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2019

Buffett Early Childhood Institute: Five year report 2013-18

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

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five year report

2013-18



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute

at the University of Nebraska

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Dear Friend:

Five years ago, the University of Nebraska, with the support of philanthropist Susie Buffett, asked an audacious question: can a public university create a national model that will transform the lives of children, particularly those at risk, birth through age 8? As you'll see in this report, the answer to that question is yes. Backed by the largest commitment of any public-private partnership in the United States in the field of early childhood development and education, we are well on our way to accomplishing our goal.

Throughout these five years our purpose has been clear: to demonstrate that ongoing, high-quality efforts across the first eight years of life will increase the likelihood that all children can experience life success and become active and productive contributors to society. Our work is timely and critical: when we began 40 percent of Nebraska's youngest children were at risk of failing in school.

What have we done? We've conducted the largest survey of the citizens of Nebraska concerning their attitudes about early care and education and the most extensive study ever completed of the Nebraska early childhood workforce. We created a statewide commission to develop a comprehensive plan for expanding and strengthening the state's early childhood workforce. We partnered with 11 school superintendents and their teams on the largest birth through third grade demonstration project in the U.S. to reduce race- and income-based achievement gaps. We conducted and published research studies and hosted conferences and meetings, professional development sessions, and consultations and presentations, among many other activities. This report gives an overview as well as specific details of our work.

While building on what has gone before—in research, practice, policy, and outreach—and collaborating with gifted and dedicated colleagues across the university, state, and nation, we have devoted ourselves to the fundamental truths that no child's needs are less important than another's and that the early childhood profession is uniquely important to children, families, and society today.

Our desire is that what we do here, together, on behalf of Nebraska children and families will inspire educators, policymakers, civic leaders, and parents across the nation for years to come. We invite you to join with us on our journey as we continue our work over the next five years.



Hank M. Bounds, Ph.D.
President
University of Nebraska



Samuel J. Meisels, Ed.D.
Founding Executive Director
Richard D. Holland Presidential Chair in Early Childhood Development
Buffett Early Childhood Institute

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute began operations in June 2013. We were charged with creating a new model for how public higher education can engage in early education by helping to transform the lives of young children and their families.

This report presents a by-the-numbers profile of who we are and what we've accomplished in our first five years. Following the numbers you'll find brief descriptions of programs, initiatives, financials, and the Institute itself.







the framework



1

big
vision

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



2

signature
programs

the achievement gap challenge

reduce this number:

96,391

children age 8 and younger at risk of failing in school
(40% of Nebraska's children)

early childhood workforce development program

increase this number:

2,005

early childhood professionals serving at-risk children
under age 5 in settings with high-quality standards
(at least 9,990 needed)



3

goals

- increase opportunities to learn
- strengthen the workforce
- build public commitment

4

interrelated activities

research

practice

policy

outreach



who we are

40

staff members: researchers, educators, consultants, scholars, and administrators

35

stakeholders on the Institute's Strategic Planning Commission

10

highly respected scholars and researchers on the Institute's Board of Advisors

A close-up photograph of a young child's face, showing their eyes, nose, and mouth. The child has dark skin and curly hair. A large, white, bold number '5' is overlaid on the right side of the image, partially covering the child's forehead and hair.

5

long-term
outcomes

- children's learning and development are on track
- quality care and education are available to all, birth – Grade 3
- families are supported and supportive
- workforce is skilled, informed, and diverse
- public policies are effective



The background of the page is a soft-focus photograph of a sandy beach. In the foreground, several small, young green plants are visible, growing out of the sand. The rest of the image is a bright, out-of-focus expanse of sand and sky, creating a sense of a vast, open environment.

the groundwork



outreach and engagement

458

staff road trips across the state for planning meetings, site visits, community forums, fact finding, presentations, and workgroups

1,600+

early childhood professionals responded to the *Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey*

22

counties and 36 school districts and communities in Nebraska where we've begun work

42

early childhood degree programs reviewed as part of the Nebraska Higher Education Inventory

7,100

Nebraskans responded to the Buffett Institute/Gallup survey *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, the first of its kind in the state

