the Institute to create the "Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan." The plan is the first initiative of the Achievement Gap Challenge, one of the Buffett Institute's two signature programs.

APRIL

Buffett Institute administrative offices are established at the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center at UNO, a new building dedicated to collaboration and to fostering partnerships between UNO students, faculty, and staff and nonprofit or governmental organizations.

JUNE

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan is unanimously approved by the superintendents of 11 school districts in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, and goes on to the Learning Community Coordinating Council, where it receives unanimous approval as well.

SEPTEMBER

Buffett Institute leadership team begins work. Directors lead Institute efforts in program development, workforce planning and development, research and evaluation, communications, and fund development.

2015

JANUARY

Details of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan for reducing or eliminating achievement gaps in the Omaha metro area are announced. Millard Public Schools Superintendent Jim Sutfin calls the plan a "game-changer" for early childhood.

MAY

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan inaugural "Professional Development for All" Institute draws 250 early childhood professionals.

Sam Meisels and others from the Buffett Institute travel to Scottsbluff and Sidney to meet with educators and learn more about early childhood education in the Panhandle. The trip kicks off a series of visits to communities across Nebraska.

JUNE

The Buffett Institute Collaboratorium opens in the College of Education and Human Sciences at UNL, providing collaboration and meeting space for the Institute and those working on early childhood issues.

SEPTEMBER

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan begins implementation in 12 schools. A complement of 29 professionals—including 25 working on-site at the schools—begin working with schools, districts, families, and communities.

The Buffett Institute and Aspen Institute partner for early childhood education symposium in Omaha.

OCTOBER

Buffett Institute conference at UNL examines critical workforce needs across Nebraska. Attending are representatives from 22 of the state's 24 higher education institutions, the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and other agencies.

NOVEMBER

Buffett Institute announces creation of four endowed community professorships that will be established by the Institute on University of Nebraska campuses to deepen campus focus on early care and education. The Community Chairs will focus on applying early childhood research in ways that benefit families, early childhood professionals, and communities.

2016

JANUARY

The Buffett Institute Graduate Scholars Program is launched to support multidisciplinary early childhood research at NU.

Meisels is appointed by Governor Pete Ricketts to the Governor's Education and Workforce Roundtable to identify critical early childhood issues, discuss needed reforms, and advise the governor.

MARCH

Results of the Buffett Institute/Gallup survey on early childhood care and education are announced at UNL. The survey is the largest public opinion poll ever conducted about early childhood in Nebraska.

MAY

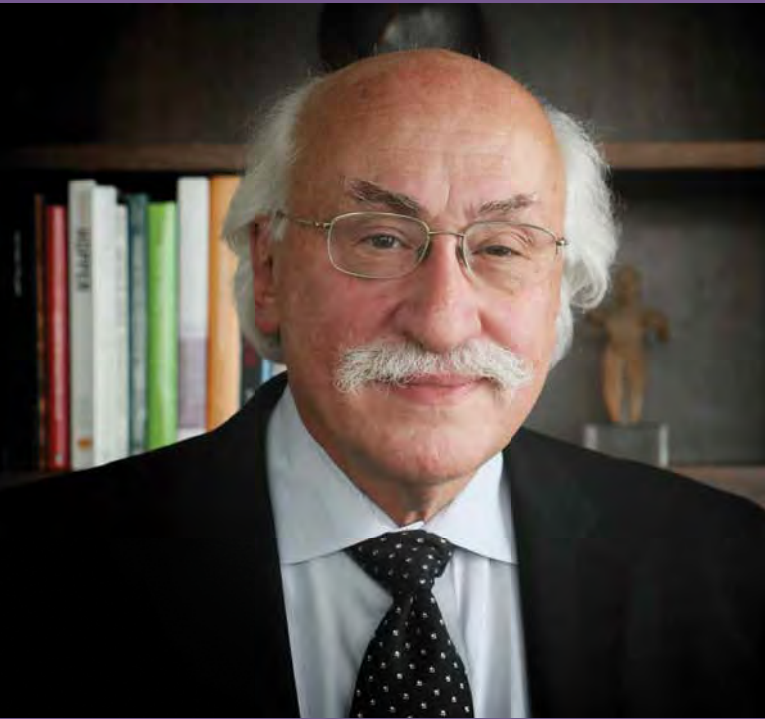
The first of four Buffett Institute Community Chairs is selected. The University of Nebraska at Kearney and Buffett Institute announce Kathleen Gallagher as the recipient of the Cille and Ron Williams Community Chair for Early Childhood Education.

Inaugural class of Buffett Institute Graduate Scholars selected.

Meisels reports to the Board of Regents on Institute's first three years and shares successes.

OCTOBER

The second of four Buffett Institute Community Chairs is selected. David Dzewaltowski will be the Community Chair for Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, beginning in January 2017.



Samuel J. Meisels

University of Nebraska leaders knew from the outset that their dream of building a world-class early childhood institute would require a visionary leader. Their search led them to Samuel J. Meisels, one of the nation's most accomplished and respected early childhood voices.

Meisels's reputation as a teacher, research scientist, and champion for young children preceded him. A former preschool, Kindergarten, and first grade teacher, Meisels came to Nebraska after more than 11 years as president of Erikson Institute, the nation's leading graduate school in child development. For 21 years, he was a faculty member at the University of Michigan's School of Education and a research scientist at the Center for Human Growth and Development. Previous to that, Meisels was a professor in the

Department of Child Study at Tufts University and director of the Eliot-Pearson Children's School. He also served as senior advisor in early childhood development for the Developmental Evaluation Clinic of Boston Children's Hospital. Today he is President Emeritus at Erikson and Professor and Research Scientist Emeritus at the University of Michigan. At the University of Nebraska, in addition to being founding director of the Institute, he is also a professor of Child, Youth, and Family Studies at UNL and holds courtesy appointments as a professor of public health at UNMC, education at UNK, and public administration at UNO.

One of the world's leading authorities on the assessment of young children, Meisels has published nearly 200 research articles, books, monographs, and assessments. His research focuses on the development of alternative assessment strategies for young children, the impact of high-stakes testing on children and teachers, and developmental screening in early childhood.

Meisels holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Rochester and master's and doctoral degrees from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In 2010 he was awarded an honorary doctorate in humane letters from Roosevelt University in Chicago.

Upon his hiring, Susie Buffett said: "Dr. Meisels is a world-class leader for the new Institute. He brings just the right vision, experience, and skills needed to launch this initiative. With Sam at the helm, the Institute will play a major role in transforming early childhood practice, early childhood research, and early childhood policy in Nebraska and across America."

The Journey Begins

The Institute was established in 2011 and became operational in June 2013 when the founding executive director, Samuel J. Meisels, joined the University. Upon his appointment, Meisels convened two advisory groups. The first was a Strategic Planning Commission, composed of nearly three dozen stakeholders, that helped establish priorities for the Institute and refine its mission and vision. The second was a 10-person national Board of Advisors that meets annually to review the work of the Institute and provide recommendations on how it can better achieve its goals and fulfill its potential. (Membership in these groups is listed at the end of this report.)

The Institute's programs and activities are governed by five assumptions or parameters that reflect its founding and its university context.

Four Campus

We operate on the four campuses of the University of Nebraska and are not affiliated with a specific campus or discipline. Our administrative home is located at the University of Nebraska Omaha, but we've also renovated space in the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and sponsor programs for students and faculty in Kearney and at the Medical Center.

Children in Greatest Need

We are dedicated to promoting the development and learning of all children, but especially those who are vulnerable as a consequence of being raised under conditions of poverty, abuse, and/or developmental, learning, familial, or behavioral challenge.

Birth Through Eight

We are devoted to the first eight years of life. Research teaches us that by going beyond a single year of PreK, or even birth–3 or birth–5

programs, the likelihood of creating lasting change and growth is greatly enhanced. Early childhood intervention calls for a long-term investment; there are no short-term inoculations or simple solutions.

