

BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation: 2019-20

FIFTH YEAR REPORT



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute

at the University of Nebraska



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Executive Summary

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan offers an approach for reducing opportunity and achievement gaps based on systemic and structural inequities for children from birth through Grade 3 in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The plan was developed in response to legislation (LB 585) passed by the Nebraska Legislature in 2013 that directed the Learning Community Coordinating Council to enact an early childhood program created by the metro Omaha superintendents for young children living in areas with high concentrations of poverty. The plan is financed by a half-cent levy, resulting in annual funding of approximately \$2.9 million to be used for this purpose.

In 2013, the superintendents of the 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy Counties invited the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska to partner with them to prepare a plan for their review and, after approval by the Learning Community Council, to facilitate the plan's implementation. The plan was adopted unanimously by the 11 superintendents in June 2014 and approved by the Learning Community Council in August 2014. In-depth planning and initial implementation in the districts occurred throughout 2014-15. Implementation of plan components was launched in summer 2015 and continues.

The goal of the Superintendents' Plan is to reduce or eliminate social, cognitive, and achievement gaps among young children living in areas with high concentrations of poverty that are impacted by structural racism and systemic inequities. Translating research into practice, the plan provides for a comprehensive systems approach that transforms learning opportunities for children placed at risk for school failure by the end of third grade. Because of its systemic perspective, the plan is intended to elevate the capacity of the Omaha metro school districts to serve all young children well.

The Superintendents' Plan engages in three levels of implementation through which school districts, elementary schools, and community-based professionals can strengthen efforts targeted at increasing educational opportunity and reducing achievement gaps among young children.

1. School as Hub for Birth Through Grade 3 (full implementation) is an approach in which elementary schools serve as a connector to build pathways of continuous, high-quality, and equitable learning experiences for children starting at birth and extending through Grade 3. Strong links between school, home, and community open up new opportunities for family engagement and provide access to supports and resources as they navigate their children's learning experiences. A shared goal is the prevention and reduction of disparities in opportunity and achievement.

- 2. Customized Assistance** offers school districts technical assistance and consultation tailored to specific needs in birth through Grade 3 policies and programming. In the 2019-20 school year, the Ralston school district participated in customized assistance projects and related program evaluation.
- 3. Professional Development for All** provides a connected series of professional development institutes open to all school and community-based program leaders, teachers, early childhood professionals, and parents who work with young children from birth through Grade 3 in the Omaha metro area. Professional Development for All introduces leading-edge research and innovative practices while promoting collaborative connections and shared commitments to strong early learning and family support systems. In the 2019-20 school year, sessions on executive function and self-regulation were offered in English and Spanish.

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan entered its fifth year of implementation and evaluation across six school districts in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties in the fall of 2019. During this year, the evaluation continued to assess school-level change, program quality, family processes, and child learning and development with a focus on program quality and child development and learning. However, this year was unlike any other in the history of Omaha metropolitan schools and the Superintendents' Plan. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led districts to close school buildings through the end of the academic year and transition to distance learning strategies and suspend year-end assessments. Families were engaged in home visiting that was virtual, rather than in person. These changes impacted schooling for children, families, and teachers, as well as the Superintendents' Plan implementation and evaluation. Throughout this report, details are provided regarding modifications in programming and how evaluation captured learning from adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the 2019-20 year, evaluation activities were intended to address the following questions:

What has been learned about the processes and outcomes related to program quality, family processes, and child learning and development?

- *Are family supports and classroom practices related to program quality improving?*
- *Do family interaction processes reflect support and engagement?*
- *How are children in full implementation schools learning and developing?*
- *How are schools implementing School as Hub?*

A variety of methods were used in the current evaluation approach, including observations in family homes, direct child assessments, and family surveys. Principals, school staff, and educational facilitators were interviewed about their work supporting

school connections with families and communities. In all evaluation processes, efforts were made to understand how schools and families engage in creating contexts that support children's learning and development and how schools can be supported in leading that engagement. Evaluation to address these questions was incomplete due to disruptions in programs and assessments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings related to program quality, family processes, and child learning and development that could be examined are highlighted below.

Are family supports and classroom practices related to program quality improving?

- ***Home visiting and personal visit*** participation has remained stable. While implementing home visiting can be challenging for schools, efforts to engage families are increasing and shifted to virtual home visiting in the spring of 2020.
- ***Classroom quality*** has improved over the first five years of the full implementation and was significantly higher in 2019-20 relative to 2015-16 for classroom organization, instructional quality, and emotional support.

Do family interaction processes reflect support and engagement?

- ***Family engagement***, as connected to interaction with the home visitor and measured via the Home Visiting Rating Scales (HOVRS), improved over the course of the school year, reflecting increased quality relationships among home visitors and families.
- ***Parent-child interaction***, as assessed by the Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS) assessment tool, reflected that most parents involved in the home visiting evaluation were interacting with children in ways that supported early learning.
- ***Family perceptions of school engagement***, assessed using an adapted version of the Family Engagement Survey, reflected relatively high family perceptions of engagement with schools. Future efforts aim to increase the number of families who provide feedback using the survey.

How are children in full implementation schools learning and developing?

- ***Development and learning from birth – 3 years*** were assessed using a screening tool completed by parents. The majority of children enrolled in home visiting were developing typically, according to parents.
- ***Academic achievement in Kindergarten through Grade 3*** was assessed using school-based achievement assessments in fall and winter, but not in spring due to the pandemic. On average, children's reading and mathematics achievement status were below the expected levels and varied by family and child demographics related to income, race, and ethnicity. However, the absence of an end-of-year data point renders this conclusion premature at best.
- ***Executive functioning in PreK – Grade 3*** was evaluated using a standardized assessment. Children's executive functions were in the average range.

How are schools implementing School as Hub?

- ***Schools and districts are increasing their leadership of the Superintendents' Plan.*** Schools are shifting their perspectives related to engaging families from birth onward and learning what it means to prioritize this work amidst the landscape of competing priorities.
- ***School and district leadership have shifted their perspectives to integrating a birth – Grade 3 approach to learning.*** This is manifest in increased ownership of School as Hub, greater engagement with families, and a growing value for community partnership.
- ***Leadership has been instrumental in responding to the pandemic to provide instructional supports for families.***

The work of influencing the perspectives of school systems is complex and labor intensive and made more complex and difficult in the context of an unprecedented pandemic. As the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan enters its sixth year, program and school staff have learned to identify essential elements of school systems change. Schools and districts are engaging families and communities from children's birth through Grade 3 with varying intensity across schools and districts. Evaluation efforts are capturing how efforts are implemented and how they are manifest in program quality and family engagement.

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan: Overview

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan offers an innovative, comprehensive approach for reducing opportunity gaps based on systemic and structural inequities for children from birth through Grade 3 in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The plan was developed in response to legislation (LB 585) passed by the Nebraska Legislature in 2013 that directed the Learning Community Coordinating Council to enact an early childhood program created by the metro Omaha superintendents for young children living in areas impacted by high concentrations of poverty. The plan is financed by a half-cent levy, resulting in annual funding of approximately \$2.9 million to be used for this purpose.

In 2013, the superintendents of the 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy Counties invited the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska to partner with them to prepare a plan for their review and, after approval by the Learning Community Council, to facilitate the plan's implementation. The plan was adopted unanimously by the 11 superintendents in June 2014 and approved by the Learning Community Council in August 2014. In-depth planning and initial implementation within the districts occurred throughout 2014-15. Implementation of plan components was launched in summer 2015 and continues.

The goal of the Superintendents' Plan is to reduce or eliminate gaps for young children impacted by structural racism and systemic inequities. Translating research into practice, the plan provides for a comprehensive systems approach that aims to transform learning opportunities for children who are put at risk for school failure, starting at birth and continuing through the end of third grade. Because of its systemic perspective, the plan is intended to elevate the capacity of the Omaha metro school districts to serve all young children well, not just those impacted by poverty.

THREE LEVELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The Superintendents' Plan engages in three levels of implementation through which school districts, elementary schools, and community-based professionals can strengthen efforts targeted at increasing educational opportunities and reducing achievement gaps among young children.

Level 1: Full Implementation of the School as Hub for Birth – Grade 3 Approach

In this systems-level implementation, schools serve as hubs that connect young children, birth to Grade 3, and their families to a pathway of continuous, high-quality, and equitable learning experiences. This continuum includes home visiting for children birth to age 3, personal visits in the context of transitions to high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, and aligned Kindergarten through Grade 3 educational experiences.

Educators, families, and communities work together to attain new levels of excellence in children's early learning experiences, from birth through Grade 3. Table 1 displays demographics for full implementation schools.

On March 13, 2019, the staff of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute transitioned to working remotely due to the pandemic. One by one, each of the 11 school districts in the Superintendents' Plan closed their buildings and offered online learning, suggested at-home practice activities, and supplied take-home curriculum packets. The 10 full implementation schools varied in their support of students and families, based on district decisions and/or available resources. The Buffett Institute staff specialists, educational facilitators, and program administrator supported each school based on the needs of the school and community, providing:

Direct Support

- Adaptation of home visitation
- Food and curriculum distribution
- Grade-level transition support
- Coaching for home visitors/family facilitators, teachers, and paraprofessionals
- Professional development for home visitors/family facilitators

Resources

- Training and materials for social-emotional learning
- Best practices for supporting children's learning remotely
- Child care connections
- Child development guidelines

Planning

- Professional Development for All went online
- Professional development for full implementation schools, related to remote learning
- Instruction
- Social-emotional learning
- End-of-year and summer learning

TABLE 1. | SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS: FULL IMPLEMENTATION SCHOOLS 2019-20

District and Schools	2019-2020 Student Enrollment	2019-2020 % Free/Reduced Lunch	2019-2020 % Students of Color	% At or Above Proficient Grade 3 Language Arts*	% At or Above Proficient Grade 3 Math*
Bellevue	9,689	41.49%	33.41%	53%	52%
Belleaire	305	71.48%	44.59%	47%	50%
DC West	975	30.67%	11.08%	60%	61%
DC West	486	30.66%	8.44%	58%	63%
Millard	24,038	21.99%	23.24%	65%	65%
Cody	318	45.28%	37.74%	55%	59%
Sandoz	366	43.17%	40.44%	31%	32%
Omaha	53,483	73.67%	74.43%	33%	30%
Gomez Heritage	816	83.70%	92.40%	29%	23%
Liberty	695	85.90%	89.78%	17%	19%
Mount View	355	85.92%	87.61%	16%	20%
Pinewood	221	73.76%	80.09%	33%	28%
Ralston	3,378	56.99%	49.79%	40%	41%
Mockingbird	390	67.95%	70.51%	33%	36%
Westside	6,094	32.08%	30.69%	60%	59%
Westbrook	558	42.83%	45.70%	42%	40%
Total school enrollment	4,510				
Total district enrollment	97,647				

*Based on 2018-19 proficiencies

Level 2: Customized Assistance to Districts

Customized Assistance offers school districts technical assistance and consultation tailored to specific needs in birth through Grade 3 policies and programming. In the 2019-20 school year, the Ralston school district participated in customized assistance projects and related program evaluation. The Ralston school district made efforts to continue fostering child care partnerships and high-quality PreK practices, particularly around language development.

Level 3: Professional Development for All

Professional Development for All (PD for All) provides a connected series of professional development institutes open to all school and community-based program leaders, teachers, early childhood professionals, and parents¹ 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 while promoting collaborative connections and shared commitments to strong early learning and family support systems. The theme for the 2019-20 PD for All series was “Executive Function and Self-Regulation.” Five institutes were scheduled, three in English and two in Spanish, to provide professional development to more than 500 early childhood education professionals. Unfortunately, due to inclement weather and COVID-19, only two of the five scheduled events occurred. Over the summer, three live webinars of an hour to 1.5 hours in length were presented.

THE FIFTH YEAR OF FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHOOL AS HUB BIRTH – GRADE 3 APPROACH

School as Hub for Birth – Grade 3 is a leading-edge approach in which elementary schools serve as a connector to build pathways of continuous, high-quality, and equitable learning experiences for children starting at birth and extending through Grade 3. Strong links between school, home, and community open new opportunities for families’ engagement and provide access to supports and resources as they navigate their children’s learning experiences. A shared goal is the prevention and reduction of disparities in opportunity and achievement based on structural racism and systemic inequities.

According to the tenets of change for the School as Hub for Birth – Grade 3 approach, continuity, quality, and equity for children are the lens through which practices and policies are shaped and evaluated at all levels of educational systems, including classrooms, elementary schools, districts, and communities. Only by addressing all levels of the system can we expect this approach to be effective in reducing or eliminating disparities in opportunity and achievement based on structural racism and systemic inequities.

Continuity refers to the commitment to provide children with seamless learning and educational experiences from birth through Grade 3. Continuity and seamless transitions across the full birth through Grade 3 continuum promote stability and long-term educational success for children (Stipek et al., 2017; Takanishi, 2016).

Quality refers to the commitment to implement practices with families, children, and educators that are evidence-based, produce positive developmental and educational outcomes, and are informed by continuous improvement. (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016; Pianta, Downer, & Hamre, 2016).

Equity refers to the commitment that every child receives what is needed to succeed in school and life (Blankenstein & Noguera, 2016). An explicit focus on equity

¹ The term "parent" is used in this report to refer to the family member (parent, grandparent, guardian) who served as the primary contact and participant in the evaluation.

throughout School as Hub practices and policies provides an essential catalyst for progress toward the goal of preventing and eliminating disparities in opportunity and achievement based on structural racism and systemic inequities by starting early.

An essential feature of the School as Hub approach is a guiding integrated framework that combines educational experiences for children with opportunities for family engagement and parenting supports. The School as Hub framework identifies three essential dimensions, requiring schools to: (1) implement a continuum of birth through Grade 3 practices; (2) strengthen organizational environments; and (3) build professional capacity. These dimensions highlight the School as Hub for Birth Through Grade 3 approach as a systems approach through which multiple components work together interactively. While changes in practices to enhance child and family supports are at the forefront, school organizational environments and professional capacity are equally influential dimensions that must be intentionally cultivated as part of the transformation from traditional elementary school to School as Hub for Birth Through Grade 3 (Fullan, 2010; Sebring et al., 2006). As the School as Hub approach is implemented, strategic and interdependent changes are promoted to build professional capacity through leadership and collaborative learning. Organizational environments, such as school culture and family-school partnerships, also are strengthened. Table 2 describes the three dimensions and their components.