10,157

children, birth through age 8, in Nebraska's Panhandle whose needs were assessed in 15 community forums

4

major reports from the Buffett Institute/Gallup survey released in Lincoln, Kearney, Scottsbluff, and Omaha

120

key stakeholders focused on change at the Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce Conference

outreach and engagement

450

attendees at two national symposia hosted in partnership with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

125+

presentations in the U.S. and abroad by founding executive director

9

graduate fellowships awarded to exceptional doctoral students

95

presentations at national conferences by staff

2

endowed community chairs appointed: senior researchers in early childhood-related fields

22

reports published on our work, findings, and strategies

63

conferences and public events organized across the state

10

appearances at legislative meetings and hearings

300+

attendees at a panel discussion with the Aspen Institute marking Head Start's 50th anniversary

341

media mentions in 35 states and Washington, D.C.

64,802

people in 139 countries follow
our work online







the
groundbreaking
work

15,000

children participating in the nation's largest birth – Grade 3

11

school districts in two Nebraska counties

180+

PreK – Grade 3 classrooms and 500+ educators at 12 schools participating in professional learning

3

levels of participation:
Full Implementation
Customized Assistance
Professional Development for All

3,500+

PreK – Grade 3 children in 12 full implementation “school as hub” schools

000+

demonstration project: the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan

9,000

home visits with more than
100 children birth to age 3

2,464

Professional Development
for All attendees

3,000

parent-child group meetings
birth to age 5

21

schools and 153 teachers,
administrators, and other professionals
receiving customized assistance

109

Professional Development for
All sessions (six in Spanish)

4 promising early results

year 2 evaluation

13%

more PreK students within average range or higher on academic achievement

16%

more K – Grade 1 students within average range or higher on academic achievement

14%

fewer students in lowest 20th percentile on academic achievement

20%

gain in instructional support among K – Grade 3 teachers





Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission

39

leaders from systems in the
public and private sectors

8

professional
preparation
and learning

11

local community

9

early care and
education

11

policy and
regulation



working on behalf of
1.92 million Nebraskans

new funding

\$4 million

endowed to establish a presidential chair to be held by the executive director of the Buffett Institute, an excellence fund, and an endowed tenured community chair

\$25 million

awarded to the Institute in public and private grants and contracts to support research, program development, and workforce planning and development







the details

A lot happened in the first five years. The following are brief summaries of the projects and initiatives that lie behind our numbers. For a closer look at all the work mentioned, visit buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu.

the framework

THE UNIVERSITY

Beginning in 2010, the University of Nebraska set itself a remarkable challenge: to transform the lives of Nebraska's young children and families, particularly those at greatest risk, based on the best research available.

An extraordinary confluence of interest, commitment, financial resources, and willing collaborators made—and continues to make—achieving this goal possible. Faculty experts across four diverse campuses contribute their knowledge and time. Talented educators throughout the state provide the support children need to succeed. Partners in the public sector and in business step up to do their part, knowing that when all our children start well, each of us benefits socially and economically.

Philanthropic partners, too, embrace this work, among them Susie Buffett. Her early and generous gift, matched by the university, became the cornerstone of the single largest commitment that any university in the U.S.—public or private—has made to the field of early childhood development and education.

THE INSTITUTE

The Buffett Institute was not founded to duplicate what others have done or work toward incremental changes to the system. We were founded to transform the lives and futures of young children and families, starting in Nebraska, according to the following parameters:

Children in greatest need. We promote the development and learning of all children, but especially those raised in the contexts of poverty,

abuse, and/or developmental, learning, familial, or behavioral challenges.

Birth through 8. Research demonstrates that for cognitive and social-emotional gains to persist, young children need more than a single year of PreK, more even than birth – 3 or birth – 5 programs. We must build a continuum of care that spans children's most formative years.

Urban and rural. Population density is not destiny, or it shouldn't be. When it comes to supporting the care and education of young children, we are committed to working in both urban and rural areas, beginning first in our state and then nationally and beyond.

Research-based. We apply the knowledge acquired from basic research to programs, policies, collaborations, and actions that foster the development of all children. All of our intervention, professional development, outreach, and policy activities are based on the best evidence available.