Urban and Rural

Reflecting our place of origin, we are committed to working in both urban and rural areas of the state, beginning first in Nebraska and then nationally and beyond.

Applied Research

Our method is to apply the knowledge acquired from basic research to programs, policies, and actions that foster the development of all children. All of our intervention, professional development, outreach, and policy activities require a sound evidence base. We do not desire to be a voice in the ivory tower; rather we seek to translate what's been learned in the ivory tower to day-to-day practice and use it to help those who need this knowledge the most.

Our vision is to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby.

Research demonstrates that high-quality early learning experiences are linked to progress in school, increased earnings, reduction in anti-social behavior, lowered welfare participation, reduced adolescent pregnancy, and less trouble with the law. In making Nebraska the best place to be a baby, we believe that we hold in our hands the potential to transform the trajectory of life for children in greatest need—both here and ultimately, beyond Nebraska. Given what we know, there is no justification for ignoring the impact of high-quality early care and education.

Our mission is to *transform the lives of young children by improving their learning and development*. We accomplish this by harnessing the interdisciplinary resources and research of the four University of Nebraska campuses and developing collaborations with schools, agencies, community partners, and policymakers all across the state to implement and support high-quality, evidence-based services, programs, and policies for young children and their families.



Outcomes

To close the achievement gap and improve opportunities to learn, the Institute's senior leadership identified a set of global outcomes, as well as a related group of more fine-grained indicators, to enable us to monitor how this is being accomplished. Working with a wide range of collaborators and organizations, the following represent the categorical outcomes we established:

- Children's health and development are on track
- Children's learning and development are on target
- Families are supported and supportive
- High-quality early care and education from birth–Grade 3 is available to all
- The early childhood workforce is skilled, informed, and diverse
- Communities are committed and engaged
- Public policies are informed and effective

These outcomes and their associated indicators help guide the Institute's decision-making and represent a set of beliefs about how to close the achievement gap and create greater opportunities for all children to grow, thrive, and reach their potential. We are well aware that these outcomes exceed the grasp of anything the Institute alone can accomplish. We view our mission as one of collaborating with others and serving as a catalyst to bring about the broad systemic changes we seek—changes that are

necessary for reducing the number of children who are placed at risk.

In articulating outcomes and specific measurable indicators, our goal is to help Nebraska focus on those factors that are the most important and salient for young children's growth and development. Over the first three years of the Institute's activity, we've been struck by the receptivity of state and community leaders, policymakers, and practitioners who are ready to work together and with us to achieve these outcomes. In the months ahead, the Institute will document its approach to this work in order to share it more broadly with others seeking to implement similar programs elsewhere.

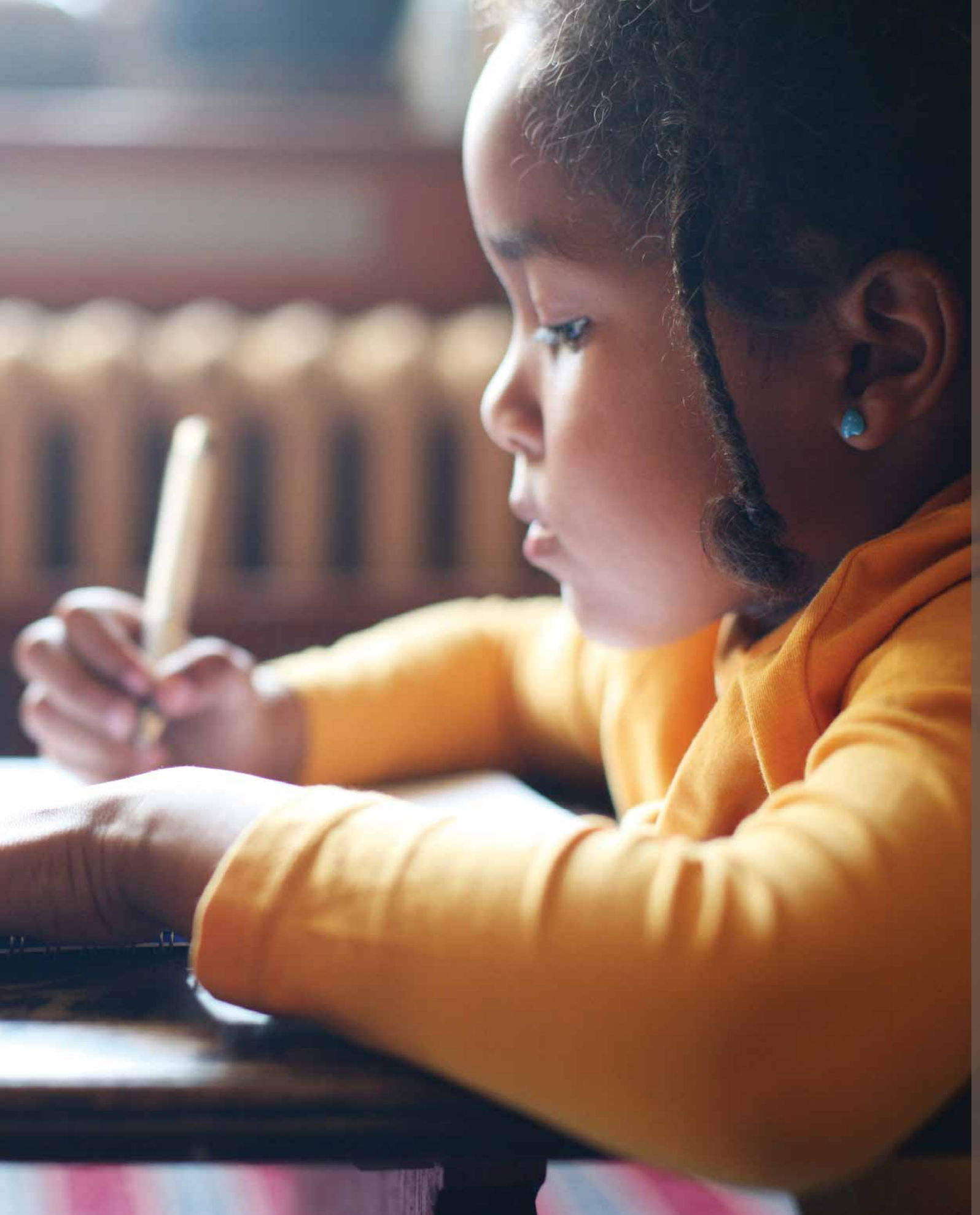
Our Goals

1. Increasing opportunities for young children to learn and eliminating achievement gaps for children in greatest need by the end of third grade.
2. Ensuring that a skilled, informed, and diverse workforce is available for all children by reinventing teacher preparation, helping create responsive state regulations, and building a positive professional environment in which early care and education professionals work.
3. Improving public understanding of early care and education for children and families by enhancing and engaging public support.

Closing the Achievement Gap

An innovative, groundbreaking approach to eliminating income- and race-based achievement gaps will help all children reach their potential.





Achievement Gap Challenge

The Achievement Gap Challenge is one of two signature programs at the Buffett Institute. Its goal is to increase opportunities to learn and eliminate income- and race-based achievement gaps for children by the end of third grade.

Like other states in the U.S., reducing or eliminating achievement gaps is a high priority for Nebraska. Using a criterion of 185 percent of the U.S. poverty rate, First Five Nebraska estimates that

42 percent of the state's children, age 5 and younger, are at risk for school failure due to poverty.

For a small population state, this is a staggering statistic. All the more staggering, however, is the disproportionate representation of children of color.

Research tells us that differences by family income in children's learning can show up as

early as 9 months and can be persistent and pervasive. Recent findings tell us that educational gaps for low-income children often continue to widen so that, by Kindergarten, many children are a year or more behind their more advantaged peers, with these gaps further widening across the early grades. These gaps limit children's opportunities for school and life success and negatively affect communities' health and well-being, workforce productivity, wealth, and quality of life.

