STAY STRONG.

OPPORTUNITIES 2021
COMMUNITY REPORT
In a year disrupted by COVID-19, the mission of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties has never mattered more. The pandemic made longstanding disparities even more visible for many community members. Working together, we can turn awareness into action.

The Learning Community, and its partners, welcome your interest in innovative, practical strategies to improve the landscape for learning in the Omaha metro region. We’re here to close the opportunity gap which impacts student achievement long before a child goes to school.

In this Community Report, you will see steady progress in the Learning Community. Here are a few highlights which illustrate the power of starting early with a two-generation approach.

**TWO-GENERATION LEARNING WORKS**  
Opportunities for children AND families lead to better outcomes for our entire community.

**WORKFORCE TRAINING WINS**  
Everyone wins when educational and economic opportunities connect.

**DIGITAL LITERACY MATTERS**  
New family-based pilot initiatives provide an early learning platform to close the digital divide.

We all want our communities to support strong families and healthy children. Let’s take our shared experiences from this difficult year and expand learning opportunities where children and families need them the most.

**LEARNING COMMUNITY MISSION**
Together with school districts and community organizations as partners, we demonstrate, share and implement more effective practices to measurably improve educational outcomes for children and families in poverty.
BRIDGING THE GAPS TOGETHER
No system, no playbook, no time to waste. The COVID-19 pandemic left school districts and parents scrambling. The Learning Community mobilized as families faced extreme challenges in education, health and safety.

FOOD FOR LEARNING
At the outset of the pandemic, the Learning Community, Millard Public Schools, OneWorld Community Health Centers and Northstar Foundation formed a healthy meals partnership. As families made the transition to virtual learning, the curbside food distribution in the Omaha metro bridged the gap until school districts and community organizations could take over.

PROTECTING CHILD & FAMILY HEALTH
The Learning Community 2-Gen partnership encouraged families to make health and safety a top priority. Our teams in Learning Community Centers connected families to community supports for the financial and emotional stresses created by the pandemic.

And just in time, the Learning Community Foundation teamed up with local donors to keep babies and toddlers healthy. Their successful campaign raised $70,000, enough for diapers, baby formula and wipes to last the rest of the year. Their generosity also made it possible for parents to continue in classes, while guiding virtual learning at home.

DIGITAL INEQUITIES HIT HOME
The inequities in virtual learning quite literally, hit home. Teams in our Learning Community Centers worked with generous donors to equip families with technology and resolve internet access issues, but that wasn’t enough. What’s the value of technology without training? In South Omaha, many families had little experience with a computer. Closing the digital divide in early childhood education meant teaching families the equivalent of a brand-new language – digital literacy. In Learning Community Centers, teachers worked one-on-one or in small groups to coach parents in computer basics, emails, school district resources, and website navigation.

2-GEN VIRTUAL VALUE
The Learning Community’s 2-Gen approach took a creative shift into virtual learning while families tried to juggle jobs, school learning packets and new technology. In South Omaha, the Learning Community team launched a YouTube channel just for families.

The Parent University team at the Learning Community Center of North Omaha shared weekly ReadyRosie videos. The mobile technology gave parents a model to engage children in school readiness activities.

With popular classes via zoom from both Learning Community Centers, early learning during the pandemic never stopped. Family-friendly online sessions actually reduced stress and fear. Families told evaluators the regular connections reassured them, even as they faced grief and health concerns.

“Families are faced with a lot of financial strain. They are very brave as many work in places that don’t have the benefits that offer them protection from COVID-19 and they continue to work to support their families.”

CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

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FAMILY LEARNING
A 2-GEN MODEL
Two-generation opportunities in Family Learning increase academic and economic success for children and families.

STRONG ATTENDANCE MATTERS
LEARNING COMMUNITY CENTER OF SOUTH OMAHA STUDENTS SURPASSED THE SCHOOL DISTRICT AVERAGE
For four consecutive years, students have consistently demonstrated strong attendance, a key factor in student achievement.

LEARNING ENGLISH OPENS DOOR TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS
For the fourth consecutive year, parents gained confidence to be involved in their child’s education, and connected to their local schools. Reading, math, talking to teachers – parents developed essential skills to support their children in school and continue their own education.

PARENT FOCUS GROUPS

Essential skills and workforce certifications improve parent-school partnerships and lead to better jobs. Research tells us the financial security from better earnings also improves student learning.

THE 2-GEN DIFFERENCE
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ONEWORLD COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS
“In the past, I didn’t see reading as something I had to do. If my kids wanted to read, we could, but we didn’t have to.”
A home visit with Ana Carina, the family’s Learning Community educational navigator, convinced Yessica reading would help her children in school. She set a family goal to read one book a day together and join Prime Time Reading classes.

“They really liked it and I started getting ideas for what I could do to practice reading with them. And from there it became a routine. I’ve learned a lot of new words...they’re helping me, too!”
Children in the Learning Community Center of South Omaha consistently show strong academic proficiency when parents take classes to learn or improve English language skills.

“They’re raising their reading level at school. I’ve noticed they comprehend better what they’re reading.”
And now, reading reminders come from Yessica’s children.