Multidisciplinary and university-wide. Multiple factors affect the development of young children; multiple disciplines must collaborate to find ways to support that development. We engage all four campuses of the University of Nebraska in our work, including Lincoln, Omaha, Kearney, and the Medical Center.

TWO SIGNATURE PROGRAMS

In our first year, we launched two initiatives to increase the quality of early care and education available in Nebraska and to make that care and education accessible to every child who needs it.

The first, the *Achievement Gap Challenge*, aims to increase opportunities to learn and reduce or eliminate income- and race-based opportunity

and achievement gaps for children by the end of third grade. The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, in which 12 elementary schools in two Nebraska counties have become hubs that connect area children and their families to quality care and education from birth through third grade, is the proving ground for this work.

The second, the *Early Childhood Workforce Development Program*, takes on the critical issues that affect the quality and quantity of early childhood professionals in our state, such as professional preparation and qualifications, workforce compensation, funding, and public commitment. Part of our work in this area is the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, charged with developing a consensus-driven action plan to expand and strengthen the state's workforce. Both of these initiatives have major national implications.

the groundwork

NEBRASKANS SPEAK ABOUT EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

The opinions and needs of Nebraska's citizens are as central to our work as any research finding. We want to know what Nebraskans know, think, and believe about early care and education. In 2015, we partnered with Gallup to find answers to these questions, administering the largest public survey on this subject ever conducted in the state. A random sample of 7,191 Nebraskans age 18 and older participated; data were weighted to match Nebraska's demographics by gender, age, education, and race.

The results, published in four reports in 2016 and 2017 as *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, underscore the relevance of our mission. The vast majority of Nebraskans recognize the importance of high-quality early care and education and understand that it has long-term impacts on student success. Only 11 percent, however, believe that quality care is available for every family in the state, and even fewer believe it's affordable (6 percent). Ten percent strongly believe that most of the state's young children are prepared to be successful in school when they enter Kindergarten. Not surprisingly, 67 percent agree or strongly agree that the state should make early care and education a higher priority than it is today.

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE SURVEY

In partnership with the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, we conducted the largest, most comprehensive survey to date of the state's early childhood workforce. Participants represented licensed

home-based and center-based child care programs, public PreKindergarten programs, and elementary schools serving children in Kindergarten through Grade 3.

Low compensation, lack of health and retirement benefits, uneven professional preparation, and stress are among the most common challenges early childhood educators face. For example, approximately 20 percent of PreK and K – 3 teachers hold second jobs and more than 13 percent of home- and center-based providers report their own children qualify for free or reduced-price lunches at school. Amid the challenges, however, survey findings also point to areas of promise. Among teachers with degrees, most majored in education-related fields. And teachers of young children tend to have considerable experience—12 years or more on average. Under the circumstances, that length of service demonstrates real commitment to Nebraska's children and families.

NEBRASKA HIGHER EDUCATION INVENTORY

One of the first questions we asked as we began planning to make Nebraska the best place to be a baby was this: how do we, in higher education, prepare those who want to work with or for the benefit of young children? What do we expect them to know? What competencies must they demonstrate? At our request, in the 2014–15 academic year the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley conducted a survey, the Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory, with the 20 institutions in our state that collectively offer a total of 42 early childhood degree programs.

The inventory found considerable differences in both curricula and degree requirements among those 42 programs. Infant and toddler content, for example, varied by topic and degree level; it was

also less likely to be offered than preschool or elementary content. While all degree programs required at least one supervised practicum, the hours involved varied widely from as few as nine to as many as 150.

Four broad recommendations came out of the inventory. They include unifying pathways and expectations across institutions, strengthening content and equity across the age span, building a leadership pipeline, and increasing faculty support. Those recommendations guide our work and the work of our partners in higher education, state agencies, and others as together we rethink curricula and programs to strengthen and expand the early childhood workforce.