Against this backdrop, the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan—the first initiative of the Achievement Gap Challenge—was launched in the Omaha metro area in fall 2014. Over time, the Buffett Institute will work with partner organizations, agencies, schools, and others to introduce new initiatives in other communities, including in Western Nebraska, where planning conversations are already underway, and in locations throughout the U.S.



The Achievement Gap Challenge is one of two signature programs at the Buffett Institute.



Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan

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 Grade 3. Led by Christine Maxwell, director of program development at the Institute, the plan offers a systematic approach that puts into action the best of what research has taught us. It is built around intensive, continuous, and evidence-based services for children living in high concentrations of poverty in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, 11 school districts in the Omaha metro area.

Implementation of the plan involves three levels, including full implementation at a dozen elementary schools in six school districts, customized technical assistance for seven school districts, and a "professional development for all" series that is offered to school and community-based personnel working with young children throughout the two-county area. Services consist of a home-visiting program for children from birth to 3 years old, intensive support for school- and community-based preschools and child care centers to reach 3- and 4-year-olds, and support to align Kindergarten through Grade 3 curriculum, instruction, and assessment for 5- through 8-year-olds. Family engagement and teacher mentoring are critical features of this approach.

The Superintendents' Plan represents a strong collaborative, community effort. The plan was made possible by the Nebraska Legislature in 2013 through the passage of LB 585 and is funded with enhanced levy authority of the



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 Grade 3.



Learning Community. It was developed by the Buffett Institute in partnership with the superintendents and their district representatives and was endorsed unanimously by all 11 superintendents. The Buffett Institute continues to facilitate implementation of the plan.





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 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 “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 early care and education professionals 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 child 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.



Persistence of effort yields persistence of effect.



Three Levels of Implementation

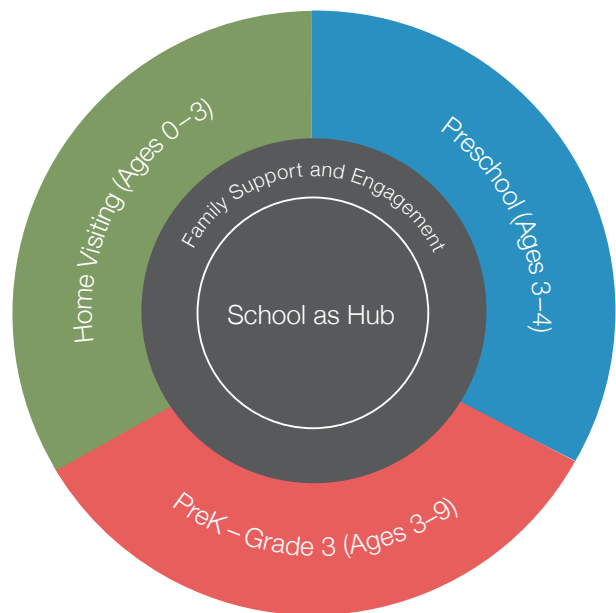
The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan provides three interconnected opportunities for school districts, elementary schools, and community-based professionals to strengthen early childhood efforts.

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 opportunity to come together and learn from one another.

Customized Technical 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.

Full Implementation of Birth–Grade 3 Approach. Twelve elementary schools, 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: weekly 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.



Schools and School Districts



Full-Implementation Schools

Belleaire Elementary School
(Bellevue Public Schools)

Douglas County West Elementary School
(Douglas County West Community Schools)

William Cody Elementary School
(Millard Public Schools)

Mari Sandoz Elementary School
(Millard Public Schools)

Gomez Heritage Elementary School
(Omaha Public Schools)

Liberty Elementary School
(Omaha Public Schools)

Mount View Elementary School
(Omaha Public Schools)

Pinewood Elementary School
(Omaha Public Schools)

Karen Western Elementary School
(Ralston Public Schools)

Meadows Elementary School
(Ralston Public Schools)

Mockingbird Elementary School
(Ralston Public Schools)

Westbrook Elementary School
(Westside Community Schools)

Customized Technical Assistance for School Districts

Bellevue Public Schools

Bennington Public Schools

Elkhorn Public Schools

Gretna Public Schools

Papillion La Vista Community Schools

Ralston Public Schools

Westside Community Schools



By the Numbers

School district and elementary school participation in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan impacts thousands of children, families, and teachers:

150

Children, birth to age 3, receive weekly home visiting.*

500+

PreK–third grade educators at the 12 full-implementation schools.

1,000

Participants have enrolled in professional development programs.

3,500+

Children and families from PreK–third grade at the 12 full-implementation schools.

15,000+

Children in PreK–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.

*Number reflects the program at full capacity

Evaluation

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation will provide information about how well this program is working for families, children, schools, and teachers. The plan relies on a two-phase, multi-method design that focuses on full implementation of the birth—Grade 3 approach. It has two purposes. It provides information about the implementation of core components of the plan and areas in need of improvement, and it gives teachers, principals, directors, superintendents, Buffett Institute staff, and policymakers data about the impact of the plan on children, families, teachers/classrooms, and schools. Children will be followed through Grade 3 once they are enrolled in the evaluation study.

Over the next five years, a subsample of approximately 350 children and their families will be included in the evaluation. About 150 children, birth to age 3, and 200 randomly selected children in PreK and Kindergarten classrooms (3–4 children per classroom) will be assessed. Approximately 200 teachers in PreK–Grade 3 classrooms in participating schools will also be included.

We believe that what we learn from this evaluation will be beneficial for early childhood educators and policymakers in Nebraska and across the country. 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 are conducting the evaluation in partnership with the Buffett Institute.



Creating the Early Childhood Workforce of the Future

High-quality early care and education settings need a diverse workforce of skilled, informed early childhood professionals.





Early Childhood Workforce Development Program

The Early Childhood Workforce Development Program focuses on one of the most important issues facing early childhood today — how best to ensure a high-quality early childhood workforce that is recognized for the critical role it plays in children’s growth and development.

Laying the Foundation

To tackle this challenge, the Institute recognized the need to establish a foundation for understanding the conditions of the early childhood workforce and for helping us identify effective strategies for future growth. Three principal activities formed this context.



Nebraska Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory. To better understand professional preparation for those working in early childhood in the state, we partnered with the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley in 2014–15 to conduct the Nebraska Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory.

Information acquired from the Inventory is assisting the Institute in recommending important changes in the way institutions of higher education prepare their students to join the early childhood workforce. It also provides a rich pool of information to draw on as we work with colleagues and stakeholders to develop a statewide plan for improving the early care and education workforce.

Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey. To learn about the Nebraska early childhood workforce and their views and perspectives about young children, the Institute commissioned the largest survey of its kind in state history — a



comprehensive overview of the state's early childhood workforce (birth–Grade 3).

Data analysis from the survey is underway and will be widely disseminated once completed early in 2017. These data will allow us to compare Nebraska early educators to national profiles, examine regional patterns across the state, and fuel insights that can drive program and policy changes.

Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce:

A Statewide Conference. More than 120 participants from higher education institutions, the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and other agencies attended a conference entitled “Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Nebraska” held at University of Nebraska-Lincoln in October 2015. Twenty-two of the state's 24 higher education institutions were represented and,

along with national consultants, began building a consensus around how to address Nebraska's early childhood workforce needs.

In the months following the conference, the Institute hosted a series of think tanks with faculty and administrators from Nebraska's institutions of higher education as well as early childhood professionals working directly with practitioners or those who provide regulatory oversight to child care and early education providers and settings.

Discussion and findings from these stakeholder conversations were invaluable for understanding the perspectives of those working in Nebraska's early care and education field. The conference and subsequent think tanks also provided the opportunity for the Institute to form important relationships and begin to think about how Nebraskans can come together to better serve children and families.

