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## **Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan**

### **School AS Hub for children and families Birth to Grade 3**

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan is a collaboration between the 11 school district superintendents within the metro Omaha Nebraska, the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska.

In the nation's heartland, an innovative, groundbreaking approach to closing achievement gaps and opening opportunities for young children birth to grade 3 are well underway.

Its goals are:

- Helping school districts to re-imagine their role in early learning systems
- Assisting schools in building relationships with families long before their child's first day of Kindergarten
- Supporting families as they nurture their children's strengths and advocate for their futures
- Helping teachers, principals, home visitors, child care providers, and community partners work side by side with parents and families to equitably aid in children's growth

Like other states across the country, reducing or eliminating opportunity gaps that confront children or families is a high priority for Nebraska.

According to First Five Nebraska, nearly 40 percent of children age 5 and younger across the state are considered at risk for school failure due to poverty alone. This is a staggering statistic. But all the more staggering are statistics about the disproportionate representation of children of color among groups placed at risk. Differences in children's learning can show up as early as 9 months and can be persistent and pervasive throughout childhood. Educational gaps for children in low-income families and children of color often continue to grow so that by Kindergarten, many children are a year or more behind their more economically advantaged peers, with these gaps further widening across the early grades. Opportunity and achievement gaps limit children's success in school and life and can diminish communities' health and well-being, workforce productivity, wealth, and quality of life. Clearly, reducing these gaps benefits everyone. What's more, after decades of research, we know what needs to be done. Our best opportunity to prevent or reduce achievement and opportunity gaps is to start early, when children's brains are developing rapidly.

**School as Hub** an approach in which the school's role as the connector for early childhood services for children throughout the first eight years of life is at the heart of Full Implementation of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. Currently 6 school districts and 10 elementary schools in the Omaha metro area have embraced this approach and doing school differently as the work to transform an educational setting. The following describe the components of School AS Hub.

### **HOME VISITING**

Once a baby is born—or even before—the school begins building a relationship with the family. A home visitor employed by the school visits the families three times per month in the home. During these sessions, district-based home visitors focus on sharing positive interactions with parents that are critical to

*Start early. Start well.*

the baby's learning and healthy development. The home visitor demonstrates strategies to communicate with and engage babies and toddlers in ways that will impact social-emotional development, capacity to learn, and overall well-being. Families also learn how to access educational, health care, and community resources that can support their child's progress from day to day and year to year.

### **HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL**

A family facilitator, also employed by the school, continues the family support and educational activities initiated during the birth – age 3 home visiting program, building strong family-school partnerships. Families are supported in transitioning their children into a school-based Prekindergarten or community-based preschool. Monthly parent-child groups, hosted by the school, create community among families and strengthen their engagement in their children's education.

### **ALIGNED PREK – GRADE 3**

During the early elementary grades, schools focus on an aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment for 5- through 8-year-olds. This builds upon children's preschool experiences and promotes academic, intellectual, and social-emotional success through third grade. As with home visiting and PreK, strong homeschool partnerships and family support are combined with a high-quality, rigorous educational approach.

Throughout the first eight years, home visitors, family facilitators, teachers, principals, and others work as a team, helping to ensure quality, continuity, and equity in the learning experiences that build upon each stage of the School as Hub approach.

**A focus of Quality, Continuity, and Equity** are at the heart of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan and School as Hub approach is a deep commitment to transforming the experiences and outcomes for young children and their families. This work takes place in partnership with early care and education programs and schools that are responsible for children's education birth through Grade 3. Quality, continuity, and equity serve as cornerstones for this work.

**QUALITY** refers to a commitment that all practices used with children, families, and educators will be focused on producing developmentally and educationally meaningful outcomes. These practices are research-based and benefit from continuous improvement. The goal is to enhance the impact of programs and instruction for young children through third grade.

**CONTINUITY** means that children will experience a nearly seamless set of learning and educational experiences from birth through Grade 3. What children learn at one age or grade level builds upon learning that came before.

Continuity is grounded in a shared understanding of child development and the critical recognition of progression and transition in early learning. The School as Hub approach connects families to school and community-based services in order to build continuity in children's learning pathways and provide access to ongoing family supports.

**EQUITY** involves prioritizing policies and practices that effectively promote the learning of all children and seek to address disparities in learning opportunities, family supports, and child outcomes. Equitable teaching and learning reduces or eliminates the predictability of who succeeds and who fails. It is dependent on changing the root causes of institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, prejudice, and bias through fundamental systemic changes in how children are taught, treated, and cared for.