PANHANDLE PARTNERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICE UNIT 13 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Census data indicate that more than one in three children birth to age 5 in Nebraska are at risk for school failure. That number is growing faster in our state's rural counties than in its urban areas. In May 2015, we paid the first of what would become a series of visits to the Panhandle, the 11-county, High Plains agricultural region in western Nebraska, to discuss the needs and priorities of those who work with young children there.

In 2017, we began working with the Panhandle Partnership for Health and Human Services (Panhandle Partnership) and Educational Service Unit 13 to execute the first of four strategies that emerged from those early conversations. With data gathered from 15 community focus groups with local educators, providers, civic leaders, and families, we are mapping the region's early childhood resources and assessing its needs and capacity.

TRANSFORMING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE CONFERENCE

Improving the lives and futures of Nebraska's young children requires a statewide consensus on the work to be done. What's more, it requires that leaders from distinct sectors join in a new, shared enterprise, one that entails new roles and responsibilities. Building that consensus and the collective willingness and capacity to achieve it is part of the ongoing work of the Buffett Institute.

In the area of workforce development, we began this work by convening a statewide, two-day conference, Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Nebraska, in October 2015. Twenty-two of the state's 24 higher education institutions that offer elementary or early childhood education programs were represented, along with members of the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and other agencies. National consultants joined state experts to discuss strategies to ensure that all our children will be served by highly trained early childhood educators. Focused think tank sessions in the following months further explored conference themes and generated a series of next steps for the months and years ahead.

COMMUNITY CHAIRS AND GRADUATE SCHOLARS

As part of the University of Nebraska, we count on the expertise of colleagues across the four campuses. By funding professorships, assistantships, grants, and collaborations, we build that expertise and increase our collective capacity to accomplish our goals for young children.

Two very special investments are making a unique contribution to our community of scholars and to the field. Four endowed "community chairs" help translate the research base of their specific university disciplines to communities of practice.

Early childhood is a fundamentally interdisciplinary field. By devoting one-quarter of their academic appointment to collaborate with us and with each other, these tenured community professors strengthen the quality of our thinking and our work and what is available in the field at large. Buffett Early Childhood Institute Graduate Scholars—doctoral students who have reached Ph.D. candidacy in one of many areas of early development—increase the pipeline of diverse, exceptional researchers studying children placed at risk as a consequence of economic, social, or environmental circumstance.

Both of these programs attract accomplished scholars whose research complements and enriches the field. Current areas of inquiry include interventions promoting physical activity and a healthy diet, improved early assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders, mindfulness-based stress management for teachers, and the effects of oxytocin on social motivation and attractiveness in early development.

CONFERENCES AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Whether multiday conferences or guest lectures, each of the events we host, like the three cited below, raise the visibility of early childhood issues, address topical concerns, or advance the science and knowledge base. Similarly, our work as researchers and experts has taken us to conferences and symposia across the country to present before audiences as diverse as elementary school principals (National Association of Elementary School Principals) and policymakers (White House summit).

50 Years After Head Start: Making an Investment in Early Childhood Education in America

To mark the 50th anniversary of Head Start, we invited members of the public to attend a panel discussion about the future of early childhood

education and care. Joining Buffett Institute founding executive director Samuel Meisels were panelists **Jackie Bezos**, president and co-founder, Bezos Family Foundation; **George Kaiser**, chairman, BOK Financial Corporation; **Deval Patrick**, managing director, Bain Capital LLC, and former governor of Massachusetts; and **J.B. Pritzker**, co-founder and managing partner, Pritzker Group. The panel was moderated by **Walter Isaacson**, president and CEO of the Aspen Institute, an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, D.C., which co-sponsored the event.

Parenting Matters National Symposium

Practitioners and administrators from across Nebraska and around the nation joined us to examine the issues raised in *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8*, a report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. After an overview of evidence-based practices that parents and other caregivers can use to help children realize their potential, plenary sessions led by local and national experts focused on the impact of poverty on parents and families, the Family Medical Leave Act, and the implications of adverse childhood experiences. The symposium was presented in collaboration with the American Educational Research Association and the National Academies.