A Blueprint for Transformation

In the spring and summer of 2016, Institute leadership and staff, led by Susan Sarver, director of workforce planning and development, began assimilating the discovery and discussion of the past two years in order to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for improving and expanding the state's early childhood workforce. Informed by the Institute's surveys, think tanks, and the 2015 conference, we were able to use what we know about large-scale systems change in order to develop a blueprint or theory of change for this transformation.

Central to our conclusions are the beliefs that a highly qualified workforce requires a supportive professional environment, investment in the professionals themselves, an agreed upon set of competencies, and aligned systems across early childhood settings. To be successful, we must rely on collaboration and engagement across the multiple systems of higher education, early care and education, and regulation and policy. We believe that if leaders and practitioners can reach consensus around a set of shared understandings and a shared vision, it is possible to successfully address the complex issues facing early childhood today.



Four Key Components

Four key components are incorporated in the Blueprint for Transforming Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce. Underlying all is a commitment to principles of equity, collaboration, evidence-based practice, responsiveness to local needs, and sustainability.



Common Definitions and Competencies. As a state and professional field, it is essential to develop a common set of definitions and criteria for such terms as high-quality teacher, educator, and caregiver. Specific skill and competency statements tied to these definitions must be agreed upon across two- and four-year preparation programs and systems of certification and regulation.

Alignment and Integration. A review of regulations and certification standards that reflect the competencies and higher education course and program requirements is vitally important. A common set of competencies allows for integration within and across systems of practice and regulation. Aligned competencies also increase efficiency and effectiveness by eliminating competing policies and practices and removing barriers to the current and future workforce. Once this alignment is achieved, systems of care and education can begin using these competencies for hiring, training, and structuring their programs.

Supportive Professional Environment. The workforce environment is an essential element in enabling caregivers and educators to implement best practices for children and families. Supervisors, principals, and directors need sufficient background in child development and early education to effectively support and understand best practices. A supportive professional environment that compensates workers fairly and offers career advancement opportunities is critical for attracting and retaining high-quality practitioners in the field.

Development of Workforce Professionals. Creating the early childhood workforce of the future requires recognizing and expanding these individuals' expertise so they feel valued by their employers, the communities they serve, and the general public. This calls for induction and mentoring programs that ensure that those who comprise the early childhood workforce are prepared to see themselves as professionals who fulfill a critical role in the healthy growth and development of Nebraska's children, as well as opportunities to continue their professional learning.

Critical Steps to a Statewide Plan

The Institute is working intensively with two planning groups to develop a comprehensive statewide plan for the Nebraska early childhood workforce. We are using the foundational knowledge that has been acquired over the past three years and are guided by the Blueprint for Transforming Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce, which outlines components that are critical for success.

Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce

Commission. In fall 2016 the Buffett Institute is convening a statewide group of key stakeholders to serve on the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission. This representative group of leaders, educators, and practitioners will be charged with developing a comprehensive statewide plan. Members will be asked to articulate a shared vision for the state's early childhood workforce and identify achievable outcomes and plan of action based on the four components of the proposed blueprint.

Commission membership will include representatives from higher education, early care and education, and policy and regulation. Other entities critical to bringing about the transformative goals we are committed to include private philanthropy, chambers of commerce, business and economics, and labor development specialists. We envision workgroups or committees that will delve into select areas of focus.

The Buffett Institute will staff and support the commission's work, and emphasis will be placed on public education and outreach. The commission will be co-chaired by Buffett Institute Founding Executive Director Sam Meisels and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Interim Senior Vice Chancellor Marjorie Kostelnik.



Nebraska Early Childhood National Academy Team. The second planning group is an invited group of leaders, educators, practitioners, and policymakers who serve on the Nebraska Early Childhood National Academy Team.

The Buffett Institute, in cooperation with the National Academy of Medicine's Innovation to Incubation Program, is convening a team to examine state and national efforts based on recommendations from the recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) consensus report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. The 13 recommendations in this seminal report span local, state, and federal levels that can potentially have a significant impact on the field. The National Academy's Innovation to

Incubation Program brings together state teams and national organizations to discuss opportunities and barriers encountered in implementing the recommendations of the report.

Nebraska will join a cohort of states including Colorado and Minnesota with the intent of reviewing the IOM recommendations for their relevance to Nebraska and their potential for implementation; compiling and reporting on successful strategies used in other states and their applicability within the Nebraska context; and assembling information and tools that may be useful to the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission.



Partnering With the University of Nebraska

No other university in the nation — public or private — has made a more significant commitment to the field of early childhood development and education than the University of Nebraska.





Partnering With the University of Nebraska

One of the foundational features of the Institute is its university-wide affiliation. We are not an independent agency, college, or school, but an integral component of the University at large. Indeed, we have an obligation to relate to all four campuses of the University. The connections to the University extend the reach of our signature programs by sustaining them and strengthening our efforts on behalf of early care and education throughout the state and nation.

We not only view the University as a partner, but we also want to strengthen its capacities in the early childhood field. We will accomplish this not by supplanting its activities or faculty, but by supplementing them. Over the past three years, the Institute has helped fund professorships, assistantships, grants, and numerous other opportunities for collaboration with faculty, students, and researchers across disciplines and campuses.

Community Chairs

UNK – Ron and Cille Williams Community Chair for Early Childhood Education

(College of Education, Department of Teacher Education)

UNL – Community Chair in Infant Mental Health (College of Education and Human Sciences, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies)

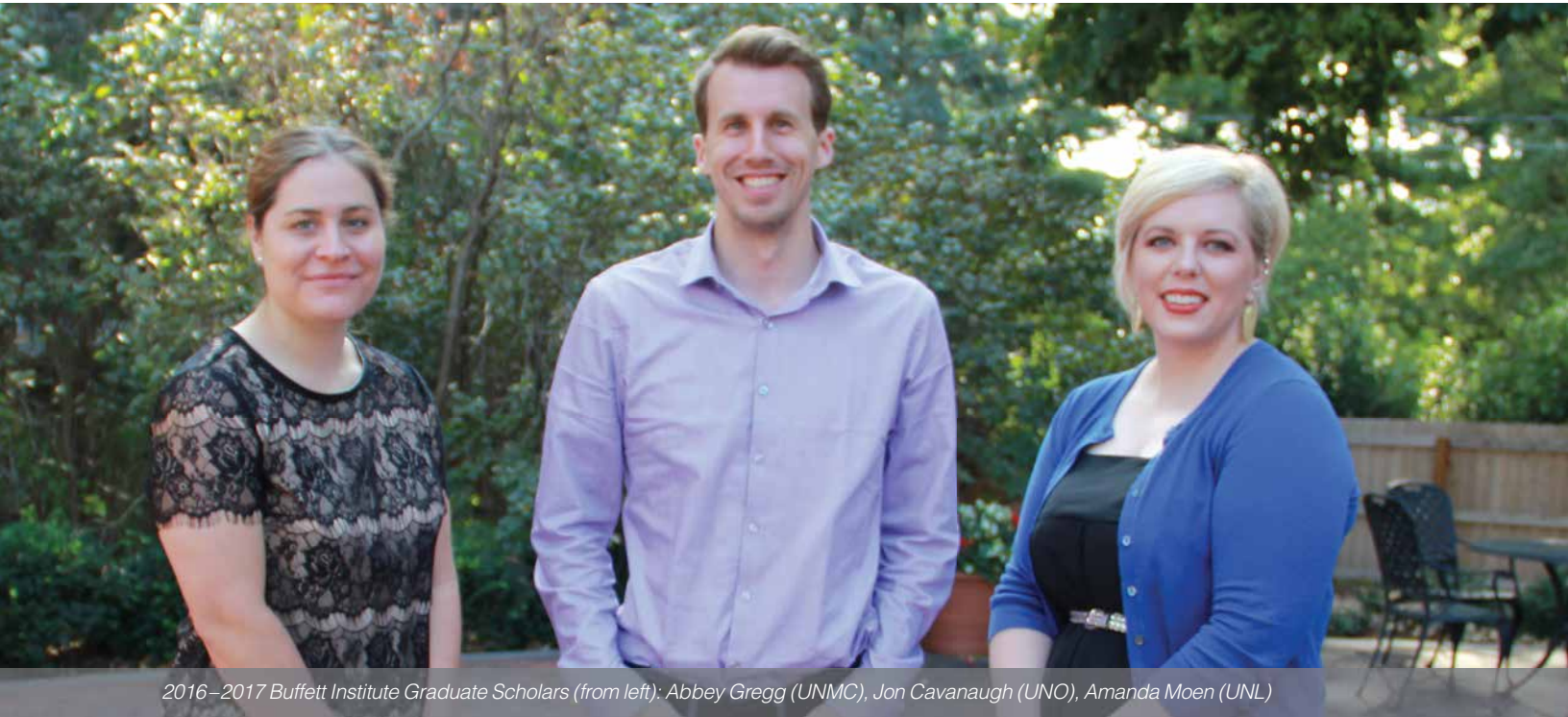
UNMC – Community Chair in Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention (College of Public Health, Department of Health Promotion, Social and Behavioral Health)