TABLE 2. | SCHOOL AS HUB FOR BIRTH THROUGH GRADE 3 FRAMEWORK

DIMENSIONS		
Implement Birth – Grade 3 Continuum of Practices	Strengthen Organizational Environments	Build Professional Capacity
COMPONENTS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child-Centered Teaching and Learning Child-Centered Parenting and Learning Cross-Cutting Practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture and Climate Family-School Partnerships Community-School Connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Professional Learning Collaboration

Evaluation activities specific to each of the three interconnected levels of implementation in the Superintendents’ Plan are described in the sections that follow.

EVALUATION OF THE SCHOOL AS HUB FOR BIRTH – GRADE 3 APPROACH

The Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan Evaluation aims to capture the degree to which the School as Hub for Birth Through Grade 3 framework is being implemented and observed across a range of districts and schools. In the following sections, we

describe the methods used to evaluate the approach, findings related to program quality, and what is being learned about efforts in the full implementation schools. Subsequent sections describe engagement in the customized assistance and Professional Development for All programming.

The evaluation of the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 approach (full implementation) includes evaluation at four system levels:

- Program quality in home visiting and classrooms
- Family engagement processes
- Child development and learning outcomes
- Program implementation within school systems

For the 2019-20 year, evaluation activities addressed the following questions, though not all questions were fully answered due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic:

What has been learned about the processes and outcomes related to program quality, family processes, and child learning and development?

- Are family supports and classroom practices related to program quality improving?
- Do family interaction processes reflect support and engagement?
- How are children in full implementation schools learning and developing?
- How are schools implementing School as Hub?

The full implementation approach is designed to bring about significant shifts in how “schools do school” over time. Principals, teachers, school staff, children, and families participate in the program. In addition to principals and teachers, school staff include a home visitor and family facilitator employed by each school (and funded by the levy associated with LB 585) to provide early parenting supports and promote family-school-community partnerships. Table 1 describes the characteristics of the children enrolled in the full implementation districts and schools.

Evaluation Overview: Full Implementation

The evaluation was designed to document, measure, and support the implementation of the Superintendents’ Plan, and to provide information about shifts in practices and progress in school systems, family processes and engagement, and child learning and development.

The quality of home visiting and classroom practices was assessed using the same observational measures as in previous years. Family process assessments included observations of parent-child interactions and a modified survey to assess aspects of family engagement, aligned with the theory of change dimensions. Child development

and learning outcomes were assessed with standardized measures of educational achievement and executive function. The measures chosen were either currently being utilized by the schools or could be implemented with all children in the same manner as the current school-based measures so that data could be used for multiple purposes. Data sharing agreements were negotiated with participating districts to facilitate the use of school-based data. General methods by child age group are described below. Specific methods for program quality, family processes, and child learning and development are described in the sections that follow.

Birth – Age 5

Families of children under 5 years who were enrolled in either home visiting (birth – 3 years) and/or in family facilitation (3 – 5 years) who consented to participate in the evaluation are represented in these results. Families completed developmental screening and home visiting observations that included home visitor interaction quality and parent-child interaction.

Age 3 (transitioning out of home visiting)

To allow examination of a similar “starting point” or baseline for all children enrolled in home visiting, direct assessments of academic skills, language, and social-emotional (executive function) were performed for children at age 3 who were transitioning out of the home visiting program into one of the 3 – 5 pathways (school PreK, community child care options, or home-based education).

PreK – Grade 3

Evaluation staff used school-based child assessments, direct child assessments, video observations of classroom practices, and a family survey. All children in PreK through Grade 3 were asked to participate in the evaluation through a passive consent process, which consisted of a letter sent to each school family providing an overview of the evaluation activities and the use of student assessment data. Families could decline participation in the evaluation by signing and returning the opt out form to schools within the required time frame. This process resulted in 2,820 PreK through Grade 3 children across 10 full implementation schools participating in the evaluation, with 170 declining to participate.

Following Children From Previous Cohort Design

Children included in the original design and any additional children for each of the following years continue to participate in the evaluation. Children from all the cohorts will be followed through third grade. For children enrolled in birth – age 5 programming (e.g., home visiting and personal visits), future evaluation will consider the number of years children were enrolled in programming and participation in School as Hub

components. This will be particularly valuable as we consider children in the original birth to age 3 cohort who experience multiple years of home visiting.

Data Analytic Approach

Descriptive and inferential data analytic approaches were used to address the evaluation questions. Statistical analyses were conducted to test for differences across time points and groups, when possible, as well as to account for clustering of data (e.g., children and teachers within schools). Sample sizes (of classrooms and students) were often insufficient for determining the statistical significance of group differences and change over time.

Program Quality: Home Visiting and Classroom Practices

BIRTH – AGE 5: HOME VISITING AND FAMILY FACILITATION

Schools Continue to Learn How to Engage With Families From Birth

School-based, voluntary home visiting is a key program component for the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 approach. Consistent, high-quality home visiting in the early years has been shown to increase children’s outcomes over time by: (1) increasing parents’ capacity to support their child’s learning and development (Caldera et al., 2007) and (2) enhancing families’ relationships and engagement with their child’s school (Wessels, 2013). The home visiting program includes three one-hour visits per month with each participating family throughout the school year and summer months. As children age out of home visiting when they are 3 years old, family facilitators continue to perform personal visits with most families once per month to provide continuity of educational experiences for children until they enter school-based PreK or Kindergarten.

Leaders at each school identified criteria for recruiting families into the voluntary home visiting program, with an emphasis on including children and families facing higher barriers to opportunities. Early and continuous engagement with families was encouraged by the school staff; therefore, schools prioritized recruitment of families with children under age 1 or those expecting a child. Other recruitment priorities included low income, teen parent(s), low birth weight, low maternal education level, and home language other than English. When home visitors enrolled families in the program, they invited them to participate in the evaluation. Evaluation activities in the 2019-20 year focused on the process of home visitation and parent-child interaction.

The metro Omaha area felt the effects of the global pandemic, and by mid-March 2020, all area schools, including the 10 full implementation schools, were closed. Home visitors and family facilitators worked closely with families to support basic needs. Food insecurity, loss of child care, unemployment, and the overall stress of the unknown weighed heavily on these families. Home visitors and family facilitators were quick to respond. They connected with families via phone calls, text messaging, and video conferencing to support each family’s individual needs. The Institute’s family engagement specialists, working with the school-based home visitors and family facilitators, provided additional support, including increasing the monthly community of practice to twice a month and increasing one-on-one coaching sessions with each home visitor and family facilitator.

An important decision for parents includes the milestone of their child turning 3 and making a family choice of a preschool experience. The Buffett Institute defined these choices as pathways. By age 3, parents informed the home visitor and family facilitator

of their child’s pathway. Will the child be enrolling in school-based PreK or Head Start, community child care, or staying at home with family, a friend, or a neighbor? Parents who chose the pathway of community child care or staying at home with family, a friend, or a neighbor continued receiving monthly personal visits with the family facilitator. As of May 31, 2020, 41 children turned 3 years old and transitioned from traditional home visiting into one of the pathways. Of this group, 28 children were accepted into school-based PreK or Head Start classrooms, and the remaining 13 children stayed home or attended community programs.

School-based home visitors and family facilitators implemented the Growing Great Kids curriculum (GGK; Eliot, Flanagan, Belza, & Dew, 2012). Growing Great Kids focuses on understanding family assets, building secure attachments, and cultivating resilience. Home visitors engaged and empowered parents in their role as educators of their children. To ensure a smooth transition and building upon home visitation, the family facilitators continued supporting families in a reciprocal partnership using Growing Great Kids for those families who continued with personal visits.

For professional development and coaching purposes, the Home Visiting Rating Scales (HOVRS; Roggman et al., 2017) was used to assess the quality of home visits and personal visits. The HOVRS assessment includes a videotaped observation containing two subscales: home visiting practices and family engagement. Individual items are scored using anchors that indicate the quality of the interaction (1 = needs training, 3 = adequate, 5 = good, 7 = excellent), and each scale is assigned an overall score (1 – 7). Home visiting practices refers to the home visitor’s responsiveness, relationship with the family, facilitation of parent-child interactions, and non-intrusiveness and collaboration. Family engagement refers to how the home visitor supports developmentally appropriate parent-child interactions (see section on Family Processes).

Home visit and personal visit quality is typically evaluated twice per year. Because of the pandemic, the home visit and personal visit quality was assessed just once.

HOVRS coders participate in a rigorous training and reliability process. Coders must achieve 85% reliability and submit to ongoing reliability checks on every fifth video to continue coding. Individualized reports are shared with the program staff for professional development and self-assessment purposes. Compilations of these data are utilized for evaluation aims. Recorded observations were evaluated from 10 home visitors and two family facilitators for a total of 12 school-based professionals. Fifty-three completed observations included 51 from home visitors and two from family facilitators. Fifty-one different families participated in these recorded evaluation observations.

TABLE 3. | CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ENROLLED IN HOME VISITING

School	ENROLLED		CONSENTED TO EVALUATION	
	Families	Children	Families	Children
Belleaire	12	13	10	10
Cody	7	8	1	1
DC West	6	7	6	6
Sandoz	12	17	11	14
Gomez Heritage	13	14	11	11
Liberty	13	15	11	11
Mockingbird	15	16	11	12
Mount View	7	8	3	3
Pinewood	7	8	7	7
Westbrook	11	15	9	12
Totals	103	121	80	87

The home visiting practices subscale was used to assess the behaviors of home visitors based on four scales, each of which is assigned a rating of 1 to 7. The scales include: responsiveness to family, relationship with family, facilitation of parent-child interactions, and non-intrusiveness and collaboration. The four subscale scores are summed to provide the summary score. Most summary mean scale scores were within the “adequate” range (11-18). Mean home visit practice quality summary scores were 15.74 (*SD*=3.63) at the fall data collection. Scores for the individual item relationship with the family, a foundational element for building trust in the context of home visiting, was positively rated in the “good” range at 5.04. Home/personal visits from 29 families were observed and scored in fall 2018 and again in fall 2019. For these 29 families, the home visit practices demonstrated by their visitors remained consistent ($t(28)=-0.09, p>.05$) from fall 2018 ($M=15.17; SD= 3.97$) to fall 2019 ($M=15.10; SD=3.29$).

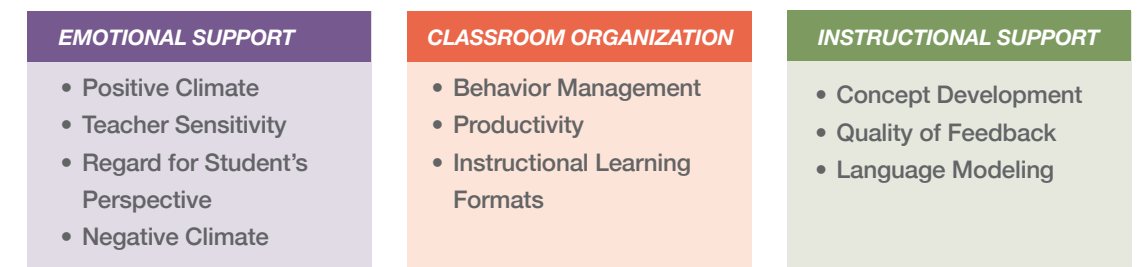
PREK – GRADE 3: CLASSROOM TEACHING PRACTICES

The quality of teachers’ practices and interactions in the classroom is associated with higher academic and social interactions throughout the elementary school years (Hamre & Pianta, 2003). To enhance quality instructional practices, the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan employs methods and instructional content grounded in child development and learning. Educational facilitators provide coaching and professional learning opportunities for PreK – Grade 3 teachers and work with all school staff to promote school climates that support evidence-based strategies to support children’s optimal learning and development.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observational tool that

assesses the quality of classroom practices in the domains of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (see Figure 1). CLASS scores (scaled from 1 to 7) are correlated with student achievement (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Preschoolers in classrooms with higher-quality interactions based on CLASS observations showed greater learning gains across school readiness domains, including executive functioning and early literacy (Vitiello, Bassock, Hamre, Player, & Williford, 2018). PreK through Grade 3 classrooms across all 10 full implementation schools participated in the CLASS assessment and were videotaped for an hour during November 2019 through January 2020. Trained evaluators reviewed and scored the video, and teachers received their score reports and had access to video to observe their teaching. Classroom teachers and educational facilitators work collaboratively to reflect and set goals using the CLASS data.

FIGURE 1. | CLASS DOMAINS AND DIMENSIONS



Teacher Practice Scores Surpass National Benchmarks

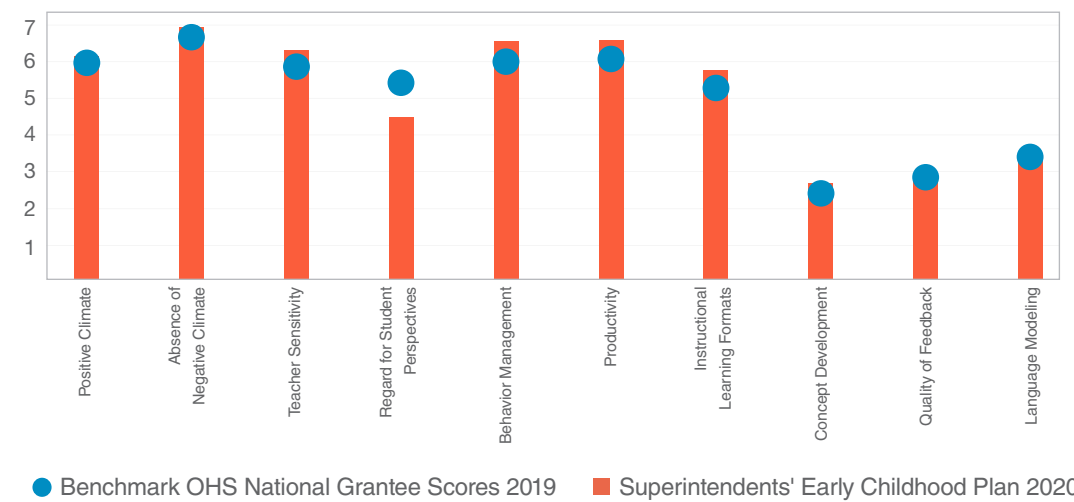
PreK through Grade 3 classrooms overall were of high quality. To situate the quality of classroom interactions in a national context, CLASS domain and dimension scores from the 2019-20 academic year were compared to national Head Start grantee national average scores from the national Office of Head Start (Data & Ongoing Monitoring, 2020). Although these data from Head Start represent the preschool population, they were used to compare to the PreK to Grade 3 classrooms, as no other national comparative K – Grade 3 data is available. Overall, classroom quality, as measured by CLASS, outperformed national averages across domains and the majority of the dimensions. Figure 2 represents PreK and K – Grade 3 CLASS dimension scores compared to the Head Start national averages, represented by blue dots.