Promoting the Success of Young Children Learning English: Nebraska and National Perspectives

Nearly 230 researchers, practitioners, community leaders, philanthropists, and policymakers took part in this national symposium on critical issues raised in the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's report, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*. The event included an overview of the report, which examines the research evidence about learning English from

early childhood through high school, identifies effective practices for educators to use, and recommends steps policymakers can take to support high-quality educational outcomes for children and youth whose first language is not English. The event also featured plenary sessions led by national and local experts. The symposium was presented in collaboration with the National Academies.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION

Structural change—whether it is reinventing teacher preparation to increase the size, diversity, and skills of our early childhood workforce, creating and aligning regulations across state agencies, or securing financial support for expanded and improved services—requires more than the collaboration of a dedicated few. It requires knowledgeable, motivated citizens: an informed and vocal majority who understand what young children need, what we must do to meet that need, and how we will all benefit from doing so. Public outreach, whether through traditional or social media channels, public forums, or public service announcements, is essential to our work, and is an area to which we are deeply committed. We view public outreach as a corollary to all of our work and a critical lever for supporting policy changes consistent with research.

the ground-breaking work

THE SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN

This multiyear, multipartner collaboration to reduce race- and income-based achievement gaps for children birth through Grade 3 is community-based, research-informed, continuously evaluated and improved, and highly policy relevant. It is also the largest birth through third grade demonstration project in the country.

These facts alone mean that what we are doing here, how we are doing it, what we are learning, and what we will have achieved are important to every educator, policymaker, and taxpayer in the U.S. and beyond.

The plan is built around intensive, continuous, and evidence-based services for children living in high concentrations of poverty in the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, comprising 11 school districts in the Omaha metro area. The Superintendents' Plan is made possible by the Learning Community and the 11 metro-area school district superintendents.

At the core of the plan is the idea that schools can serve as the “hub” that connects vulnerable young children and families to education and services throughout the first eight years of life. A dozen elementary schools in six school districts have become such hubs, providing home visiting for families with children from birth to age 3, high-quality school- and community-based preschools and child care centers for 3- and 4-year-olds, and aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment for children in PreK – Grade 3. Active family engagement and support as well as educator coaching are critical features of this approach. The plan also includes customized assistance,

based on district-identified need, for eight school districts, as well as Professional Development for All, an educational series offered to all school- and community-based personnel who work with young children throughout the two counties. The better caregivers, teachers, and administrators are able to translate child development research into practice, the better children with diverse learning needs can thrive.

THE SUPERINTENDENTS' EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN EVALUATION

As we evaluated the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan during the 2016-17 school year, we looked for answers to two broad questions. First, how well is the plan being implemented? And second, what progress has been made in specific processes and outcomes related to the plan components? Working with colleagues at the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, we used a multiple-cohort, mixed-methods longitudinal design for our study.

The early evidence is promising. Children's learning improved, particularly those progressing beyond the lowest percentile ranks over time. Gains in vocabulary and general academic skills were observed across all students as well as within subgroups stratified according to race/ethnicity and free or reduced-price lunch status. Scores in social-emotional and executive function skills remained stable.

The quality of teacher-child instructional interactions has increased. Teachers showed improvement across three categories, including emotional, organizational, and instructional support. Parents/caregivers—whose engagement is key—experienced high levels of social and physical support. They also reported positive and

collaborative relationships with teachers and schools and strong relationships with their children.

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE COMMISSION

To improve young children’s learning and development in Nebraska, three major changes must come about. First, we must ensure that we have a sufficient number of early childhood professionals and that all those professionals have the specialized knowledge and skills to be effective. Second, we must see to it that the critical work they do to support young children’s cognitive and social-emotional development is widely recognized and appropriately compensated. And, third, we must build the public will and commitment necessary for sustained investments in early care and education.

Each of those outcomes requires collaboration and engagement among systems of higher education, early care and education, and regulation and policy, as well as the business community and general public. In early 2017 we convened a statewide commission of thought leaders from those sectors to develop the action plans necessary to transform the early childhood workforce.

BLUEPRINT FOR TRANSFORMATION

Drawing on knowledge of large-scale systems change, research, and the input of experts and stakeholders over our first two years, we developed a theory of change to guide the work of creating the early childhood workforce of tomorrow.