UNO – John E. Christensen Chair in Early Child Welfare (College of Public Affairs and Community Service, School of Social Work)

Community Chairs

The Buffett Institute is breaking new ground nationally by establishing endowed professorships on each of the four University of Nebraska campuses. Called “community chairs,” these positions are intended to translate the research base of specific university disciplines to communities of practice and, in doing so, broaden practice and scholarship in their discipline or sector and enhance interdisciplinary activity at the Institute. Each tenured community professor will devote the majority of his or her time to their home campus while also working with the Institute and the other three chairs for at least one-quarter of their academic appointment.

The Community Chair represents a new role for faculty that goes well beyond teaching, research, and service to include campus leadership and responsiveness to the local community through



2016–2017 Buffett Institute Graduate Scholars (from left): Abbey Gregg (UNMC), Jon Cavanaugh (UNO), Amanda Moen (UNL)

translational and applied research. We and our campus partners are in the process of recruiting endowed professors who represent different sectors or areas of expertise in early childhood development. Two positions have already been filled, one at the University of Nebraska at Kearney by Kathleen Cranley Gallagher, a nationally recognized early childhood researcher who most recently held a research scientist position at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The other, through the appointment of professor David Dziewaltowski of Kansas State University, will be in the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Graduate Scholars

In addition to recruiting endowed, tenured faculty leaders, the Institute also seeks to strengthen the ranks of applied researchers who are at the advanced graduate level. To accomplish this, we launched the Buffett Early Childhood Institute Graduate Scholars program in 2016. This is the first financial support program at the University of Nebraska devoted exclusively to doctoral students who have reached Ph.D. candidacy in one of many areas of early childhood development. It is designed to foster the growth of diverse, exceptional graduate students conducting research about early development, with particular attention to children placed at risk as a consequence of poverty and social and environmental circumstances. The Buffett Institute Graduate Scholars program awards one- and two-year grants—each worth up to \$25,000 annually—to a maximum of four doctoral students every year. The inaugural group of three scholars was selected in 2016.

University of Nebraska Early Learning Network Grant team (back row, from left): Iheoma Iruka, Lisa Knoche, Mark DeKraai, Susan Sheridan, Jim Bovaird, and Greg Welch



Research Partnerships

Our leadership team partners with University of Nebraska faculty on grant applications and ongoing research about young children's learning and development. Director of Research and Evaluation Iheoma Iruka oversees research partnerships and is directing the development of the Buffett Institute's research agenda. Current partnerships include:

Early Learning Network Grant. Iruka is co-principal investigator on a university team that was awarded a five-year, \$6.5 million federal grant to study early childhood practices and policies for 3- to 8-year-olds and a contract to lead a national network committed to improving children's outcomes. The project is part of the multi-institutional Early Learning Network, a \$26 million research initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. The team is led by the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Child Care Evaluation Grant. A multi-campus university team has received funding to evaluate and inform child care quality. The project, housed in UNL's CYFS, will pinpoint the minimum thresholds of child care quality required to promote positive development and prevent negative outcomes for children birth to age 5. Funding was provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. Iruka is co-principal investigator.

Classroom Assessment of Sociocultural Interactions-Preschool to 3rd Grade (CASI-P3) Research Network. A group of researchers from several universities, including Iruka and Tonia Durden (formerly of UNL), is working to create a classroom assessment instrument that can be used by researchers and educators to evaluate socio-cultural interactions in early childhood classrooms. Once completed and validated, the tool has the potential to help eliminate the early learning racial gap and sustain positive trajectories for children of color by ensuring that they have equitable opportunities to learn when compared to their white peers.

Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey. Susan Sarver, Buffett Institute director of workforce planning and development, and Iruka are collaborating with UNL's Bureau of Sociological Research to conduct a comprehensive overview of the state's early childhood workforce (birth to third grade). Results of the survey will be available in 2017.



Faculty Collaborations

To strengthen our programmatic work, the Buffett Institute partners with university faculty and staff in a variety of ways.

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan: The evaluation team for the plan includes faculty from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Research on Youth, Families and Schools and the Interdisciplinary Center for Program Evaluation of the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. The work group that guided the design and continues to oversee the implementation of the plan includes University of Nebraska Omaha professor Debora Wisneski; professional development activities for the plan are guided by an advisory committee that included Tonia Durden (associate professor, formerly of UNL).

Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey: The Institute formed a research partnership with UNL professor Julia Torquati and the UNL Bureau of Sociological Research to develop and administer the survey.

Buffett Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education in Nebraska: Leadership and faculty from UNK, UNL, UNMC, and UNO participated in an advisory committee for the survey.

Nebraska Early Childhood Integrated Data System: The Institute is working with UNL and UNMC faculty, along with the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and private agencies and foundations, to develop a statewide integrated data system and an accompanying report on the state of young children in Nebraska.

Ongoing Partnerships: Institute leaders have also collaborated on research grants, mentored students, and served on faculty search committees across the NU system.



Graduate Assistantships

The Institute provides research assistantships to graduate students on all four university campuses. Students contribute research and technical support for ongoing projects, including the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey, Community Risk Indicators Project, and Buffett Institute-sponsored conferences and seminars. Students are mentored by Institute leaders and gain valuable research experience, including grant and manuscript development, research presentations, and experience developing study designs and conducting statistical analyses.

The Collaboratorium

Located in Teachers College Hall at UNL, the Collaboratorium serves as a setting for multidisciplinary conversations about early childhood development that bring together faculty, students, and others from a range of different colleges and areas of interest on the various campuses, as well as early childhood practitioners and policymakers. The Collaboratorium is equipped with advanced audio/visual equipment to facilitate meetings between early childhood researchers and practitioners across the state and nation. Additionally, it provides space for graduate students and postdoctoral appointees to meet and work together.

Communications

Institute team members regularly work with the University of Nebraska communications and public affairs staff, as well as communications offices on each of the four campuses, to promote collaborative initiatives and announcements and to plan and execute special events. We also collaborate regularly with communications staff at the other NU system-wide institutes—the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute, National Strategic Research Institute, and Rural Futures Institute.

Additionally, the Institute works with various groups on the four campuses to contribute to the planning and support of a range of conferences that are consistent with the Institute's mission and that promote the Institute's goals.

Conferences and Special Events

2014

- CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood (UNL)

2015

- Celebrating Young Children (UNO)
- Strengthening the Learning and Development of African American Children (UNO)
- Fifty Years After Head Start: Making an Investment in Early Childhood Education in America (Aspen Institute and the NU Foundation)
- Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Nebraska (UNL)

2016

- Temple Grandin visit as part of the Goldstein Lecture on Human Rights (UNO)
- CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood (UNL)
- Celebrating Young Children (UNO)
- Conference on Bullying Prevention in Early Childhood (UNL)
- Early Childhood Conference (UNK)

Public Education and Outreach

We aspire to be a state voice
and national leader in the
development and promotion
of evidence-based policies
that impact children from
birth through age 8.