“Mom, we haven’t read a book yet! We have to read a book!”
“I want two things for my children – to be kind to others and be educated.”

When Khine and her family came to Omaha as refugees from Burma, they didn’t know anyone. In Parent University at the Learning Community Center of North Omaha, they gained a sense of belonging and support.

“Parent University is a very good thing. I can see our future here. My children won’t have to worry because we are all learning.”

When Khine is in a parent class, little Ney is just a few doors away immersed in early learning activities. Before going home, they stop in the Family Resource Center for take-home kits and books. What everyone here shares is a love of learning.

“I have friends from lots of different places. We’re happy and help each other to study and learn new things, like how to get a better job.”

In Parent University, Khine is already more than half-way to her next goal, a GED. And from there? She’ll go to college to become an early childhood teacher, but a career in criminal law could come later. This mom believes in the power of education.

“I want to help my community (from Burma) come to the center to get more education because then we can help this country.”
INTENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD PARTNERSHIP
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OMAHA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Intensive Early Childhood Partnership (IECP) is a Pre-K—Grade 1 teaching team system for six OPS elementary schools. Enhanced professional development, family outreach and dedicated teacher-coaches lead to more effective teaching.

CHILD CARE DIRECTOR TRAINING
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIVE

The Child Care Director Training program aims for quality early childhood care in home-based and community child care centers in north Omaha. The program provides directors with coaching and training to model best practice skills for center staff.

TEACHER USED MORE KEY PRACTICES
After a year in the program, teaching staff used more skills which positively contribute to a child’s social and emotional growth.

INSTRUCTIONAL INITIATIVES

INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING SUPPORTS CLASSROOM TEACHING SKILLS
BELLEVUE, RALSTON, MILLARD, OMAHA, WESTSIDE

Research shows strong teacher-coaching programs positively impact student achievement.

K-3 TEACHERS DEMONSTRATE STRONG SKILLS IN CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Instructional support shows a continued need for improvement. Evaluation results are shared with teachers and coaches to strengthen their process.

JUMPSTART TO KINDERGARTEN
1 SCHOOL DISTRICT

Jumpstart to Kindergarten gives children with little classroom experience an opportunity to make rapid gains in school readiness.

TEACHERS FOUND JUMPSTART STUDENTS WERE EQUAL TO OR MORE PROFICIENT THAN THEIR PEERS

The majority of parents noticed improvements in their child’s understanding of key academic concepts.

EXTENDED LEARNING

DC WEST, COMPLETELY KIDS, ELK Horn, SPRINGFIELD-PLATTEVIEW

Extended Learning classes are smaller and more personal. In some districts, a pilot program for virtual summer school targeted students most in need of academic support.

PARENT SATISFACTION HIGH

“My son enjoyed the program and felt more confident starting 2nd grade.”
“Equity is one of our core values of the district. Everything we should be doing should have equity at the heart.”  
PRINCIPAL

The Superintendents’ Plan offers an innovative, comprehensive approach for reducing opportunity gaps based on systemic and structural inequities from birth through Grade 3.

STUDENT GROWTH IMPROVED BUT VARIED BY GROUP MEMBERSHIP
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, results revealed disparities in achievement based on family income, home language, and child race or ethnicity.

CLASSROOM QUALITY WAS HIGH AND INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER TIME
The quality of teachers’ practices and interactions in the classroom, assessed before the onset of COVID-19, was associated with higher academic and social interactions.

SCHOOL AS HUB
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BUFFET EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE AND LEARNING COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

TYLER HOTTOVY
Principal, Westbrook Elementary, Westside Community Schools

“We want our school to be a place where every family and child feels at home. So, equity is an action, something we do as a team.”

For the team at Westbrook, the largest elementary in the Westside school district, equity means going the extra mile. From the school pantry to the multi-cultural library displays, a visitor can see the difference.

“COVID-19 gave us an opportunity to ask what we could do for families. Early on, we had to find help for families who had no child care and no option to work from home.”

• A school partnership through Do Space and Metropolitan Community College provided a safe, all-day learning environment. Students gained the one-on-one help they needed while their parents returned to work with peace of mind.
• Hottovy and his team canvassed neighborhoods around the school, setting up hot spots so every family would have internet access.
• Students couldn’t go to the library, so the library went home. During the pandemic, every child had regular access to books they wanted to read.

“This is all part of growing the School as Hub. We are getting the message out that we want to be there as a resource for families with children, starting at birth.”
The response of the Learning Community and its partners during this pandemic gives me great confidence in what we are accomplishing. I see continued growth in new and much-needed opportunities for children and families.

ALLEN HAGER
Chair
Coordinating Council
FOUNDATION PUTS FAMILIES FIRST

The Learning Community Foundation is a much welcome support team. We’re working together to expand successful Learning Community programs where children and families need them the most.

At the outset of the pandemic, the foundation shifted from startup mode to urgent fundraising. Their successful diaper campaign helped children and families stay healthy and connected to our programs. We are amazed, but not surprised, that foundation fundraising surpassed $100,000 in 2020.

WELCOMING NEW PARTNERS

The Learning Community partnership network gives the Omaha metro region a distinct advantage. Our partners include top experts in community health, child advocacy, early childhood education, and workforce development. In challenging times, this expertise makes strong programs even better.

LEARNING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP NETWORK

1. SCHOOL DISTRICTS
Bellevue Public
Bennington Public
DC West Community
Elkhorn Public
Greeley Public
Millard Public
Omaha Public
Papillion La Vista Community
Ralston Public
Springfield Platteview Community
Westside Community

2. HIGHER EDUCATION
Bellevue University
Buffett Early Childhood Institute
Creighton University
Metropolitan Community College
University of Nebraska Omaha

3. RESEARCH
Aspen Institute Ascend Network
National Centers for Family Learning
University of Nebraska Medical Center—Munroe Meyer Institute

4. FOUNDATIONS
Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Dillon Foundation
Dollar General Literacy Foundation
First National Bank
Humanities Nebraska
Learning Community Foundation
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Richard Brooke Foundation
The Sherwood Foundation
Union Pacific Foundation
U.S. Bank Foundation
Wells Fargo Foundation

5. HEALTH & WELL-BEING
Abundant Life Consulting
MMI | Autism Care for Toddlers (ACT)
Benevolence Disposition
Boys Town
Connections Project Harmony
Douglas County Community Response
Douglas County Health Department
EduCare
Foodbank of the Heartland
Grief’s Journey
Jewish Family Service of Omaha
Lutheran Family Services
Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative
North Omaha Community Care Council
UNMC
Omaha Public Library
OneWorld Community Health Centers
Project Harmony Child Advocacy Center
UNMC Center for Reducing Health Disparities
Williams Consulting

6. COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENT PLAN
Buffett Early Childhood Institute
Educational Service Units 3 & 19
GOALS Center
Iowa Western Community College
Metropolitan Community College
Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium
Nebraska Department of Education
University of Nebraska Omaha

7. COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS
Avenue Scholars
Child Saving Institute | KidSquad
City Sprouts
Completely Kids
Creighton Financial Hope
Durham Museum
ESU3 Early Learning Connection
Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership
Empowerment Network
Family Housing Advisory Services
Goodwill Industries
Heartland Workforce Solutions
Joslyn Art Museum
Latino Center of the Midlands
Life Coach Academy
Nebraska Children’s Home Society
Nebraska Enterprise Fund
Nebraska Extension Office
Nonprofit Association of the Midlands
Omaha Bridges Out of Poverty
Omaha Conservatory of Music
Omaha Economic Development Corporation
Opera Omaha
PTI Nebraska
Raise Me to Read
Smart Girls Society
Sparkpositivity
Surreal Media
The Big Garden
The KIM Foundation
The Wellbeing Partners
University of Nebraska Omaha
College of Education, Health and Human Sciences
Teacher Education Department
Special Education and Communication Disorder Department
Grace Abbott School of Social Work
School of Music
Service Learning Academy
United Way of the Midlands
Whispering Roots
Women’s Center for Advancement (WCA)
WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER
Better opportunities lead to better outcomes. Children and families in Learning Community Centers prove that every day.

WHAT’S AT STAKE?
COVID-19 has pushed the stakes even higher for all of us. A strong, diverse workforce depends on a more inclusive learning landscape where children and families thrive.

WHAT’S AHEAD?
ELIMINATE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE.
Digital literacy is like a new language. The pandemic showed us families need digital skills well before children start school.

GROW 2-GEN OPPORTUNITIES.
It is an efficient and innovative approach that elevates the valuable role of families in education.

EXPLORE A THIRD COMMUNITY CENTER.
We are planning so that we can do more to counter the opportunity gap which impacts student achievement long before a child starts school.

OUR VISION
That all children within the Learning Community achieve academic success without regard to social or economic circumstance.

Strong partners, research-based programs and a commitment to continuous improvement. That’s how the Learning Community leadership team and Coordinating Council define innovation to close the opportunity gap in the Omaha metro region.

LEADERSHIP

COORDINATING COUNCIL

ALLEN HAGER
Chair
Achievement Subcouncil 4

BRIAN THOMMES
Vice Chair
Achievement Subcouncil 1

MARK HOEGER
Treasurer
Achievement Subcouncil 3

CAROL HAHN
Secretary
Achievement Subcouncil 2

CLARICE JACKSON
Achievement Subcouncil 1

NATHAN ZINGG
Achievement Subcouncil 2

MELINDA KOZEL
Achievement Subcouncil 3

LISA SCHOENBERGER
Achievement Subcouncil 4

ERIK SERVELLON
Achievement Subcouncil 5

TONYA WARD
Achievement Subcouncil 5

ANDREW BROCK
Achievement Subcouncil 6

TIM HALL
Achievement Subcouncil 6

OVER 16,000
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND TEACHERS
GOAL: FOR MY CHILDREN TO LOVE LEARNING AND SEE WHAT EDUCATION CAN DO.

“We’re all here because we want a better life for our children. Every step gives me hope that we’re moving towards a better future.”

SUNSHINE MASON-MELENDEZ with her children, Uriel, 8 and Xiomara, 3
Parent University,
Learning Community Center of North Omaha