Our theory of change, or Blueprint for Transformation, rests on a commitment to principles of equity, collaboration, evidence-based practice, responsiveness to local needs, and sustainability. It incorporates four essential

components: (1) common definitions and specific skills and competencies tied to these definitions across all professional training programs and systems of certification or regulation, (2) alignment and integration of competencies within and across systems of practice and regulation, (3) a supportive professional environment that compensates workers fairly and offers career advancement opportunities, and (4) development of workforce professionals through induction, mentoring, and professional development programs.

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL ACADEMY TEAM

The Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) consensus report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* contained 13 recommendations for local, state, and federal action that, if taken, could have a significant impact on the field.

In cooperation with the National Academy of Medicine’s Innovation to Incubation Program, we convened a team that reviewed the IOM recommendations for their relevance to Nebraska and their potential for implementation here. The team also compiled successful strategies used in other states, evaluating their applicability within the Nebraska context, and assembling information and tools useful to the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission.

SUPPORTING HIGH-QUALITY BIRTH – GRADE 3 APPROACHES IN THE NEBRASKA PANHANDLE

Effective problem solving is rooted in collaborations that address local concerns. Continuing a partnership that began with an assessment of early childhood needs in the Panhandle, we are working with leaders there to develop a region-specific vision and strategic plan for an early childhood initiative. The assessment and plan are two of four strategic

priorities identified by area educators and service providers. The other two on our shared agenda are to create and implement a regional professional development plan and to develop the long-term financial plan needed to sustain the work and ensure long-term success.

RESEARCH

Research and research partnerships are central to our work as individual investigators and as an institute within the University of Nebraska. We have published four major analyses of the Buffett Institute/Gallup survey on early care and education in Nebraska (overall findings, urban/rural differences, the workforce, and parental responses); two major reports on the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Evaluation; a report on the Early Childhood Workforce Survey; a comprehensive report on technology-assisted professional development; several peer-reviewed articles on aspects of workforce development (in press or under review); and three issue briefs on the Nebraska early childhood workforce.

Data gathering and evaluation are ongoing for the Superintendents' Plan at our demonstration project in the Omaha area. In addition to the research projects described elsewhere, we are collaborating with the Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS) and the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln to pinpoint the minimum thresholds of child care quality needed to promote positive development and prevent negative outcomes for children birth to age 5.

We are also joining with CYFS colleagues on a market rate study that will inform state policymakers about child care costs in Nebraska. Analysis of data from the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey generated research briefs on turnover and risk factors for depression

among early childhood teachers in Nebraska. Another research focus is the Nebraska Early Childhood Data Coalition, an effort we're leading with faculty colleagues on the Lincoln and Medical Center campuses as well as partners in the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and private agencies and foundations. The goal is to develop a statewide integrated data system that will answer key questions about publicly funded early childhood services, provide greater accountability for public investments in services for children from birth through age 8, and inform future investments in early care and education.

The Buffett Institute Community Chair in the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, David Dzewaltowski, received five years of funding from the National Institutes of Health to study a novel, locally driven community development strategy on community systems change and physical activity in children. Building on local health department partnerships, Dzewaltowski and his colleagues will randomize rural communities and child development settings to compare the impact of their intervention versus standard public health practice.

the team

LEADERSHIP

Samuel J. Meisels, Ed.D.

Founding Executive Director
Richard D. Holland Presidential Chair
in Early Childhood Development

Renee Wessels

Associate Executive Director

Kathleen Gallagher, Ph.D.

Director of Research and Evaluation

Iheoma Iruka, Ph.D.

Director of Research and Evaluation
(2014 – 17)

Maria Malnack

Director of Finance and
Administration

Chris Maxwell, Ph.D.

Director of Program Development

Erin Owen

Director of Communications
and Marketing

Susan Sarver, Ph.D.

Director of Workforce Planning
and Development

Shannon Sherman

Director of Communications
(2014 – 18)

Rose Edzie, Ph.D.

Director of Development, University
of Nebraska Foundation

COMMUNITY CHAIRS*

David Dzewaltowski, Ph.D.