Public Education and Outreach

Central to the Institute's mission is a deep commitment to public education and outreach. We seek to share the best of what is known about early childhood development and education. We use public education programs and outreach strategies to reach Nebraskans and those from outside the state who are interested in our efforts and want to learn more about improving young children's learning and development.

We know that for Nebraska to become the best place in the nation to be a baby, it will require the engagement and support of all Nebraskans. Our public education programs support not only our programmatic work, but also seek to connect with individual Nebraskans and engage them in the broader mission of helping all children achieve their potential.

Through outreach, community visits, events, and communications, we are sharing what we know, and we are also listening. We believe it is vitally important to hear the public's perspectives on state and community needs and learn how local and regional contexts shape the agenda for children and families.



Nebraskans Voice Support for Early Care and Education

In 2015, we launched the Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Childhood Care and Education in Nebraska. The Institute partnered with Gallup on this unprecedented, statewide survey, which was completed in 2016. More than 7,100 residents participated, making it the largest early childhood survey in Nebraska's history and yielding one of the highest response rates Gallup has ever obtained on a mailed survey.

The survey helped us learn about the public's attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge concerning early care and education across the state. It also provided an important empirical baseline to help us track our accomplishments in the arena of public engagement.

The responses from the survey were striking. The survey report, *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, revealed the vast majority of Nebraskans—nearly seven in 10—recognize the importance of high-quality early care and education and understand that it has a long-term impact on students' success. However, few residents strongly agree that high-quality early care and education is affordable (6 percent) or available (11 percent). More than two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents voiced strong support for more investment in young children by the state.

The Buffett Institute and Gallup announced these findings in Spring 2016 at UNL before an audience of nearly 300 state and community leaders, public officials, early childhood professionals, higher education faculty, and others. A panel conversation about the survey's implications for Nebraska followed, led off by remarks from Senator Galen Hadley, Speaker of the Nebraska Legislature. Panelists included Hank Bounds, University of Nebraska president; Barry Kennedy, president of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Matt Blomstedt, commissioner of education of the Nebraska Department of Education; Iheoma Iruka, director of research and evaluation at the Buffett Institute; and Samuel Meisels, the Institute's founding executive director.

Additional reports from the survey focus on the early childhood workforce, parents' perspectives on early care and education, and urban and rural residents' views on early childhood across the state.

68%

Of Nebraska residents say early care and education has a lot of impact on the long-term success of students in school and in life.

11%

Of residents strongly agree that high-quality early care and education is available to every family in Nebraska.

67%

Of Nebraska residents strongly agree or agree that the state should make early child care and education a higher priority than it is today.

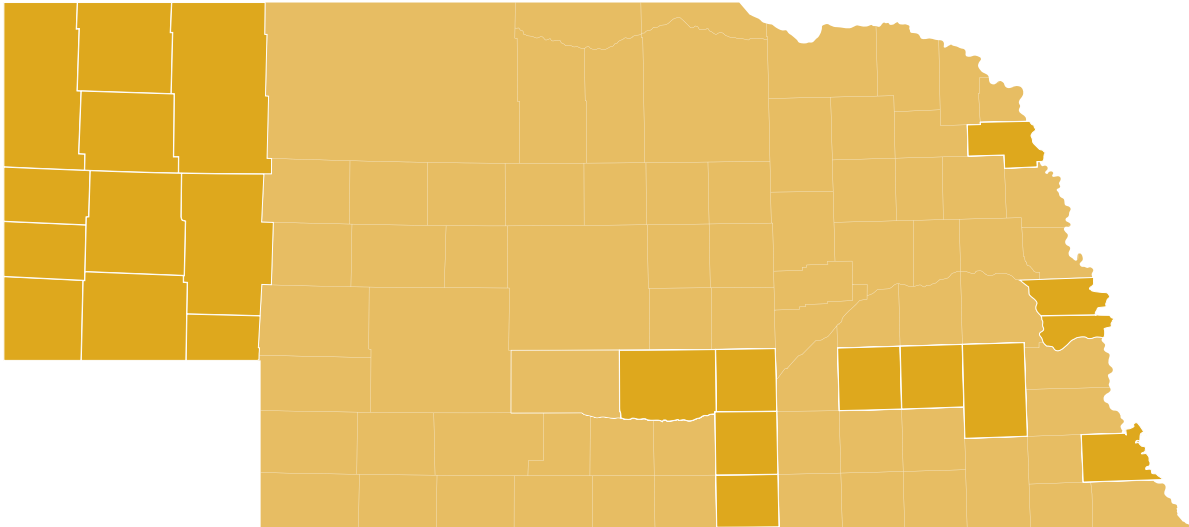
6%

Of Nebraskans strongly agree that high-quality early care and education is affordable for every family in Nebraska.

Statewide Community Visits

Members of the Buffett Institute's leadership team continue to learn about early childhood programs and the needs of vulnerable young children statewide by visiting various communities across Nebraska. We have traveled to two dozen cities and towns, meeting with school district superintendents, early childhood professionals, elected officials, representatives from Educational Service Units, two- and four-year higher education institutions, health care and social service agencies, community organizations, and others who work with young children placed at risk and their families. These conversations are helping inform our efforts to expand and enhance early childhood systems to meet the needs of young children across Nebraska. They are showing us that replication and scaling of our programs must always be based on a thorough knowledge of the specific resources and needs of the communities we are seeking to partner with.

Areas where Institute leadership and staff are working or are in an initial planning phase:



Counties

- Adams
- Banner
- Box Butte
- Buffalo
- Cheyenne
- Dawes
- Deuel
- Douglas
- Garden
- Hall
- Kimball
- Lancaster
- Morrill
- Nemaha
- Sarpy
- Scotts Bluff
- Seward
- Sheridan
- Sioux
- Thurston
- Webster
- York

Communities and School Districts

- Omaha Metro:**
 - Bellevue
 - Bennington
 - Elkhorn
 - Gretna
 - La Vista
 - Millard
 - Omaha
 - Papillion
 - Ralston
 - Springfield
 - Platteview
 - Valley
- Other:**
 - Alliance
 - Grand Island
 - Hastings
 - Kearney
 - Lexington
 - Lincoln
 - Peru
 - Red Cloud
 - Scottsbluff
 - Seward
 - Sidney
 - Winnebago
 - York

Events

Over the past three years, we've hosted and co-sponsored nearly 40 events designed to advance the science and knowledge base concerning young children's development and to raise visibility about early childhood issues.

Among the most notable hosted events, the Buffett Institute and Aspen Institute brought together some of the nation's leading early childhood experts and philanthropists for a public conversation about the future of early childhood care and education. The event, entitled "50 Years After Head Start: Making an Investment in Early Childhood Education in America," took place in September 2015 at the Strauss Performing Arts Center on the University of Nebraska Omaha campus.

More than 400 people registered to attend the panel discussion, featuring Samuel Meisels, founding executive director, Buffett Early Childhood Institute; Jackie Bezos, president and co-founder, Bezos Family Foundation; George Kaiser, chairman, BOK Financial Corporation;

Deval Patrick, managing director of Bain Capital LLC and former governor of Massachusetts; and J.B. Pritzker, co-founder and managing partner, Pritzker Group. The panel was moderated by Walter Isaacson, former chairman and CEO of CNN and Time Magazine editor and current president and CEO of the Aspen Institute, a non-partisan educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, D.C.

Other prominent co-sponsorships include the 2015 Alliance for Early Success Annual Partner Summit; the 2014 and 2016 Summits on Research in Early Childhood, organized by the Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools at University of Nebraska-Lincoln; the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's "Innovative Approaches to Strengthening Social-Emotional Development in Child Care" conference held at University of Nebraska Omaha in fall 2015; and a city-wide symposium organized with United Way of the Midlands that brought Robert Putnam of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University to Omaha to discuss his most recent book, *Our Kids*, and engage in intensive discussions with community leaders.