- Emotional Support reflects positive teacher-student relationships and communication patterns. Kindergarten through Grade 3 teachers in the full implementation schools exceeded Head Start national grantee average scores on three of four Emotional Support dimensions including positive climate ($M=6.13, SD=.78$), absence of negative climate ($M=6.94, SD=.20$), and teacher sensitivity ($M=6.32, SD=.83$).
- Classroom Organization reflects settings in which teachers establish structures and opportunities for student engagement in learning, including facilitating student

discovery and supporting attention through clear expectations and routines. Scores for Classroom Organization are in the high-quality range and exceeded Head Start grantee average scores for behavior management ($M=6.55, SD=.73$), productivity ($M=6.58, SD=.61$), and instructional learning formats ($M=5.77, SD=.88$).

- Instructional Support reflects how the teacher uses language and activities to scaffold children’s learning. Instructional Support scores in the full implementation Kindergarten – Grade 3 classrooms are mid-range and reflect national trends (Hamre, 2014; Moiduddin, Aikens, Tarullo, West, & Xue, 2012). These scores exceeded national benchmark scores across all dimensions, including concept development ($M=2.69, SD=1.13$), quality of feedback ($M=2.93, SD=1.02$), and language modeling ($M=3.45; SD=1.07$).

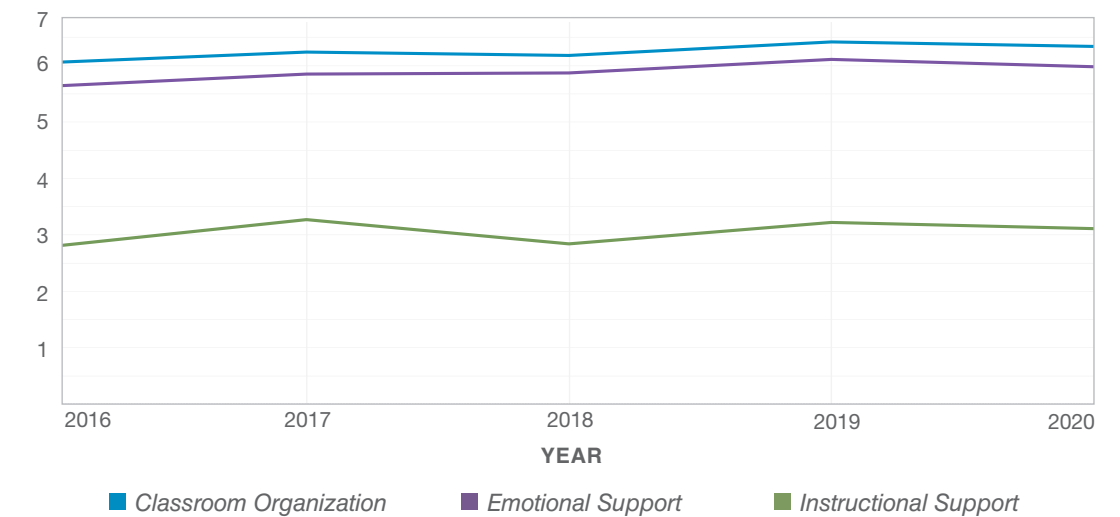
FIGURE 2. | PREK AND K – GRADE 3 CLASS DIMENSION SCORES COMPARED TO NATIONAL BENCHMARK, N=142



Classroom Interactions and Instruction Trends Are Strong and Increasing Over Time

CLASS scores in all three domains improved over the first five years of the full implementation and were significantly higher in 2019-20 relative to 2015-16 across all three domains. Current year scores were also significantly higher relative to 2018 in Instructional Support and Classroom Organization, while Emotional Support was rated lower in the current year, relative to 2018-19. All three domains showed an overall positive directional trend (See Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. | PREK – GRADE 3 CLASS DOMAIN SCORES ACROSS TIME, N=94



Family Processes

The Superintendents’ Plan works with schools to address support of families of young children, birth – Grade 3. Schools can support families by helping families connect with other families, school staff, and helpful community resources (Min, Anderson, & Chen, 2017). Research shows that welcoming, embracing, and supporting parents and other caregivers central to children’s lives supports the development of the trusting relationships needed to promote true partnerships with families (Pecaski, McLennan, & Howitt, 2018). Through intentional interactions with every family, such as those taking place in the context of a home visiting relationship or parent-child interaction group, schools can provide information about child development and learning and promote healthy relationships. These trusting relationships often offer families an opportunity to ask questions, express opinions, and learn about school processes. Schools can listen and be responsive to families as a part of this partnership and shift their practices related to partnering with families, communication, school culture, and trust. To learn about family processes, birth to Grade 3, in the full implementation, we examined parent-child engagement and interaction and surveyed families about their engagement with schools.

HOME VISITING AND FAMILY FACILITATION FOSTER POSITIVE PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS

Connecting families to early education knowledge, other families, and the schools in their communities are the sources of family engagement and a major goal of home visiting in the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 approach. The quality of family processes is assessed using the Home Visiting Rating Scales (HOVRS; Roggman et. al., 2017), focused on the family engagement subscale. The family engagement scale assesses the degree to which the home visitor supports developmentally appropriate parent-child interactions. Home visitors ($n=10$) and family facilitators ($n=2$) video recorded parent-child-home visitor/family facilitator interactions as part of the home visit, and these were coded by trained evaluators.

The three family engagement scales: Parent Engagement, Child Engagement, and Parent-Child Interaction, are each rated between a minimum of 1 and maximum of 7 and are summed to get the summary score. At baseline, family engagement subscale scores were approaching the “good” range of engagement ($M=13.77$, $SD=3.56$). Home/personal visits from 28 families were observed and scored in fall 2018 and again in fall 2019. These families demonstrated consistent ($t(28)=-.92$, $p>.05$) parent engagement behaviors from fall 2018 ($M=14.04$; $SD= 2.82$) to fall 2019 ($M=13.14$; $SD=3.68$).

POSITIVE PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS SUPPORT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The parent-child relationship contributes in essential ways to young children’s development and learning (Richter, Griesel, & Manegold, 2004). A primary goal of home visiting is to help the parent develop and maintain a positive relationship with

their child (Sama-Miller et al., 2017). In the context of the home visit, the home visitor or family facilitator video records the parent and child engaging in play for 10 minutes. Trained coders observe how the parent and child interacted in play and use the Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS; Comfort & Gordon, 2006) to observe how the parent responds to the child in ways that promote trust and acceptance, scaffold child learning, and encourage the child’s self-confidence. The 12-item scale is rated on a 5-point scale (1 = rarely, 3 = usually, and 5 = consistently). In the fall of 2019, 51 observations were recorded and rated for 50 families; one family had multiple children enrolled in the program. Most families participating in home visiting demonstrated moderate to high-quality parent-child interactions ($M=3.62$, $SD=.60$), suggesting that on average, parents are responsive and supportive of their children’s development and learning (see Figure 4). Of these 50 families, 23 had also been observed previously in the spring of 2019. These families demonstrated slight (non-significant; $p = 0.69$) improvement from the spring of 2019 ($M=3.50$; $SD=0.60$) to the fall of 2019 ($M=3.73$; $SD=0.55$). This slight improvement in parenting skills over this six-month period of time (see Figure 5) may indicate that cumulative time spent in home visitation activities prompts positive growth in parents’ observed interactions with their children.

FIGURE 4. | QUALITY OF PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS IN HOME VISITING FAMILIES, FALL 2019

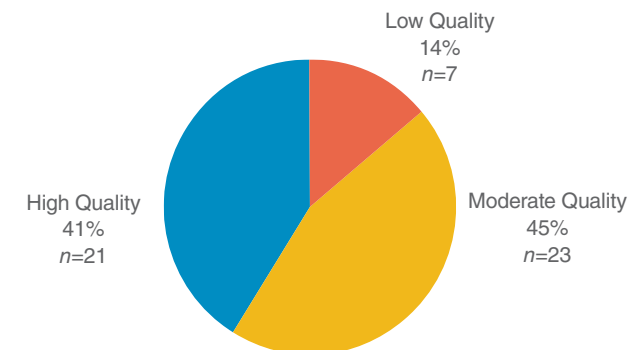
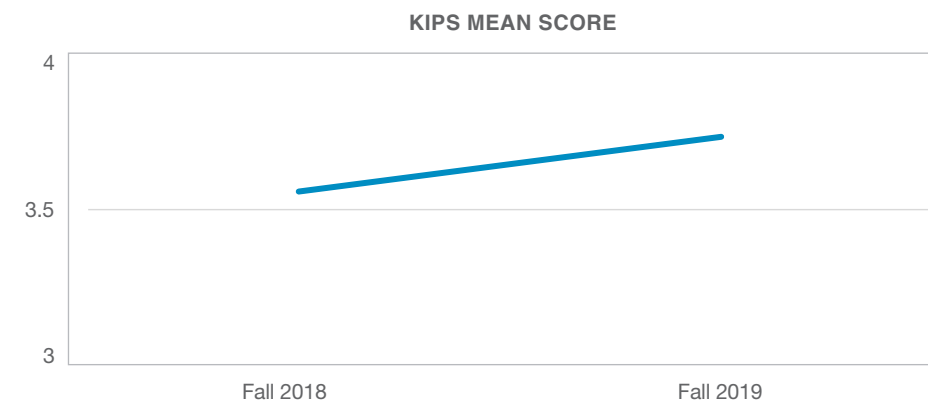


FIGURE 5. | CHANGE IN QUALITY OF PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS, FALL 2018 TO FALL 2019



ASSESSING FAMILY PERCEPTIONS INFORMS FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

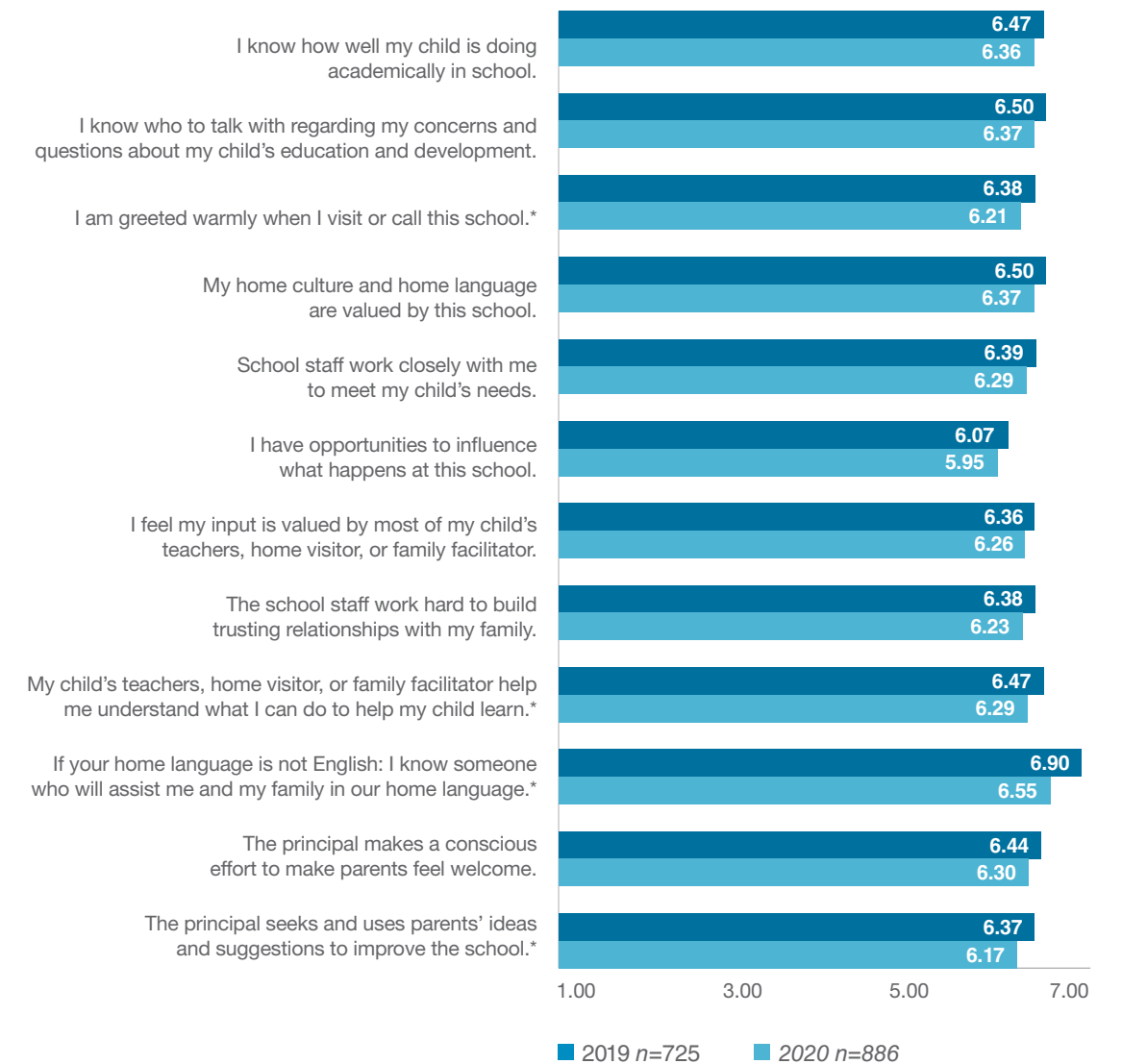
When schools engage meaningfully with families, children demonstrate better educational achievement and social outcomes (Fantuzzo et al., 2004). To support schools’ practices engaging families for continuity, quality, and equity, an adaptation of the Road Map Family Engagement Survey (Ishimaru & Lott, 2015) was used to assess families’ perceptions about collaboration among families, communities, and schools. Twelve items addressed six domains: Parent/Family Knowledge and Confidence, Welcoming and Culturally Responsive School Climate, Parent/Family Influence and Decision-Making, Family-Educator Trust, Family-Educator Communication, and Principal Leadership for Engagement. Parents rank items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Surveys were distributed to families in full implementation schools in PreK to Grade 3, in either online or paper format, based on school preference. Families enrolled in home visiting or family facilitation also received the surveys.