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

Kathleen Gallagher, Ph.D.

Cille and Ron Williams Community
Chair for Early Childhood Education,
University of Nebraska at Kearney
(2016 – 17)

* Searches underway at the University of
Nebraska–Lincoln, University of Nebraska at
Omaha, and University of Nebraska at Kearney

**PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT**

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Associate Director of
Program Development

Cris Lopez Anderson
Program Administrator

Keeley Bibins
Educational Facilitator

Molly Colling
Program Specialist

Kristy Feden
Program Manager (2016)

Darcy Heath
Educational Facilitator

Erica Kenoyer
Educational Facilitator

Dahlia Lloyd
Program Specialist

Janette Merkel
Program Specialist

Mary Beth Pistillo
Educational Facilitator

Amy Schmidtke
Program Specialist
(formerly Educational Facilitator)

Barb Stratman
Educational Facilitator

Brooke Studt
Educational Facilitator (2015 – 18)

Melissa Wolken
Educational Facilitator

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Catherine Huddleston-Casas, Ph.D.
Associate Director of Workforce
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Cama Charlet
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**RESEARCH
AND EVALUATION**

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and Evaluation

Amanda Garrett, Ph.D.
Research Assistant Professor

Amy Roberts, Ph.D.
Research Assistant Professor
(2016 – 18)

Malena Rousseau, Ph.D.
Research and Evaluation Coordinator

COMMUNICATIONS

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Interim Events and
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Machaela Cavanaugh
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Rebecca Elder
Designer and Marketing Specialist

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Office Associate (2015 – 18)

Melissa Boyer
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Stella Chow
Finance and Administration
Associate

Shannon Gelbman
Office Associate

Marcos Jacome
Technical Support Associate

Lori Kuker
Office Associate

Salina Wallace
Office Associate

GRADUATE SCHOLARS

2016 – 17
Jon Cavanaugh
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Abbey Gregg
University of Nebraska
Medical Center

Amanda Moen
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2017 – 18
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In just five years, hundreds have joined in the effort. The Board of Regents and leadership of the University of Nebraska, who laid the groundwork for the Institute, have been engaged, enthused, and supportive. Educators, researchers, child care workers, public servants, legislators, businesses, thought leaders, parents, and communities across

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We could not have achieved what we have achieved thus far without the efforts of many individuals and organizations. They supported us, and we have built on that support over the past five years. We will continue to build on it in the years to come.

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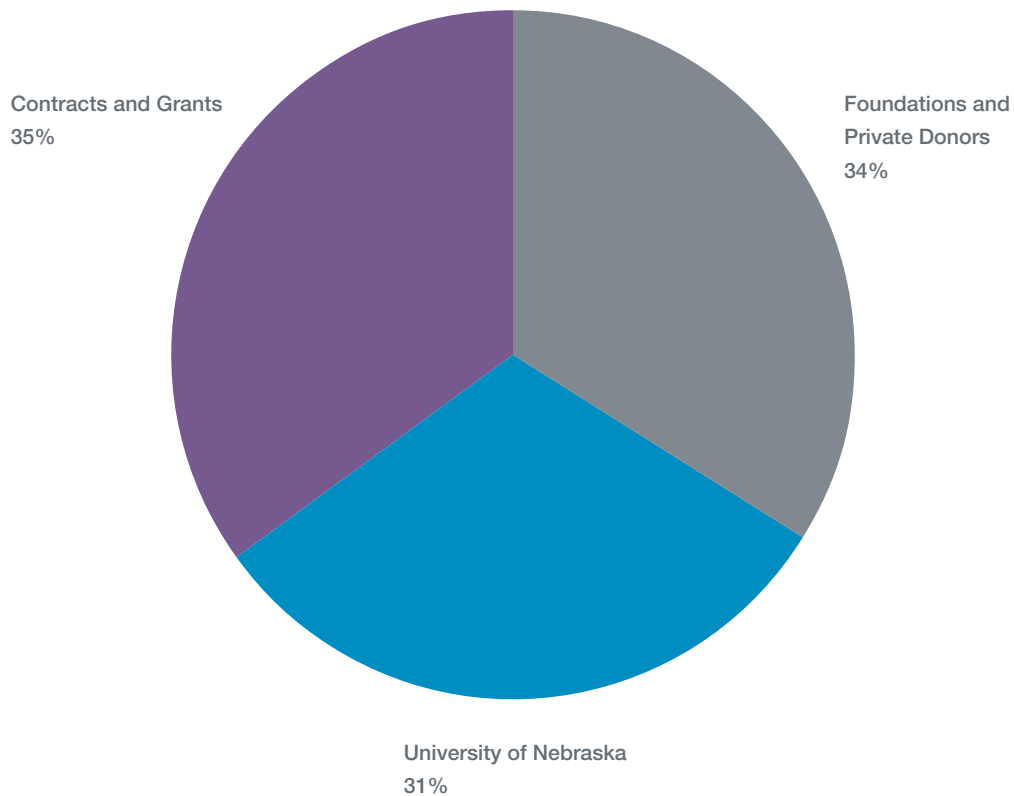
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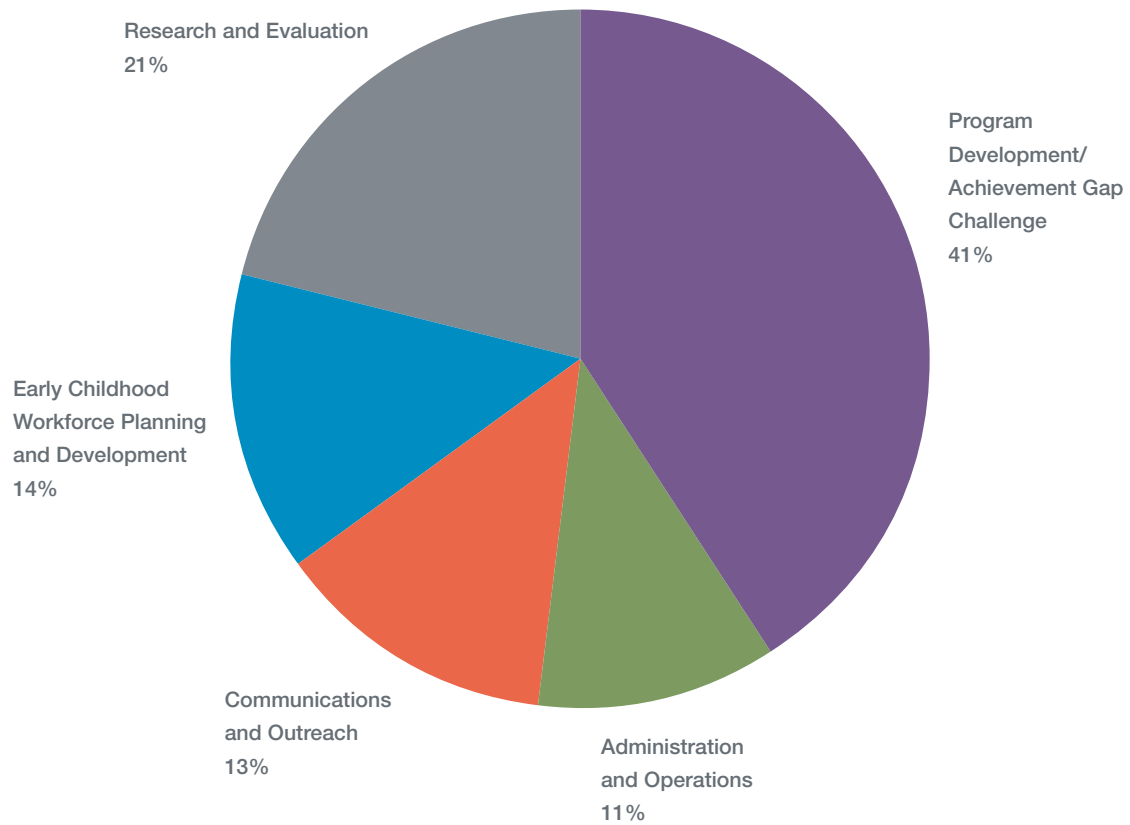
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