Featured participants in "50 Years after Head Start: Making an Investment in Early Childhood Education in America" at the University of Nebraska Omaha (from left): Walter Isaacson, George Kaiser, Jackie Bezos, Deval Patrick, J.B. Pritzker, and Samuel Meisels.

Communications

Under the leadership of director of communications, Shannon Sherman, the Buffett Institute continues to develop and launch new communications platforms, including a dynamic, mobile website, social media channels, email newsletters, and more. The effort has been successful, with significant gains in website traffic and new subscribers every week. Our database now includes nearly 4,000 higher education faculty and staff, educators, early childhood professionals, caregivers, service agencies, policymakers, business and community leaders, national early childhood organizations, and others.

More than 30 media outlets have written about the Institute. Stories have featured a range of topics, including front-page coverage of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Childhood Care and Education in Nebraska.

Additionally, dozens of materials have been produced to inform audiences about the Institute, its work, and the importance of the early years.



State Voice. National Leader.

The Buffett Institute aspires to be a state voice and national leader in the development and promotion of evidence-based policies that impact children from birth through age 8. Public policy is a key area of focus, and our voice will be directed toward those policies that will improve the lives of young children and their families as well as our communities, state, and nation. We aim to “move the needle” and feel an urgency to share what we know in ways that will shift both practice and policy.

Founding Executive Director Samuel Meisels testifies regularly before state and federal legislative committees and has participated in dozens of meetings with elected officials at the local and state levels during the past three years. At the federal level, Meisels and Iheoma Iruka, director of research and evaluation, have both participated on White House panels examining early childhood issues.

In the coming years, greater focus will be placed on building an understanding of early childhood issues nationally and sharing what we have learned in Nebraska through innovative programs and partnerships. National early childhood organizations, researchers, and policymakers are listening and watching.

Institute leaders have been invited to present to policymakers in Washington, D.C., and at national conferences and symposia hosted by:

- Alliance for Early Success
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- Society for Research in Child Development
- American Educational Research Association
- National Black Child Development Institute
- Zero to Three
- Head Start National Research Conference
- Center for Human Growth and Development at the University of Michigan
- Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University
- Educare Learning Network
- John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Nearly all of the principals and several of the superintendents who participate in the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan have also made presentations with our senior staff at state and national conferences.

Financials

“Investing in the early years... is a responsible way to shift the odds so more children will grow up eager to learn, ready for school, and inspired with hope.”

– Susie Buffett,
Sherwood Foundation



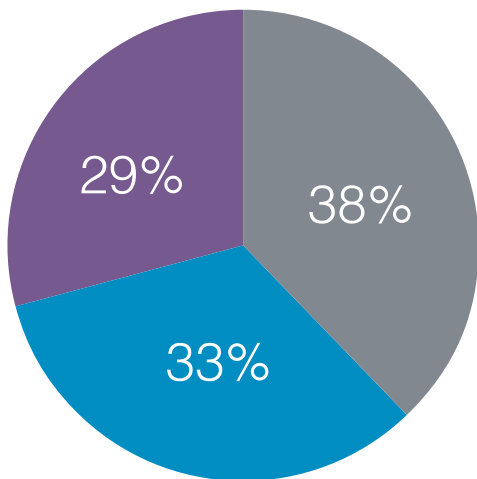


Income and Expenditures

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute has numerous sources of funding and allocates those funds among its various programs and initiatives. The Sherwood Foundation provided initial support for the Institute, matched by funds from the University of Nebraska and the NU Foundation. This remarkable public-private partnership on behalf of young children provides endowment income to support the Institute's core operations and represents a collective effort that is unrivaled in America today.

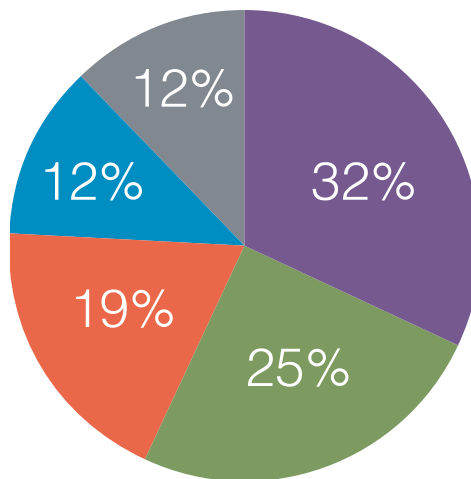
In addition to endowment income, other resources are central to the Institute's financial picture and essential for supporting the Institute's growing body of work. They are managed by our director of finance and operations, Maria Malnack, and by Rosemary Edzie, director of development. Private donors and foundations have contributed generously to the Institute's work. Government contracts and grants make possible much of the Institute's programmatic efforts. Additional in-kind support is provided by the University and each of its four campuses.

Income



- Foundations and Private Donors
- University of Nebraska
- Grants and Contracts

Expenditures



- Program Development/Achievement Gap Challenge
- Core Leadership and Operations
- Communications and Outreach
- Early Childhood Workforce Planning and Development
- Research and Evaluation

Major Gifts

Sherwood Foundation. A lead gift from Susie Buffett's Sherwood Foundation helped launch the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and secure its future. The Sherwood Foundation supports programs and practices that bridge the opportunity gap for families and help students achieve their greatest potential.

Buffett Early Childhood Fund. A gift from the Buffett Early Childhood Fund helped make possible the Buffett Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education in Nebraska, the largest statewide public opinion poll ever conducted on the topic. The Buffett Early Childhood Fund is committed to establishing a more level playing field for all children as they enter Kindergarten.

Holland Foundation. Gifts from Dick Holland's family foundation support initiatives of the Early Childhood Workforce Development program. The Holland Foundation's investment has been instrumental in the launch of this initiative and enables the Institute to collaborate with stakeholders in higher education, practice, and policy to develop a consensus-driven approach to improving the workforce and workplace conditions in the state.

The Denver Foundation. Endowment gifts from The Denver Foundation at the request of Cille and Ron Williams provided resources to establish the Williams Community Chair at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. The newly hired Community Chair will work directly with UNK and the Buffett Institute and play a leadership role in the state in promoting critical improvements in early childhood workforce preparation by translating and applying evidence-based practices.

Weitz Family Foundation. An endowment funded by the Weitz Family Foundation will establish the John E. Christensen Community Chair in Early Childhood Welfare at the University of Nebraska Omaha. The tenured professor hired for this community chair will work directly with the Buffett Institute and lead research and programmatic efforts related to issues of child welfare and child development.

Montessori Foundation. A gift from the Montessori Foundation in honor of longtime educator Lavonne Plambeck provided support for the Buffett Institute to explore how technology can be leveraged to deliver online training and needed professional development programs to teachers and care providers throughout the state.

Contracts and Grants

Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties provides funding through a half-cent property tax levy to the Buffett Institute to implement the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, a collaborative, evidence-based approach to reducing or eliminating income or race-based achievement gaps among children, birth through Grade 3, in the Omaha metro area's 11 school districts.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In collaboration with the Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools and the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Institute was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. The grant funds an 18-month project to pinpoint the minimum thresholds of child care quality needed to promote positive development and prevent negative outcomes for children birth to age 5.

U.S. Department of Education. The Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences awarded a five-year grant to a team that includes researchers from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS), the Buffett Institute, and NU's Public Policy Center. The team, led by CYFS, will conduct studies across Nebraska on early education policy, classroom practices, and children's transition from preschool through third grade.

A Final Word

“Much has been accomplished in just three years, but much more lies ahead. We have been given a remarkable opportunity — and a great responsibility — to use our resources to change the lives of young children and strengthen their future.”

– Samuel J. Meisels,
Buffett Early Childhood Institute





When I came to the Buffett Early Childhood Institute in 2013

I proposed a dramatic vision—to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby.