A total of 889 families responded to the FES across all 10 schools, with 258 (29%) of these families reporting speaking a language other than English in the home. The majority of the families reported their race as White (*n*=541; 72%) with the next largest race categories reported being “Two or more races” (*n*=83; 11%) or Black (*n*=73; 10%). A majority of the families (*n*=545; 65%) reported qualifying for the Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) program. Across the schools, families responding to the survey ranged from 37 (low) to 258 (high) per school, with an average response rate of 10% across each of the 10 schools.

On a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high), families rated schools very positively, with item means ranging from 5.95 (*SD*=1.83) to 6.50 (*SD*=1.56). The highest-rated item across the schools was “I know someone at (school) who will assist me and my family in our home language in resolving questions and concerns regarding my child.” The lowest-rated item, while still very positive, was “I have opportunities to influence what happens at (school).” Descriptive analyses were completed that compared parent responses based on race, ethnicity, eligibility for FRL, and family language.

A longitudinal analysis examined changes between parent responses to individual survey items in 2019 compared to 2020. While all items were rated lower than the previous year, there were few significant differences. Parents rated four items lower in the current school year, including: “I am greeted warmly when I visit or call” (school) (*t*(1606) = 2.04, *p* = .041); “My child’s teachers, home visitor, or family facilitator help me understand what I can do to help my child learn” (*t*(1603) = 2.21, *p* = .027); “If your home language is not English: I know someone (school) who will assist me and my family in our home language in resolving questions and concerns regarding my child” (*t*(839) = 2.98, *p* = .003); and “The principal at (school) seeks and uses parents’ ideas and suggestions to improve the school” (*t*(1602) = 2.36, *p* = .019). Figure 6 displays the families’ ratings for each item across the two years.

FIGURE 6. | RATINGS OF FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS



*Denotes statistical significance at *p*<.05

Child Development and Learning

Over time, a focus on continuity, quality, and equity in the context of the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 is expected to manifest in an increase in opportunities for all children to receive a dynamic and engaged educational experience and a subsequent reduction in the development and learning gap between children of different racial and economic backgrounds. Children’s development and educational achievement are examined annually. Measures used in the 2019-20 school year were intended to (1) identify development concerns in the birth to 3-year-old population participating in home visiting, (2) examine 3-year-olds’ language skill and early academic skill related to math and reading, and (3) examine development and learning for children using school-based assessments for reading and math, PreK to Grade 3.

DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING: BIRTH – 5 YEARS

Children’s development was assessed using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Third Edition (ASQ-3; Squires, Bricker & Twombly, 2009). A screening tool, the ASQ-3 includes 21 age-specific questionnaires for 3 to 60 months, with items assessing five developmental areas: communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, and personal-social. Scores for each developmental area are assigned one of three ratings meant to indicate risk of developmental delay and need for referral: Developmental Concerns (lowest), Borderline (mid-range), Typical (highest). Families complete the questionnaires in the context of the home visit or personal visit; home visitors and family facilitators score and discuss any concerns families may have about their child’s development. Due to the ongoing recruitment of families into home visiting and family facilitation, children’s ages at first assessment varied. A total of 177 children were assessed at least one time ($M=18.67$ months, $SD=11.03$ months), with the youngest child measured at 1 month and the oldest child measured at 60 months.

Due to the variability in the number and timing of assessment points, children’s initial enrollment questionnaire served as the focus of these analyses. A majority of children in home visiting were developing typically (86% – 92% across five areas), and a very small number presented developmental concerns (0 – 4 children across five areas). Figure 8 illustrates the proportion of children rated in each developmental category.

FIGURE 7. | CHILDREN BIRTH – AGE 3 ASQ SCORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAIN

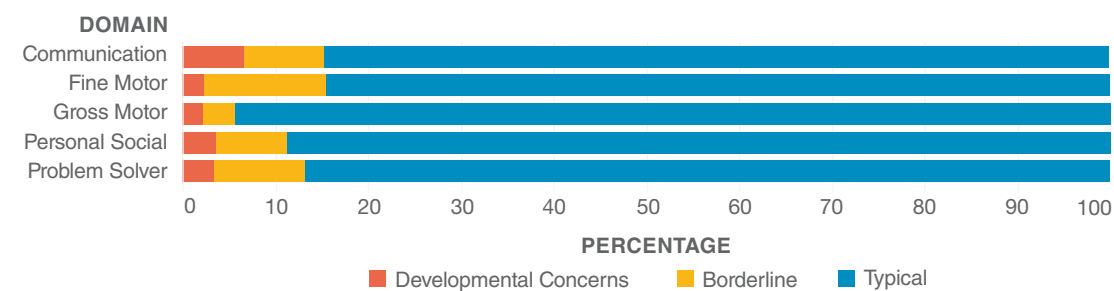
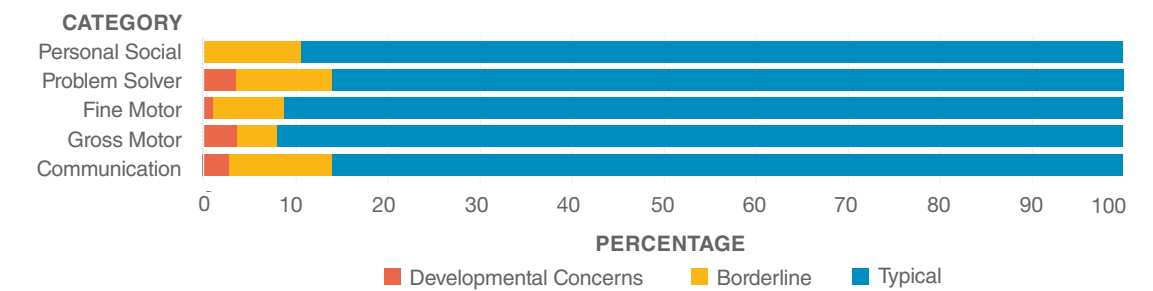


FIGURE 8. | CHILDREN BIRTH – AGE 3 ASQ SCORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL CATEGORY, N=114



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

An indicator of children’s early academic achievement includes the ability to understand written language and acquire fundamental math concepts. In the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan, educational facilitators work with classroom teachers to support academic instruction in PreK – Grade 3 classrooms.

Language, Cognitive, and Academic Skills at 3 Years

The Northwest Evaluation Association’s Measures of Academic Progress Growth (NWEA MAP) was used to examine students’ academic achievement and growth. MAP Growth is a computer-adaptive, multiple-choice, norm-referenced assessment that measures student proficiency and growth in the areas of reading, mathematics, language usage, and science. Schools participating in the Superintendents’ Plan administer MAP Growth testing three times a year (fall, winter, and spring) in Kindergarten through third grade. For evaluation purposes, data obtained from participating schools were used to examine status and status of student growth for math and reading. Status refers to a student’s achievement level at a specific point in time (e.g., fall). For this report, fall 2019 data will be reported for status. Growth refers to how much the student progressed across multiple points in time (e.g., fall to spring). Due to COVID-19, students were only assessed in the 2019-20 school year in the fall and winter. NWEA growth metric (conditional growth percentile) was calculated based on two points of time, fall 2018 and fall 2019 assessments and spring 2019 and fall 2019. Data for nine of the 10 Superintendents’ Plan schools were provided for Kindergarten and Grades 1 through 3; one school provided only data for Grade 3.

Student Achievement Status

NWEA MAP uses a proprietary RIT (Rasch Unit) scale to measure student achievement status. The RIT scale is an equal-interval scale that is particularly useful for measuring student achievement in a variety of subject areas as well as tracking student achievement over time (<https://community.nwea.org/docs/DOC-1647>). Fall 2019-20 RIT scores were used to evaluate the status of reading and mathematics achievement of

students in Kindergarten through Grade 3. Achievement percentiles were calculated based on a national norm sample. For interpretation purposes, an achievement status percentile of 50 indicates a student performed at the midpoint of similar students across the United States. Norms were developed by NWEA (Thum & Hauser, 2015 Student and School RIT Norms Research Update 1; 4/9/2015). Table 4 summarizes the median student achievement across Superintendents’ Plan schools and grade levels. Achievement status data was available for 2,160 students across all 10 schools. Median percentile scores were in the “slightly below” range (between the 30.5 and 42.5 percentile value) across all grades and academic areas, with much variance in median percentile ranks across schools.

TABLE 4. | KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 3 MAP FALL READING AND MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT STATUS SCORES

Grade	READING			MATHEMATICS		
	N	Median Percentile	Effectiveness Level*	N	Median Percentile	Effectiveness Level*
Kindergarten	507	41.00	Slightly Below	507	34.00	Slightly Below
Grade 1	561	36.00	Slightly Below	561	37.00	Slightly Below
Grade 2	548	38.00	Slightly Below	548	41.00	Slightly Below
Grade 3	543	39.00	Slightly Below	544	37.00	Slightly Below

*NWEA uses these labels to describe achievement and growth of students.

Analyses were completed to determine if selected demographic characteristics were associated with MAP RIT scores. Only English Language Learner (ELL) status predicted fall MAP scores, such that English-speaking students scored higher in both MAP reading and math than English Language Learners. Race, ethnicity, and Free and Reduced Lunch status did not predict math or reading scores. The median achievement status scores by subpopulations are summarized in Figures 9 and 10. Percentile score patterns were similar across academic areas, with highest median scores demonstrated by students who were White, had a paid lunch status, and were English speakers. Those with the lowest scores were Hispanic or Native American, were eligible for free lunch and were English Language Learners.

FIGURE 9. | MEDIAN MATH ACHIEVEMENT STATUS PERCENTILE SCORES BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS



FIGURE 10. | MEDIAN READING ACHIEVEMENT STATUS PERCENTILE SCORES BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS



Longitudinal Data

Math and reading MAP achievement RIT scores were compared from spring 2019 to fall 2019. Across the full implementation schools, students' MAP math scores decreased significantly and reading scores increased significantly. These results suggest that students' math scores were negatively impacted by the gap in services over the summer, whereas reading scores actually improved.

Student Growth Status

The Conditional Growth Percentile (CGP) indicates how a student's growth compares to the 2015 NWEA student growth norms (<https://community.nwea.org/docs/DOC-1642>). Table 5 provides the median CGP for reading and mathematics by grade level for fall 2018 to fall 2019. For interpretation purposes, a CGP of 50 indicates a student performed at the midpoint of similar students across the United States. A total of 1,561 students in Grades 1 to 3 had growth scores. Overall, in both reading and math, students' scores ranged from slightly below range (between the 30.5 and 42.5 percentile value) to the about average range (42.5 to 57.5 percentile). Students in Grade 3 had the highest CGP median scores (at the about average range) and students in Grades 1 and 2 scored in the slightly below range. The lowest CGP median score was for Grade 1 students in reading. It should be noted there was much variance in median percentile ranks across schools.

TABLE 5. | GRADES 1 – 3 MAP FALL 2018 TO FALL 2019 READING AND MATHEMATICS CGP SCORES

Grade	READING			MATHEMATICS		
	N	Median	Effectiveness Level*	N	Median	Effectiveness Level*
Grade 1	513	35.00	Slightly Below	513	41.00	Slightly Below
Grade 2	497	42.00	Slightly Below	498	41.00	Slightly Below
Grade 3	450	48.00	About Average	450	46.00	About Average

*NWEA uses these labels to describe achievement and growth of students.

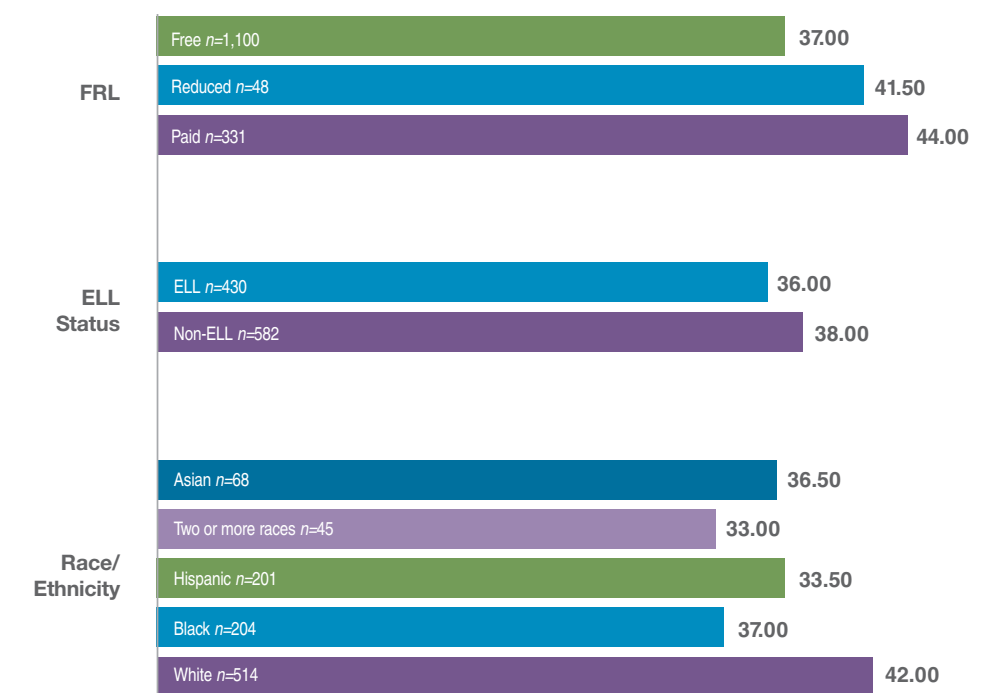
Students' math and reading status were also analyzed by demographic groups. Figures 11 and 12 present the demographic breakdown of fall percentile ranks across race/ethnicity, ELL, and Free and Reduced Lunch status. There was little variability in math CGP median scores between students who were Hispanic, White, or Black or between non-ELL and ELL students. Paid lunch status and Asian students demonstrated the highest median math CGP scores. A different pattern emerged for CGP scores in reading with more differences demonstrated between subgroups. Students who were White, had paid lunch status, and were English-speaking demonstrated the highest median CGP. Students with the lowest CGP reading scores were Hispanic, ELL, and were eligible for free lunch.

FIGURE 11. | MEDIAN MATH CONDITIONAL GROWTH PERCENTILE SCORES BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS



Native American students were not reported as n < 10

FIGURE 12. | MEDIAN READING CONDITIONAL GROWTH PERCENTILE SCORES BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS



Native American students were not reported as n < 10

Achievement Status and Growth Summary

It is important to examine student progress by reviewing both student achievement status and conditional growth. Ideally, one would see students demonstrate both high achievement and high growth. Figures 13 and 14 summarize the data from 1,652 students based on achievement and conditional growth data. The results found that students in Grades 1 through 3 were demonstrating both math and reading scores within the low achievement-growth quadrant. Students in Grade 3 were in the low achievement-high-growth quadrant; however, they were just slightly below the scores needed to be in the low achievement-high-growth quadrant. No Kindergarten growth scores (i.e., CGP, Observed Growth, Projected Growth) are available because those students were not tested in fall 2018.

FIGURE 13. | READING OUTCOMES: ACHIEVEMENT STATUS AND GROWTH SUMMARY BY GRADE LEVEL



TABLE 6. | READING ACHIEVEMENT STATUS AND GROWTH SUMMARY

Grade	N Achievement Percentile (Fall)	Median Achievement Percentile (Fall)	N Conditional Growth Percentile (Fall to Fall)	Conditional Growth Percentile (Fall to Fall)
Kindergarten	507	41.00	--	--
Grade 1	561	36.00	513	35.00
Grade 2	548	38.00	497	42.00
Grade 3	544	39.00	450	48.00

FIGURE 14. | MATH OUTCOMES: ACHIEVEMENT STATUS AND GROWTH SUMMARY BY GRADE LEVEL

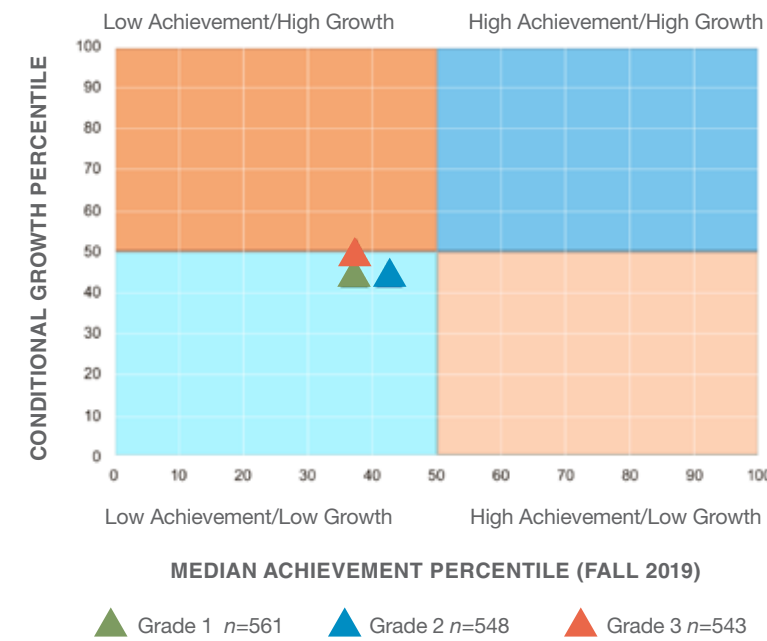


TABLE 7. | MATH ACHIEVEMENT STATUS AND GROWTH SUMMARY

Grade	N Achievement Percentile (Fall)	Median Achievement Percentile (Fall)	N Conditional Growth Percentile (Fall to Fall)	Conditional Growth Percentile (Fall to Fall)
Kindergarten	507	34.00	--	--
Grade 1	561	37.00	513	41.00
Grade 2	548	41.00	498	41.00
Grade 3	544	37.00	450	46.00

Student Projected Growth to Observed Growth Comparisons

NWEA MAP calculates a projected growth score that represents the change in RIT score that half the U.S. students will make over time, which are based on the student growth norms. An important analysis is to determine how the student’s actual change in RIT scores compared to the projected growth. The descriptive analyses were completed with students (1,653 math scores and 1,654 reading scores) across the schools. In third grade only, reading and math growth scores on average met or exceeded the projected growth. The highest number of students met their projected growth in reading (ranging from 40.40 to 59.50%). Fewer students met their projected growth in math (ranging from 44.10 to 48.70%). Third grade students had the highest percentages meeting their projected growth in both math and reading. Second grade students had the lowest percentages meeting their projected growth. Results by grade are summarized in the following figures and tables.

Social-Emotional and Executive Function Development

FIGURE 15. | READING GROWTH FALL 2018 TO FALL 2019 PROJECTED VS. OBSERVED GROWTH BY GRADE LEVEL

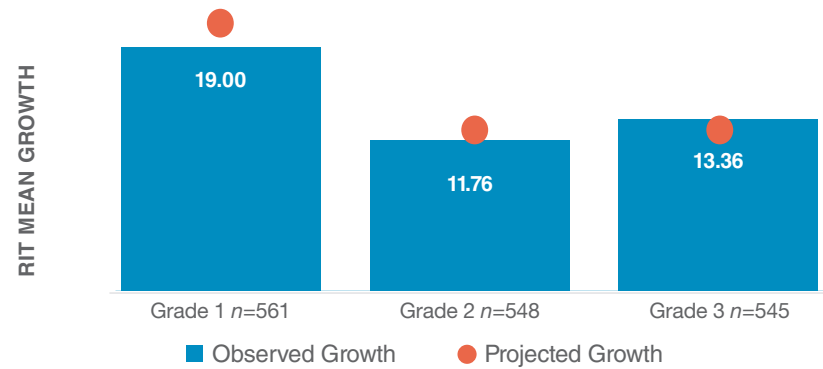


TABLE 8. | READING GROWTH FALL 2018 TO FALL 2019

Grade	N*	Fall 2019 Mean RIT	Observed Growth	Projected Growth	% Meeting Projected Growth
Kindergarten	508	138.41	--	--	--
Grade 1	561	156.95	19.00	21.56	53.10%
Grade 2	548	171.25	11.76	13.53	40.40%
Grade 3	545	183.86	13.36	13.64	59.50%

*The sample size reported is the minimum sample size available across all measures.

FIGURE 16. | MATH GROWTH FALL 2018 TO FALL 2019 PROJECTED VS. OBSERVED GROWTH BY GRADE LEVEL

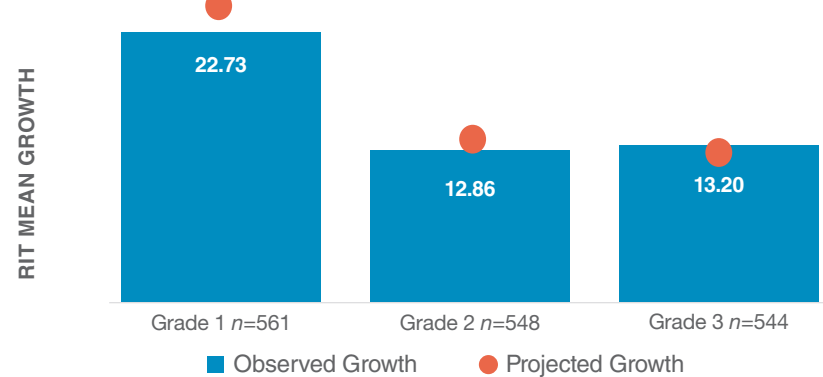


TABLE 9. | MATH GROWTH FALL 2018 TO FALL 2019

Grade	N*	Fall 2019 Mean RIT	Observed Growth	Projected Growth	% Meeting Projected Growth
Kindergarten	507	134.45	--	--	--
Grade 1	561	157.07	22.73	24.67	47.20%
Grade 2	548	173.39	12.86	14.40	44.10%
Grade 3	544	185.36	13.20	13.57	48.90%

*The sample size reported is the minimum sample size available across all measures.

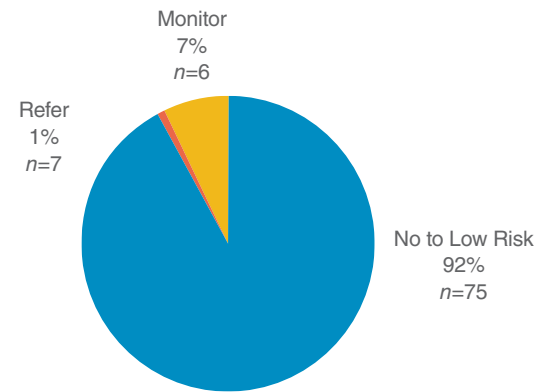
Social-emotional and executive function development in early childhood is strongly associated with children’s academic progress through the school years. Learning to express and regulate emotions, develop empathy for others, develop relationships, make responsible decisions, and adapt to challenging situations effectively are key achievements during early childhood (Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018). In the Superintendents’ Early Childhood Plan, children whose families participate in home visiting (birth – 3 years) and personal visits (3 – 5 years) complete regular screening questionnaires on children’s social-emotional development. When children turned 3 years old and transitioned out of home visiting services, and again in preschool through third grade, a child assessor from MMI completed a specialized screening for executive function.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: BIRTH – 3 YEARS

A program specialist with the Buffett Institute coached school-based home visitors to support their work with families of children birth to 3 years. Home visitors work with families to increase their understanding of children’s social-emotional development, with a focus on enhancing parent-child interaction quality. Using the screening tool, Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional (ASQ:SE; Squires, Bricker, & Twombly, 2002), families answer questions about their young child’s expression and regulation of emotions, relationships and interactions with others, and how the child explores her environment. Home visitors identify children who may need further assessment and/or intervention and provide resources to families who may want to know how to support their child’s social-emotional development. Offered in English and Spanish, parents completed the questionnaire for each child upon enrollment in home visiting and in regular intervals thereafter. The assessment takes about 10 – 15 minutes for parents to complete and is scored by the home visitor. Scores reflect the degree to which the child may be exhibiting delays and provide guidance for action: Refer, Monitor, or No to Low Risk.

During the 2019-20 school year, data were available for children whose families participated in home visiting in the 10 full implementation schools, for a total of 177 children, aged 1 – 48 months. At the first visit of the school year, 75 children (91.5%) scored in the No to Low Risk category, six (7.3%) scored in the Monitor range, and one (1.2%) scored in the Refer range. Children enrolled in home visiting were developing typically in terms of their social and emotional development (see Figure 17).

FIGURE 17. | NUMBER (%) OF CHILDREN WITH REFER/MONITOR OR NO TO LOW RISK ASQ-SE SCORES



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING: 3 YEARS – GRADE 3

In the first 8 years, children’s executive function skills develop rapidly and are associated with how well children participate in activities and engage in learning. Executive functioning supports children’s ability to focus and shift attention, regulate emotions and behaviors, and follow directions. When children have well-developed executive functioning, they exhibit self-control, think creatively, and remember information while using it in thinking or planning. They regulate their behavior and emotions in order to learn and get along with others. Children’s executive functioning supports cognitive, social, and psychological development, as well as success in school and in life (Diamond, 2014).

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, children whose families participated in home visiting were assessed at 3 years of age, using the Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS). In each of the full implementation schools, children in PreK through third grade completed the MEFS in the 2019-20 school year. MEFS is a global measure of executive functioning for children 2 years through adulthood (Carlson & Zelazo, 2014). It is reported as a single standard score, with an average of 100 (SD = 15). The MEFS is administered on an iPad by a trained assessor and takes 5 – 7 minutes to complete. For children in the home visiting program, the MEFS was administered at age 3 by an evaluator from the Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI) at the child’s home or elementary school, when the child was transitioning out of home visiting. For children in PreK through third grade, a team of six evaluators from MMI spent one to four days at each participating school to conduct the assessments. The assessment was conducted in English or Spanish depending on the students’ preferred academic language.

Three 3-year-olds and 2,604 PreK – Grade 3 children completed the MEFS in the 2019-20 school year. Note, the sample size for 3-year-old children who transitioned from home visiting is too small to report. Across the full implementation schools, children’s

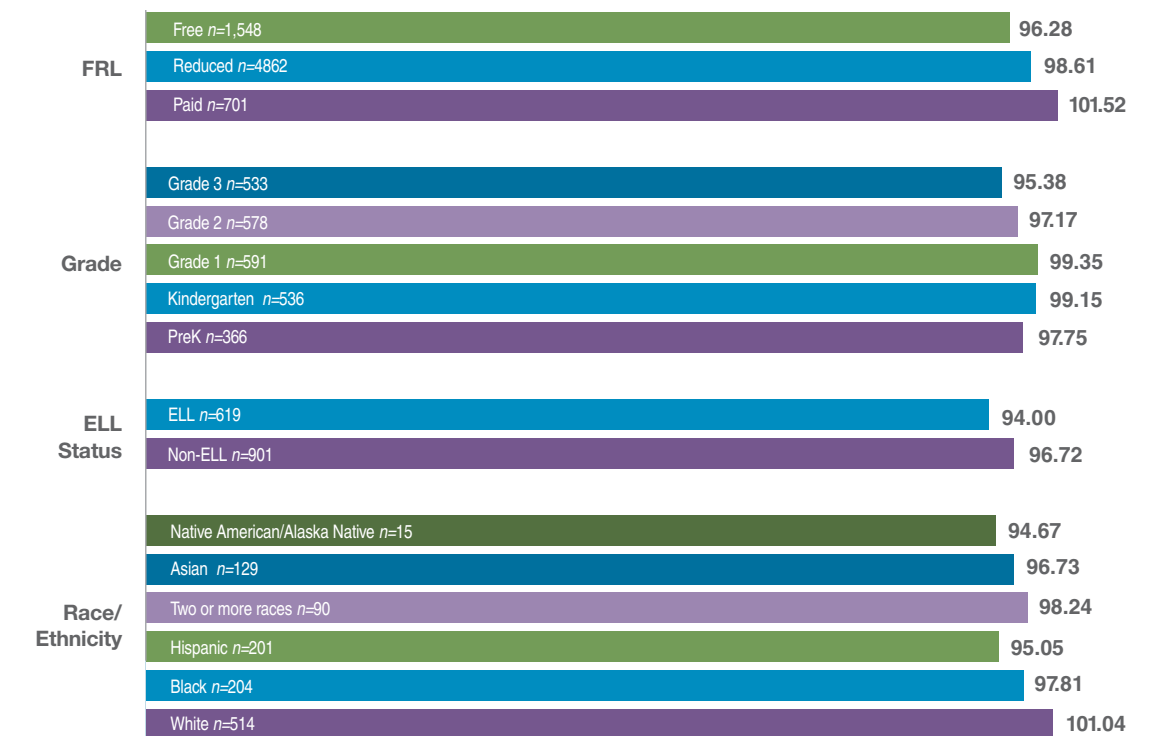
executive function skills were in the average range across ages, with slightly lower scores for third-graders (see Table 10).

A longitudinal analysis was completed to determine if there was change in scores across years. A significant increase in MEFS scores from 2019 to 2020 was found when controlling for race, ethnicity, grade, English Language Learner status, and Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) status. Race, ethnicity, language, and grade were predictive of MEFS scores, such that White children scored higher on MEFS than Black or Hispanic children. Native English speakers scored higher on MEFS than English Language Learners. Younger students were found to demonstrate higher MEFS scores than older students. Free and Reduced Lunch status was not predictive of MEFS scores. Mean MEFS scores are summarized by these selected demographic variables in Figure 18.

TABLE 10. | PREK – GRADE 3 MINNESOTA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SCALE RESULTS: FALL 2019

Grade	N*	Mean	SD
Preschool	366	97.75	9.61
Kindergarten	536	99.15	9.14
Grade 1	591	99.35	9.21
Grade 2	578	97.17	8.94
Grade 3	533	95.38	9.67

FIGURE 18. | MEAN ACHIEVEMENT STATUS SCORES BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS



Implementation Insights: Leadership in the School as Hub Approach

Qualitative studies provide an opportunity to examine the processes involved in implementing the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan School as Hub approach. By considering perspectives of people involved and examining how various systems—schools, families, and communities—are engaged in effecting change, we are learning more about how enhancements to quality, continuity, and equity are being supported. In the 2019-20 school year, Buffett Institute researchers engaged in two studies to investigate (1) leadership observations and historical perspectives on the Superintendents' Plan, and (2) systems change elements that occurred in the Superintendents' Plan full implementation schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research and evaluation staff interviewed 10 principals in School as Hub full implementation schools and 10 superintendents' workgroup members in May and June of 2020 to document leadership observations and historical perspectives on the Superintendents' Plan. In addition, a document review was conducted to explore the systems change elements that occurred in the Superintendents' Plan full implementation schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic from February through May 2020. A total of 17 documents were reviewed and included meeting minutes from superintendents' workgroup meetings, principal community of practice meetings, home visitor and family facilitator community of practice meetings, and community of practice survey results.

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

Principals took ownership and responsibility over School as Hub, describing that the work “has to start from me.” One principal mentioned being part of School as Hub served as a “constant reminder of what’s important.” It was commonly expressed that being a School as Hub leader has shifted the principals to have a “much more intentional focus on early childhood.” Principals also described how being a School as Hub principal changed how they relate to families. For instance, it was discussed that “schools should be designed to meet the needs of families and not the other way around” and that families “drive the planning” in the school. One principal described, “... we always wanted to include parents...now that's just the initial part of our planning...that'd be probably the major shift I've had...” Principals discussed how understanding each family and the challenges they experience helps schools best support families and their students.

“You know, I think the more we understand the family, and family dynamics, some of the challenges they're facing, it's just so much easier to understand what our students bring to school with them every day. You know, just always knowing that it is important to understand the family, but also, this just makes us realize that piece. Without that

piece, our partnership is just not, it just doesn't have the strength that we need in order to move our students forward.”

Principals stated that school should be a place for families to come for resources, not just education.

“...One of our things is, a building is to serve...And so we're serving the community by providing a great education, a great learning environment for students to come into, but we're also serving them with any needs that they would need, whether it's our social worker getting involved, whether it's our counselor or school psychologist, myself, you know, driving supplies to a family's home, or setting up transportation for them to go to the doctor. I mean, those are different things that I think are more important for me and are definitely more visible to me now being in a building like [school name] and trying to embody that School as Hub philosophy.”

Principals discussed how being a School as Hub principal shaped how they relate to community partners. Even though many principals mentioned the importance of community partnerships and viewed the school as being a connector to the community, principals discussed this as an area where they can improve. Only one principal mentioned child care centers or family child care homes specifically as community partners.

Supports

Although principals commonly mentioned that the commitment for School as Hub must start with the principal, they often described that it was a team effort within their school buildings. For instance, home visitors and family facilitators were crucial for representing parent voice. Furthermore, principals appreciated the support and connection offered by members of the principals' community of practice. The shared understandings and similar situations faced by these leaders created a safe foundation for cooperative thinking. Principals articulated the deep conversations and “bouncing ideas” around with their peers fostered connections that “helped us grow professionally a great deal.” One principal expressed, “It's been great learning with other leaders and other districts. It's been nice to understand where they're coming from...understanding where we're coming from. All the things that we have in common and uncommon.”

Lessons Learned

Principals discussed how they learned School as Hub is not a “one size fits all approach” and individualizing it to your school is essential.

“... At the beginning of the year I would kind of go to our School as Hub meeting, and I would listen to those things. And then I would hear something a little bit different from

our district meetings...And so, I think what I've kind of finally learned to balance is [to] be able to take both messages, and then bring that back to our School as Hub team here at the building. And then we get to be the deciders of how we make that look in our building..."

Principals described the importance of making sure the School as Hub team is fully integrated as part of the staff. School staff must appreciate the value of a School as Hub team. One principal encourages participation in the School as Hub team in the building, particularly so those working to advance School as Hub initiatives are not viewed as separate.

Next Steps

Principals most commonly mentioned increasing family engagement and recruiting more families into the program as next steps. Principals discussed their desire to connect and partner with families but struggled with how to implement family partnership strategies with the COVID-19 challenges. To increase family engagement, one principal mentioned that it will be necessary to better understand why families are not engaging with the school and to also better show families that the school values their participation.

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Workgroup members discussed the value in meeting regularly with other district leaders and how it offered important conversations and learning opportunities, including discussion on successes, challenges, and ways districts have overcome challenges. Many workgroup members felt honored to be part of this group.

"And I think that is one of the strongest aspects of this committee that I've seen is that their ability to share in hopes of helping one another...really good avenue for communication and working on issues together..."

Similar to principals, many workgroup members expressed the overarching goal of the Superintendents' Plan influenced them to "think of early childhood much more." Most workgroup members expressed that the prioritization of continuity has increased in their district. While the value of early education has increased across districts, competing priorities reduce the capacity for large, long-term investment to move the work past a formative stage.

Workgroup members discussed the goal of closing opportunity gaps across the Omaha metro area. These goals have long been district priorities. Increasing educational equity through the Superintendents' Plan has brought this into focus by elevating the issue with leadership across school districts.

Workgroup members discussed investments that were made to support the Superintendents' Plan and if resources had extended beyond the full implementation school sites. Time was the most common reported investment that was made to support the Superintendents' Plan, including administrative work (i.e., planning guidance oversight, meetings, responding to principal requests, meetings with principals, budget and human resource responsibilities) and time related to professional development and meetings for the teaching staff. Most workgroup members reported that School as Hub principals have not extended much beyond the full implementation schools. However, professional development was one investment that crossed all elementary schools. In addition, the values and ideals of School as Hub have extended through relationships with principals and staff from other district schools seeking to learn more.

"I think the work that they're doing, I think people are curious about it...so others have conversations with those principals trying to figure out how, how they build that idea of School as Hub...other principals ask them about what they're doing, they do want to learn more."

LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

Family and Student Supports

As districts shifted to remote learning, schools focused on providing basic resources to meet the needs of students and families. Many schools became meal distribution sites through a drive-through or pickup process. Schools and school districts provided devices and technology resources to families, including iPads, chargers, internet service, and hot spots for students to successfully participate in online learning. In addition, schools printed packets, gathered classroom supplies, and distributed books for pickup or delivery.

As remote learning became routine, communication with students and families in various forms was essential: video lessons, texting, phone and video calls, and daily messages on social media. Various platforms and apps were used by staff and administration including Google Meet, Zoom, Seesaw, Dojo, Raz-Kids, and HeadSprout. Home visitors continued to connect with their families via text, phone, and/or video calls rather than in-person visits.

Instructional Supports

Leadership supported school staff so they could focus on the students' academic and social-emotional needs during this uncertain time. At several schools, district and principal leadership supported staff by providing self-care resources, calling staff members on a regular basis to check in, and holding weekly meetings with staff by grade level. During this time, schools also provided supports and strategies to help

staff communicate and support families: assigning an interpreter to every grade to help staff make regular calls to families, sharing community resources with the staff so they can better support the families, and making the process easier for home visitors to take books from the library to families.

Barriers

The closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and magnified equity issues already present. Often the families with the greatest needs were challenging to reach while other families did not fully express all their needs, making it difficult for staff to make connections to the necessary supports and resources. Meal distribution sites faced high demand; meals were limited to serving only children, not the family. Technology was a common barrier as many families did not have the necessary devices, internet service, or comfort with technology required for virtual learning. Over time, parent engagement declined. Parents expressed they were missing connection while feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information they were receiving.

Next Steps

Schools are preparing for all scenarios for the 2020-21 school year and making sure staff feel prepared in addition to equipping families with the necessary supports for no matter what the school year holds. Next steps for many schools include working with home visitors and family facilitators to increase engagement with families and determining how to best develop and support relationships virtually, especially as it may be more challenging connecting with newer families during this time.

Schools are preparing for students to have greater needs when they return in the fall than when they left in the spring, but they do not know how the children's needs will present themselves. Schools are aware of and concerned about the long-term impact on children's social-emotional development and mental health. For this reason, there will be an increased focus on how to meet social-emotional needs of the students. In addition, schools will focus on how to better support English Language Learners and special education students through remote learning. There will continue to be professional development for teachers on remote learning and determining the best platform for teachers to use to communicate with their students and families. As teachers are experiencing increased stress, determining how schools best support the teachers will be another focus for the coming year.

Implementation Insights: Early Education Transitions

An evaluation of transition practices, programs, and policies present in the 10 Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan full implementation schools was conducted to establish a reference point for future study and engagement. Forms of data collected included school social media posts, separate focus group interviews with school principals, home visitors, and family facilitators, informal interviews with these school staff, and open-ended survey data from school staff and Institute staff (educational facilitators). Transitions were conceptualized as changing educational environments (i.e., classroom, school) in which the child is an active participant. Children interact with others in these spaces and others bring their own understanding and experience with transitions to these interactions and to their site-specific work. Transition experiences across the birth through elementary years were explored.

HIGHLIGHTS OF EXISTING TRANSITION PRACTICES, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Transition supports are most common as children move into Kindergarten and less common in the early elementary years. They are frequently framed as one-time events for children and families. Family members are invited to these special transition experiences, often hosted at schools. To inclusively serve families in their school community, certain transition efforts were prioritized at some schools. For example, materials were translated, and interpreters were present at events. Collaborative experiences among community- and school-based PreK and Kindergarten teachers were also used to support transitions and occur more frequently in the spring semester as the academic year comes to a close.

Birth to Age 3

Home visitation and discussion of pathways in early education are two transition practices in these youngest years. In Superintendents' Plan full implementation schools, home visitors and family facilitators developed warm relationships with families. This establishment of trust with school staff begins to create connections with the school and with other families within the community. By meeting families in their homes, at school, or virtually, home visitors and family facilitators work with families to set and achieve goals and engage in targeted discussions of education goals and pathways (school PreK, community child care options, or home-based education) as children reach 3 years.

Into Kindergarten

As children move from various settings into Kindergarten, they experience many types of transition: Kindergarten registration, orientation, open house, classroom visitation, and discussion of expectations. Enrolling students in Kindergarten through a registration event is a common school practice and is often paired with Kindergarten orientation

and open house events. Schools used these opportunities to welcome families and to convey messages about policies and procedures: health, curriculum, guidance/discipline, and family engagement. Along with conveying messages, school staff begin building relationships with children and their parents/caregivers through activities and individualized dialogue. Some parents and children may visit classroom areas and meet with a teacher as part of a tour while participating in orientation/open house or as a stand-alone activity. At these events, schools shared formally (via handouts) or informally (through conversations with teachers) ways in which parents could support their child's learning.

Teachers worked across settings to align educational experiences for children and families. PreK and Kindergarten teachers learned from one another through collaboration, understanding the children they educate by sharing child records, and hosting events to introduce children to each other across environments. Teachers also collaborated with other educators and administrators at leadership team meetings and in professional learning communities to make and enact plans. Teachers sometimes shared and reviewed various child records including portfolios, goals, and other documentation. On occasion, teachers planned and held combined events with students (and parents/caregivers) from across classroom and school environments.

Across Grades

Transition experiences across the elementary school building were less common and usually consisted of scheduling or communication from the school to families. Often, schools contacted families via technology (email, messaging apps like Dojo, e-newsletters) to inform and connect them to information and educational opportunities in the school or community. Drawing on personal relationships with families, teachers and school staff used informal communication techniques to convey transition information. Examples of these unique interpersonal communication contexts included phone calls, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher association meetings, family nights, socialization groups, drop-off/pickup time, and at other transition events. Adjusting the start schedule for portions of the school is another transition experience affecting the school system. Several schools had distinctive plans for the start of their school term. For instance, PreK students began a few days after elementary students started. Another school allowed Kindergarten students to come to school a full day before their elementary peers in the school.

LEADERSHIP IN TRANSITION IMPLEMENTATION

Planning and implementing transition experiences to support children and families is a sizable commitment. Many contribute to this effort, both in planning and execution. Transition experiences vary considerably across schools and are influenced by the school leadership and staff. As instructional leaders, principals shaped the direction

and resources for transition experiences. Principals interpreted district policies, narrowed and customized building-level priorities, and engaged in planning and hosting experiences for students and families.

School staff advanced most of the transition work. Home visitors and family facilitators developed and maintained close relationships with families and were expected to be responsible for most planning, coordination, and implementation of this work. They collaborated with many others: teachers (especially PreK/Kindergarten/dual language teachers), paraprofessionals, principals, assistant principals, custodial staff, nurses, counselors, administrative professionals, librarians, parents/caregivers, bilingual liaisons, social workers, and community partners.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals of transition experiences were varied and largely relationship-based. While many events had educational components, school staff prioritized interpersonal elements among staff and parents/caregivers. School staff wanted to develop connections with parents/caregivers to support views of school as a supportive, safe place. Stated goals for parents/caregivers included reducing anxiety with the school experience, understanding stressors for children, appreciating the importance of family morning and evening routines, recognizing the need for adequate sleep/nutrition for children, learning general academic skills that could be reinforced during the summer months, and participating in future school events. Goals for children involved taking the fear and mystery out of attending school, interacting with their peers and teachers, and navigating their school with comfort and confidence. Assessment of goals was not a formal process, and school staff followed up with participants informally. Information about the success of transition experiences included positive remarks, comfort in reaching out to school staff to ask questions, a reduction in confusion or a flurry of questions from parents, and increased attendance at future events. School staff sought recommendations and improvement advice from parents.

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan School as Hub Full Implementation Evaluation: Summary and Recommendations

This year's evaluation reflects a year of early success, disrupted by a pandemic that forced shifts in the entire education system. However, staff working to support School as Hub in full implementation continued to partner with school building leadership and family engagement (home visiting and family facilitation) staff to provide families and staff with needed supports. Program quality was assessed when possible, as were child development and learning, and system shifts related to School as Hub principles of quality, continuity, and equity.

PROGRAM QUALITY

Home visiting was an area of intensive effort. However, it remains a challenging program for schools to deliver in terms of recruiting families for program and evaluation participation and engaging in quality program delivery. Enrollment in home visiting, and in the evaluation, remain low. Only four schools met the targeted goal to serve 15 children, and four schools served fewer than 10 children. The home visitation program for birth to 3 years is designed to serve 150 children and their families, across the 10 full implementation schools. At 15 children and families per school, the reach of the program as designed is already limited to a few families per school, and as such, school leadership may not be fully engaged as a program investment.

Delivering high-quality programs for home visiting has also been a challenge, with program quality hovering in the "acceptable" range across the program years. An exception to this program rating is the degree to which home visitors supported quality parent-child relationships, for which their efforts were evaluated as "good." Clearly, the interruption of home visiting in the context of the pandemic interfered with targeted efforts on the part of schools to integrate assessment into ongoing program improvement. All have worked hard to provide what families need in this stressful context, with most home visitors meeting with families virtually through the spring and summer months.

In the coming year, Buffett Institute program staff will provide additional supports to increase district and school staff recruitment of families with children birth to age 3 into home visitation and evaluation participation. Program staff will continue to use observational assessments with home visitors and family facilitators as tools for continuous improvement.

The opportunity remains to learn how schools can continue to engage with families and learn how to create meaningful learning experiences in the years before school entry. Schools can support staff and families to acknowledge the value of parent engagement rooted in reciprocal partnerships. Going forward, efforts to enroll families will include partnering with community organizations to engage families that reflect school demographics.

Classroom practices related to instructional, organizational, and emotional supports in the classroom climate have improved over the years of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. Ongoing instructional coaching related to emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support practices is an important focus in the full implementation schools. Though individualized by school needs, coaching delivery varies across classrooms and schools. Because classrooms high in Instructional Support can serve as protective mechanisms for children placed at risk for school failure (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Howes et al., 2008), schools can continue to leverage instructional strengths (e.g., emotional support and classroom organization), and ensure that all children equitably access instructional quality. Educational facilitators can continue to provide evidence-based coaching and professional development to support teacher practices related to instruction and child engagement in learning. Principals and district instructional staff can prioritize classroom quality and support teachers' efforts informed by the CLASS assessment tool; however, the CLASS tool is designed for in-person instruction. As forms of instruction may vary dramatically in the coming year, from in person to fully remote, use of technology for teaching and learning will be elevated. Coaches and teachers will need skills and tools to engage with children and families, while ensuring equitable access to learning experiences.

FAMILY PROCESSES

Family engagement, as connected to interaction with the home visitor and measured via the HOVRS, was evaluated as a program strength, consistent with findings from the 2018-19 school year.

Parent-child interaction, as assessed by the KIPS assessment tool, reflected that most parents involved in the home visiting evaluation were interacting with children in ways that supported early learning. Home visitors and family facilitators will continue to build trusting partnerships with families with the aim of supporting parent-child interactions, while increasing efforts to support program evaluation.

Suspension of home visiting data collection in spring 2020, due to the pandemic, prevented observation of change over time. Efforts are planned for the 2020-21 school year to evaluate family engagement and parent-child interactions using virtual technology to support continuous learning and documenting programmatic quality in schools' work with families.

Family perceptions of school engagement, as assessed using the Family Engagement Survey (FES) reflected very high family perceptions of engagement with schools, with the response rate slightly higher than in the 2018-19 school year. Response rates varied dramatically across schools; it will be helpful to learn how schools that had higher rates of return secured families' survey participation. Understanding family beliefs and values regarding education is an ongoing commitment for schools and using data to inform school decisions for family engagement should remain a regular priority. Families should be able to see themselves reflected in these data as schools continue to develop partnerships based on trust. In order to effectively support high-quality school partnerships and family processes, more family perspectives are needed to support school-based staff reflection and processes for engaging with and supporting families, birth – Grade 3.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Development and learning from birth – 3 years were assessed using a screening tool completed by parents. A majority of children enrolled in home visiting and family facilitation were developing typically in all areas. Home visiting supports were in place to help children whose development was at risk. Children will continue to be screened, monitored, and supported using the ASQ and ASQ: SE in the context of birth – 3 years home visiting and family facilitation.

Development and learning at 3 years of age was assessed for only a few children transitioning out of home visiting due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results were not reported for these few children, as their number was low ($n=7$). Program efforts, home visiting in particular, can put an emphasis on supporting parents in their interactions that can increase children's learning and development (cognitive, language, social-emotional, and executive functioning) in the first three years. In the next year of School as Hub, efforts will continue to support families as they provide learning supports for their young children.

Academic achievement in Kindergarten through Grade 3 was assessed in fall and winter time points, using the school-based MAP assessments, but spring achievement was not assessed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, children's reading and mathematics achievement status was below the expected levels and varied by family and child demographics related to family income, race, and ethnicity. While schools and districts have begun to shift their attention to quality, continuous, equitable learning opportunities for families and young children, opportunity gaps based on racial and ethnic disparities continue to be reflected in academic achievement scores. Children's academic achievement will continue to be observed using MAP assessments in future evaluation years to examine how system-level changes may be associated with child outcomes. Efforts will continue to work more closely with school districts to obtain

essential data. Future analyses will compare baseline achievement status and growth across school years to examine how system-level changes might influence child development and learning over time.

Executive functioning in Kindergarten – Grade 3 was evaluated using the MEFS assessment. Children's executive function was largely in the average range and improved across the last two school years. Executive function will continue to be assessed with the MEFS at 3 years and again PreK through third grade to help provide learning and insight about how children's executive functions and academic learning progress over time. Efforts to improve young children's opportunities to develop executive function were supported through Professional Development for All activities this year. Ongoing efforts will focus on supporting executive function development for children who may not have equal access to high-quality opportunities for learning. Increasing the number of children and families who have access to home visiting may be one way to address this opportunity gap. It will also be important to identify intentional instructional practices that can be integrated into the PreK – Grade 3 curriculum to support children's developing executive function skills.

Implementation Studies examined how leadership perspectives are shifting with engagement in School as Hub and how they perceive school systems shifting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While acknowledging that School as Hub cannot work as a "one size fits all" approach, principals reported having developed a "more intentional focus on early childhood" and pivoting in their prioritization of families' needs and engagement in the school community, starting from when children are born. It is possible that elevated awareness and understanding of families' lives contributed to the rapid responses schools demonstrated in response to the onset of the pandemic. However, principals noted that the work of family engagement remains difficult and that more learning about engaging families is needed.

District leaders also acknowledged an increased focus on and understanding of early childhood as a priority for schools' attention, and the role of birth – 8 learning and development in closing opportunity gaps across the metropolitan area.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools shifted efforts to providing basic resources for families and building capacity to communicate with families. Principals and district leaders quickly identified gaps in families' opportunities to access these resources and communication. In terms of instruction, leaders were identifying how to reach students and how to support teachers in their efforts to implement virtual learning and engagement technologies.

The Early Education Transitions study was concluded in this academic year. A key

engagement in School as Hub is supporting school staff in their efforts to identify and prioritize quality transitions to ensure that families and children experience continuity in their engagement with schools. While all data were collected before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study revealed that transition practices in schools focused primarily on entering Kindergarten, and less formally addressed years before PreK and first through third grade. Goals for transition experiences also varied across schools and districts. Ongoing efforts will identify goals and strategies to support schools' efforts at engaging families in seamless transitions, across the continuum from birth to Grade 3.

The evaluation will continue to examine the processes associated with enacting systems change using the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 approach.

NEXT STEPS FOR SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN FULL IMPLEMENTATION

The current evaluation plan for the full implementation of the School as Hub Birth – Grade 3 approach will continue into the 2020-21 program and evaluation year, with the understanding that efforts may need to shift in response to schools' responses to the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, schools shifted their focus and intensity of their work with families, putting efforts into addressing food insecurity, technology for learning, and family stress. Plans are in place to continue engaging in and evaluating home visiting virtually, acknowledging that our curriculum and evaluation tools are not designed for virtual implementation.

By continuing to engage in home visiting and personal visits, using observational data, home visiting and family facilitation school staff, and building school leadership support for family engagement, schools can enhance their connections with children from birth and with their families and experience increased capacity to engage in quality home visiting. We expect that ongoing coaching, supported by observational classroom data, will result in continued classroom quality improvement across all grades. Buffett Institute staff will support schools' efforts to build capacity for use of technological-mediated learning in response to the pandemic and beyond. Using multi-pronged approaches including technological tools for virtual family engagement (e.g., home visiting, personal visits, family group activities), schools will continue to experience enhanced relationships with all families.

Customized Assistance to Districts

Customized assistance provides Learning Community school districts with access to state and national consultation as they engage in strategic planning and improvement efforts to affect system-wide early childhood education and services. Districts design and deliver sustained professional learning opportunities for staff, addressing key dimensions of birth – Grade 3 programming. Distinct evaluation plans are employed for each customized assistance plan. Measures are aligned with goals and expected outcomes for the specific plan and with the overall goals of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. The customized assistance plan of the Ralston Public Schools is highlighted below.

Supporting Language Development and Instructional Practices: Ralston Public Schools

Ralston Public Schools focused its professional development on language interactions between PreK educators and students. Targeted training sessions included classroom language practices for new educators and ongoing customized coaching for seasoned educators. Educators participated in professional development and individualized cycles of observation, coaching, and feedback.

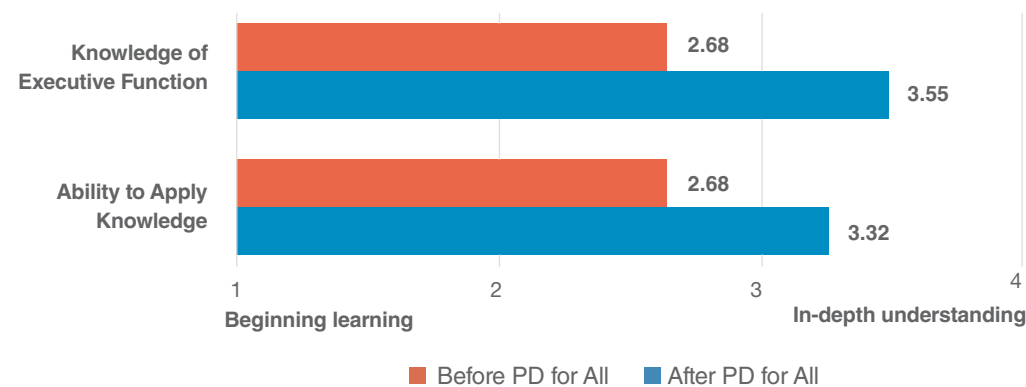
FINDINGS FOR TEACHERS

Ralston's goals for educators focused on supporting children's transitions through the school day, promotion of social and emotional development through relationships, and awareness of how language influences children's learning. Evaluation efforts focused on how professional development is impacting instructional practices and children's development on targeted learning outcomes. Using the Ralston Look Fors tool, a coach observed and evaluated instructional practices related to routines, transitions, relationships, and types of language. Coaches summarized their observations and described educators' progress. Establishing consistent transitions for children was a primary goal of the project. Teachers reviewed classroom expectations with children and by the end of the year, all teachers used visual cues to further support children's understanding of these classroom expectations and routines. By the end of the school year, students responded to classroom transitions positively with little teacher guidance. Promoting positive relationships was a goal of all teachers. Teachers were frequently observed talking with children on their level, speaking calmly to students, and demonstrating positive non-verbal behaviors to facilitate relationships with children. Teachers identified supporting language development as key to their students' academic success. Adults in the classroom were frequently observed introducing vocabulary words and referring to vocabulary they had previously introduced. Seasoned teachers were observed to use these strategies more often than novice teachers. Teachers indicated they worked to use language to support all academic areas: "I have worked to make sure I use plenty of math-talk. This is a place I have grown."

A total of 26 Ralston staff attended one of the two PD for All institutes and completed the pre/post survey. The majority (62%) of those attending were PreK teachers. The remaining teachers worked with either infants and toddlers (26%) or K – 3 students (12%). Respondents rated their knowledge of teaching skills and practices, related to the institute topics on a pre/post survey utilizing a scale from 1 (starting learning) to 4 (in-depth knowledge). Survey items were customized to the specific key learnings for each institute, but both surveys included a self-assessment of general knowledge related to executive function strength and a measure of the participant’s ability to apply that information to their work with children. A statistical analysis was conducted to determine if changes in participant understanding of executive function and their ability to apply the concepts to their work were significant. Results indicate that the increases were significant:

- Knowledge of executive function: pre ($M=2.68, SD=.894$) to post ($M=3.55, SD=.510$); $t(21)=-4.557, p<.001, d=0.972$, two-tailed test.
- Ability to apply knowledge: pre ($M=2.68, SD=1.041$) to post ($M=3.32, SD=.716$); $t(21)=-3.309, p=.003, d=0.705$, two-tailed test. The effect size was large, indicating meaningful change.

FIGURE 19. | RALSTON PARTICIPANT KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION OF EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

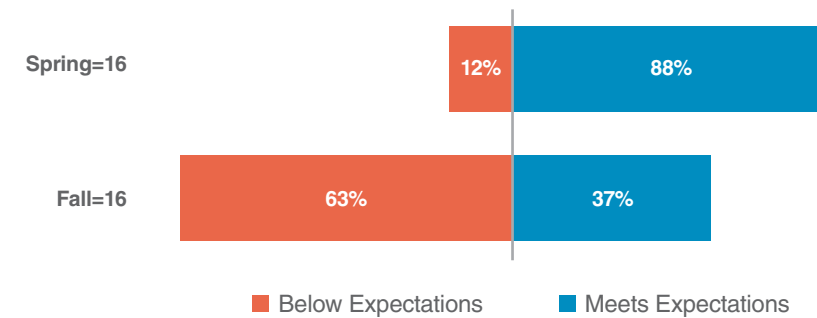


FINDINGS FOR STUDENTS

Students’ learning outcomes were assessed using Teaching Strategies (TS) GOLD (Burts et al., 2016). TS GOLD Assessment features 38 objectives designed to guide teachers through the assessment cycle, aiding them in linking observable behavior to essential early learning requirements and predicting likely next steps in development and learning. The Nebraska Department of Education requires that this assessment be completed each fall and spring. Data from the TS Strategies GOLD language domain was used to evaluate the children outcomes as part of this project. These outcomes were judged by the leadership team to be aligned with the targeted areas

for professional development and were selected as the child outcomes that would be measured in the assessment and evaluation plan. Due to COVID-19, the assessments for children, except those on an IFSP or IEP, were not required to be completed in the spring. Fall and spring comparisons were only available for children with an IEP. Child outcomes for this assessment are reported based on three categories, “below expectations,” “meets expectations,” and “exceeds expectations.” A total of 16 children who were on an IEP had fall and spring data. Due to COVID-19, no spring data was collected on the other children, as this requirement was waived by NDE. As a result, the following descriptive data needs to be interpreted in light of this specialized population of children. These results suggest that by the spring checkpoint, the majority of the children on an IEP were “meeting expectations” in the area of language development. Over half of the children moved from the category of “not meeting expectations” to “meeting expectations.”

FIGURE 20. | PREK — GRADE 3 MINNESOTA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SCALE RESULTS: FALL 2019



NEXT STEPS

During 2020-21, the external coach will consult with the Ralston lead teacher to build her coaching and technical assistance capacity with the plan for her to assume this coaching role in the following school year. Collaboration will continue among the PreK teachers and paraprofessionals to sustain implementation of effective practices. The team will also work toward more consistent planning with Kindergarten teachers to support students transitioning to Kindergarten.

Professional Development for All

The Superintendents' Plan offers a Professional Development for All (PD for All) series for professionals who work with children from birth through Grade 3 and families in the Omaha metro area. The 2019-20 theme, Executive Function and Self-Regulation, focused on research-based approaches to build and enhance children's executive functioning. The series was planned to include three full-day institutes in English and two Spanish-language institutes. The content of the sessions offered in Spanish aligned with the content presented in the previous sessions in English. After the introductory institute in November, the remaining institutes included additional focus areas: "Fostering Positive Relationships" and "Equity and Racial and Cultural Awareness." The January institute was offered twice, once during the week and then the following Saturday to accommodate educators and other professionals who could not attend during a work day.

The institute format included six hours of learning, starting with an hour-long keynote address, followed by a choice of three to four 1.5-hour breakout sessions, which were offered in the morning and repeated in the afternoon. A working lunch created time for participants to engage with one another, reflect on targeted questions, and share learnings from the day. The institute concluded with closing remarks from the keynote speaker.

This year, the PD for All schedule was disrupted. Inclement weather in January resulted in the cancellation of the Saturday institute. The remaining three institutes planned for March, April, and June were canceled due to the arrival of COVID-19 in mid-March. With school closings and statewide directives to limit gatherings, the organizers pivoted to offer a virtual model for PD for All. Over the summer, they presented three live webinars of an hour to 1.5 hours in length. In each webinar, a panel of early childhood experts focused on how to support children's social-emotional development during challenging times. Additional topics of discussion included connecting with families, supporting peer-to-peer relationships, and promoting equity and anti-racism in early childhood work.

More than 395 professionals registered for the two in-person PD for All institutes; attendance data was not available. However, 297 professionals attended the three summer webinars. Participant survey results are analyzed in the following sections for in-person and virtual PD for All offerings. Different survey instruments were used across the sessions, so results are reported separately.

PD FOR ALL IN-PERSON INSTITUTES

Methods

Following the concluding remarks, participants received a link via email to an online pre/post evaluation survey. Most (88.5%) respondents completed the survey while still at the PD for All event. The survey included ratings for the keynote address and the breakout sessions. Participants rated their pre/post understanding of key learnings, their

ability to apply the key learnings to their work with students, and their satisfaction with the presentations. Across the two institutes, 225 participants responded to the survey. Survey participation rates were not calculated because exact attendance numbers were not available.

Findings

Work Setting

Most survey respondents worked in school-based programs ($n=154$, 67.5%), including elementary schools, PreK within elementary schools, after school programs and Head Start or Educare within elementary schools. A subset of respondents ($n=38$, 16.7%) were from community-based programs, including child care centers and preschools (not in elementary schools), and the Omaha Learning Community Centers. Participants from four different Nebraska universities ($n=20$, 8.8%) also responded.

Age Group Served

Survey respondents most commonly worked with multiple age groups ($n=89$, 39%). About a third ($n=74$, 31.6%) worked primarily with preschool-age children, 14.5% worked with infants and toddlers ($n=33$), 9.2% worked with children in Kindergarten through Grade 3 ($n=21$), and a few worked directly with families ($n=11$, 4.8%).

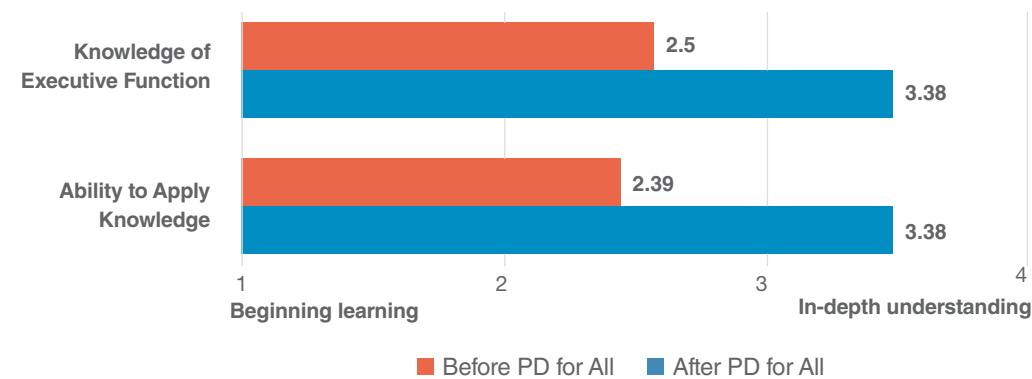
Job Title

The majority of respondents identified themselves as teachers ($n=75$, 32.9%). Other roles included home visitor or family facilitator ($n=44$, 19.2%), director ($n=14$, 6.1%), assistant teacher/paraeducator ($n=7$, 3.1%), and principal/assistant principal ($n=2$, .96%). Many respondents identified as "other" ($n=86$, 37.7%), and included speech language pathologists, educational coaches and consultants, early childhood coordinators and developers, individuals working with special education populations, and higher education professionals.

Do attendees report increased knowledge of executive function and how to support children in developing executive function skills?

Respondents rated their knowledge of teaching skills and practices, related to the institute topics on a pre/post survey utilizing a scale from 1 (starting learning) to 4 (in-depth knowledge). Survey items were customized to the specific key learnings for each institute, but both surveys included a self-assessment of general knowledge related to executive function and a measure of the participant's ability to apply that information to their work with children. The following graph shows the average ratings before attending the institute and after for these two areas.

FIGURE 21. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL: RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF EXECUTIVE FUNCTION, N=221



Survey results show that 14% of respondents ($n=32$) indicated they had “in-depth” knowledge about executive function prior to attending the PD for All sessions. At post, 50% ($n=110$) of participants rated their understanding at that level. In the area of applying their understanding of executive function to their work with children and families, only 11% ($n=25$) of respondents indicated in-depth knowledge at pre. After attending the institute, 47% ($n=103$) selected this response. A statistical analysis was conducted to determine if changes in participant understanding of executive function and their ability to apply the concepts to their work were significant. Respondents reported large and significant increases for:

- Knowledge of executive function: pre ($M=2.50$, $SD=.840$) to post ($M=3.38$ $SD=.689$); $t(220)=-19.36$, $p<.001$, $d=1.29$, two-tailed test.
- Ability to apply knowledge: pre ($M=2.39$, $SD=.839$) to post ($M=3.38$ $SD=.647$); $t(220)=-19.46$, $p<.001$, $d=1.31$, two-tailed test.

Did the attendees find the breakout sessions useful?

Respondents rated the effectiveness of the breakout sessions. Sample topics included the connection between executive function and challenging behaviors in preschool-age children, children’s executive functioning in natural outdoor settings vs. indoors, and engaging students and parents in executive function activities.

- 85% of respondents thought the sessions had a good balance between theory and practical information they can use.
- 87% thought the sessions helped them understand new information and ideas.
- 88% plan to use what they learned in the sessions.

PD FOR ALL WEBINARS

Methods

After each webinar, participants received a link via email to an online evaluation survey.

Across the three webinars, 143 participants responded to the survey, which is a completion rate of 48%.

Findings

Where Participants Work

The webinar format allows for much broader geographic participation compared to the in-person institute. The majority of webinar attendees ($n=110$, 76.9%) work in Douglas or Sarpy County. The remaining participants come from many counties across Nebraska and as far away as Washington state.

Work Setting

About a third of the survey respondents worked in school-based programs ($n=51$, 35.7%), including elementary schools, PreK within elementary schools, Head Start, Educare, and after school programs. A third worked in community-based programs ($n=51$, 35.7%). The rest ($n=41$, 28.8%) were from a variety of work settings including higher education, home visiting programs, and state agencies.

Age Group Served

Survey respondents most commonly worked with multiple age groups ($n=60$, 41.8%). About a fifth ($n=32$, 22.2%) worked primarily with infants and toddlers, 16.1% worked with PreK ($n=23$), 12.4% worked directly with families ($n=18$), and a few worked with school-age children in Kindergarten through third grade ($n=11$, 7.5%).

Job Title

Some respondents identified themselves as teachers ($n=19$, 13.3%). Other roles included home visitor or family facilitator ($n=22$, 15.4%), director/administrator ($n=24$, 16.8%), assistant teacher/paraeducator ($n=3$, 2.1%), instructional/early childhood coach ($n=8$, 5.6%) and special education/early intervention teacher ($n=4$, 2.5%). Many respondents identified as “other” ($n=63$, 44.1%), and included curriculum coordinators, program evaluators, speech language pathologists, early childhood coordinators, and higher education professionals.

Did participants find the webinars informative and useful to their work?

The participant feedback surveys included three common questions about learning new ways to support children’s social-emotional development and if they found the information to be useful. Results across 143 participants indicate high levels of satisfaction with what they learned from the webinars and the relevance of the learning to their work.

- 92% of respondents reported that they learned new ways to support children’s social-emotional learning.

- 94% reported that the webinars helped them understand new information and ideas.
- 94% plan to use what they learned in the webinars.

Two of the webinar surveys included two additional common questions. Results are reported below.

- 95% of respondents ($n=94$) reported that the webinars gave them new ways to foster connections and relationships with families.
- 93% of respondents ($n=77$) indicated that they learned new ways to promote equity and anti-racism in their work.

CONCLUSIONS

Survey responses for in-person learning and online webinars indicate high levels of satisfaction, with 88% to 94% of respondents reporting that they plan to use what they learned at PD for All. Participants at the in-person institutes indicated their knowledge and understanding of executive function increased significantly. Webinar participants had high levels of satisfaction with the offerings. Strong majorities found the information useful and learned new ways to support children's social-emotional development.

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