That vision has guided us in the challenging task of building a world-class institute dedicated to transforming the lives of children from birth through age 8 by improving their learning and development.

As we've built and shaped the Institute over these years—recruiting talented staff, partnering with University of Nebraska faculty and others committed to young children throughout the state, implementing programs with educational leaders and the support of policymakers, and traveling across Nebraska and the U.S.—that vision has grounded us. It has fueled our passion and helped us make choices about what to do first, what to invest in, what to learn more about.

Looking back, I've never been more convinced that this bold vision will become a reality. My belief is based on countless experiences and interactions with the people who make up this university and this state. The generosity of philanthropist Susie Buffett, a lifelong champion of children and families, linked to the resources and vision of the University leadership, helped launch the Institute and secure its future. Others in the state and the University were already making progress on early childhood issues—higher education, school districts, child care providers, policymakers, researchers, state agencies, community leaders, and nonprofit organizations. All have been willing and eager to work together and work with us.



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. Our work is dedicated to demonstrating that ongoing, high-quality efforts across the first eight years of life will increase the likelihood that all children will experience life success and will grow to become active and productive contributors to society. All of this is predicated on the words we use as our motto: Start Early. Start Well.

Jerome Bruner, the pioneering 20th century psychologist who taught us about the connection between child development and education and who passed away only months ago at the age of 100, gave us these words: "The importance of early childhood for the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of human beings is probably

... one of the most revolutionary discoveries of modern times. Where emotional and mental growth are concerned, well begun is indeed half done."

This is the task to which we are committed. The road ahead is long and we cannot succeed without your help, your interest, your commitment. Please join us as we make Nebraska *and beyond* the best place to be a baby.

Samuel J. Meisels
Founding Executive Director

Leadership and Staff

Leadership Team

Samuel J. Meisels, Ed.D., Founding Executive Director

Renee Wessels, Associate Executive Director

Iheoma Iruka, Ph.D., Director of Research and Evaluation

Maria Malnack, Director of Finance and Administration

Chris Maxwell, Ph.D., Director of Program Development

Susan Sarver, Ph.D., Director of Workforce Planning and Development

Shannon Sherman, Director of Communications

Rose Edzie, Ph.D., Director of Development, University of Nebraska Foundation

Program Development Staff

Kim Bodensteiner, Associate Director of Program Development

Kristy Feden, Program Manager

Cama Charlet, Educational Facilitator

Molly Colling, Program Specialist

Darcy Heath, Educational Facilitator

Dalhia Lloyd, Program Specialist

Janette Merkel, Program Specialist

Mary Beth Pistillo, Educational Facilitator

Amy Schmidtke, Educational Facilitator

Brooke Studt, Educational Facilitator

Workforce Planning and Development Staff

Catherine Huddleston-Casas, Ph.D., Associate Director of Workforce Planning and Development

Research and Evaluation Staff

Greg Welch, Ph.D., Associate Director of Research and Evaluation

Amy Roberts, Ph.D., Research Specialist

Communications Staff

Machaela Cavanaugh, Conferences and Special Projects Manager

Duane Retzlaff, Communications Associate

Administrative Staff

Lori Kuker, Administrative Associate

Maggi Nall, Administrative Associate

Community Chairs

Kathleen Gallagher, Ph.D., Cille and Ron Williams Community Chair for Early Childhood Education in the Department of Teacher Education, College of Education, University of Nebraska at Kearney

David Dzewaltowski, Community Chair for Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention in the Department of Health Promotion, Social and Behavioral Health, College of Public Health, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Graduate Scholars (2016–2017)

Jon Cavanaugh (UNO)

Abbey Gregg (UNMC)

Amanda Moen (UNL)

Graduate Assistants

Alex Daro, University of Nebraska Omaha

Kimberly Blicht, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Board of Advisors

Hiram Fitzgerald, Ph.D.

Distinguished Professor in the Department of Psychology and Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement, Michigan State University

Vivian Gadsden, Ed.D.

William T. Carter Professor of Child Development and Education, University of Pennsylvania

Eugene Garcia, Ph.D.

Professor of Education Emeritus, Arizona State University

Beth Graue, Ph.D.

Sorenson Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed.D.

Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Early Childhood and Family Policy, Teachers College, Columbia University

Tammy Mann, Ph.D.

President and Chief Executive Officer, The Campagna Center

Jessie Rasmussen

President, Buffett Early Childhood Fund

Arnold Sameroff, Ph.D.

Professor of Human Development and Distinguished Research Scientist Emeritus, University of Michigan

Ross Thompson, Ph.D.

Distinguished Professor of Psychology, University of California, Davis

Kathy Thornburg, Ph.D.

Emerita Professor of Education, University of Missouri-Columbia



Buffett Institute Board of Advisors (from left): Tammy Mann, Kathy Thornburg, Sharon Lynn Kagan, Eugene Garcia, Samuel Meisels, Jessie Rasmussen, Ross Thompson, Arnold Sameroff, Beth Graue, Vivian Gadsden. Not pictured: Hiram Fitzgerald

Strategic Planning Commission

Tonia Durden

Assistant Professor, Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Nancy Edick

Dean, College of Education, University of Nebraska Omaha

Lori Byrne

Senior Vice President, Development, University of Nebraska Foundation

Tracy Edgerton

Associate Vice President, Strategic Philanthropy, University of Nebraska Foundation

Carolyn Edwards

Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Sarah Edwards

Professor and Chair, Department of Teacher Education, University of Nebraska Omaha

Ayman El-Mohandes

Dean, College of Public Health, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Rosa Gofin

Professor, Department of Health Promotion, Social and Behavioral Health, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Gladys Haynes

Director, Nebraska Early Learning Initiatives, Buffett Early Childhood Fund

Melody Hobson

Administrator, Office of Early Childhood, Nebraska Department of Education

Barb Jackson

Associate Professor, Department of Education and Child Development, Munroe-Meyer Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center

ReNae Kehrberg

Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and Learning, Omaha Public Schools

Marjorie Kostelnik

Dean, College of Education and Human Sciences, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Sarah Ann Kotchian

Director of Early Childhood Policy and Public Relations, Holland Children's Movement

Lillie Larsen

Member, Nebraska State Board of Education

Michael Leibowitz

Director, Munroe-Meyer Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Brian Maher

Superintendent, Kearney Public Schools

Organizational affiliation listed reflects individuals' positions during their time as members of the commission.

Chris Marvin

Professor, Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Max McFarland

Professor, Department of Counseling and School Psychology, University of Nebraska at Kearney

Gay McTate

Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Family Enrichment, Ltd.

Dawn Mollenkopf

Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education, University of Nebraska at Kearney

Sue Obermiller

Vice President, Nebraska Head Start Association; Early Childhood Programs Director, Central Nebraska Community Services

Thomas Pristow

Director, Division of Children and Family Services, NE Department of Health and Human Services

Helen Raikes

Professor, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Jessie Rasmussen

President, Buffett Early Childhood Fund

Ed Scantling

Dean, College of Education, University of Nebraska at Kearney

Susan Sheridan

Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Director of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Families, and Schools

Eleanor Shirley

Director, Step Up to Quality, Nebraska Department of Education

John Sparks

Stokes-Shackleford Professor and Chair, Department of Pediatrics, University of Nebraska Medical Center

Jane Stavem

Associate Superintendent for Instruction, Lincoln Public Schools

Ted Stilwill

CEO, Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties

Fawn Taylor

Executive Director, Early Childhood Services, Omaha

Becky Veak

Director, First Five Nebraska

Brian Wilcox

Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and director of UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law

Debora Wisneski

William Langan Endowed Professor, Department of Teacher Education, University of Nebraska Omaha

To learn more, visit **buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu**.



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute

at the University of Nebraska

6001 Dodge Street, CEC 228
Omaha, NE 68182-0849

402.554.2924
buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska