

**Remarks of Chancellor Milliken
Success by Six Launch Breakfast
April 24, 2019**

Introduction

Good morning. It's good to be here. I want to thank David and the United Way, and Cathy McHorse and the Success by 6 Coalition inviting for me be a part of this important gathering.

I've been in Austin now for only seven and a half months, but pretty early on I became aware of the community's commitment to early childhood development. I met Libby Doggett at a party and it didn't take long to realize we knew many of the same people and had many of the same interests. I suspect that started the chain reaction that led to me being with you this morning.

I think Libby was surprised the UT System Chancellor was even moderately conversant in the subject. It wasn't always the case.

My Journey

I remember at an early appearance in 2004, shortly after I started as President of the University of Nebraska. I met with a Leadership Lincoln class, and one of the smart, young emerging leaders in the group asked me what my thoughts were on early childhood education.

I thought it was an odd question and I made some joke about incoming freshman.

Not long after, as I was considering priorities and volunteer leadership for a major capital campaign, one person I asked to serve said she would consider it if I would meet some people to discuss a passion of hers: early childhood education.

I said yes, of course, and that was the beginning of my overdue education.

I first met Harriet Meyer from Chicago, who headed Irving Harris's Ounce of Prevention Fund, which was building Educare Schools across the country, based on a model they had successfully developed locally.

She took me to meet Sam Meisels at the Erikson Institute in Chicago. Not long after I attended a lunch with business leaders in Omaha to hear Jack Shonkoff, head of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard.

That lunch was it.

I saw found Jack's slides on cognitive development in the first months and years stunning. The growth of vocabulary. The impact of any of a number of circumstances – including substance abuse or violence in the home, extreme poverty, a mother without a high school education – and the resulting effects on development.

I learned about Nobelist Jim Heckman's work at the University of Chicago, establishing that the greatest rate of return for investment in education – a seven to one payback – is in the first few years of life.

I read about the longitudinal Ypsilanti study that demonstrated long-term non cognitive gains attributable to early childhood development.

I was a convert.

The philanthropist who started me in this journey agreed to be part of the leadership of our capital campaign. And I worked with her colleagues to develop a plan for a university-based early childhood institute focused three things: educating professionals in what I was convinced would be a burgeoning field, conducting basic and applied research, and developing policy options for local, state, and federal government.

I asked many people who would be the best person to lead the institute, and the name that came up repeatedly was Sam Miesels at Erickson. I flew to Chicago and asked Sam to do it. There was no "it" yet; no funding, no commitment demonstrated by the university other than my promise. He laughed and said he was very happy where he was. I prefer to think he wasn't laughing at me, but I have to strain to believe that. I left Chicago empty handed.

Back to my capital campaign. I continued to work on plans for a new institute. I asked my friend, over pizza, for a major gift. I mean a really major gift. She immediately said yes. This has happened to me more than once. I should have been happy, but of course I thought I didn't ask for enough!

The second thing I asked for was to be able to announce the gift publicly, which was a sharp departure for her. She was incredibly generous, but liked to do things quietly. I tried to persuade her that the announcement would put a big stake in the ground and draw national attention to an agenda we both cared a lot about. After some weeks of pressing, she finally acquiesced.

The third thing I asked was that she allow me to name it after her. That, she was really uninterested in. And in any event, she told me there was one other person who had a strong

interest in the name, and that he almost never allowed his (and by extension, her) name to be associated with their giving.

I worked hard on this, and it seemed like more of a challenge than the large 8 figure gift. I was convinced that because our cause was so important, the family would agree in the end. Finally, after the right moment came to raise the issue—over a holiday dinner—I was told it was a go. We announced a new university initiative, with a 100 million dollars of private and public support, to be called the Buffett Early Childhood Institute.

I went back to Chicago and asked Sam Meisels to be the inaugural executive director. This time he said yes.

Today the Institute is a thriving success, one of the things I'm proudest of in 10 years as president. As part of our work, we opened an Educare Center as a lab school a few miles from our Lincoln campus, in a low income, underrepresented neighborhood. The impact on the children involved in that one school alone is no doubt more important than many, many other things I've been a part of in my career.

I ran into Sam a few months ago. He's happy as a clam, and told me this is the most important thing he's done in his life.

I'm still a believer, and I hope that I, and especially the UT System, can be part of expanding opportunities for early childhood development and education in Texas, needed here as much as anywhere in the nation.

Higher Education Equals Opportunity

I'll tell you another story—this one shorter and probably more obvious.

I've been in higher education for more than thirty years. I'm not sure I remember why I got into it—I started my career on Wall Street—but I can tell you why I stayed.

I believe that talent is universal – distributed evenly regardless of race, gender, zip code, national origin, or anything else. Unfortunately, opportunity is not. Sadly, it remains stubbornly most highly correlated with wealth at birth.

In large part it's higher education – and public higher education, which produces 70% of the nation's graduates, in particular – that matches talent and opportunity.

It is the most powerful engine of social and economic mobility the world has ever known.

And when a student graduates from college – particularly a first generation college-goer – it affects the lives of their family and community members for generations.

That's why I do what I do, and I hope it makes some difference.

But as you know well, it's not just higher education. As I conceded earlier, the greatest return on investment comes in the first few years of life. But it's not a competition. We are part of what, it's increasingly clear, must be lifelong education.

A 100 year old model—or in the case of colleges, a 1000 year old model—isn't sufficient in a century where almost every new job requires education beyond high school, graduates change careers 7 times by the time they're 35, and machine learning will impact the future of work dramatically.

Texas

Nowhere will this play out on a larger stage than in Texas. Our state's population is the second biggest and third youngest in the country.

And it's growing fast.

As a state, we're adding 1,000 new people a day, and we may double in population over the next thirty years.

Between now and then, we're either going use our demographic advantage – it's a lot easier to educate and prepare people when they're young than when they're old – or we're going to get dragged down by it.

We need it to be the former, not the latter, and early childhood development is key.

Progress is being made, but it's too slow.

In 2002, 6% of our state's three year olds, and 39% of the four year olds were enrolled in preschool.

In 2018, it was 8% and 49%. And that's just 4 year olds, not the younger children with their brains developing at amazing speed.

As a state we're not alone, but we are clearly not investing in our young learners like we should be.

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, in the 2017-18 school year, 231,000 Texas children were enrolled in preschool – 3 percent more than the year before. But Texas spent 8 percent less -- \$419 less per child, and \$1,600 less than the national average.

The result – in 2017-18, we ranked rank 35th in the country for spending on pre-K, seven spots worse than the year before.

UT Austin

Despite Texas’s slide, my new hometown has some important things going for it, including:

- A school district that last year invested nearly \$9 million in pre-K – serving nearly 5,000 students, including 1,000 three-year olds.
- And a leading public research university with faculty and students interested and engaged in the effort to make Texas a better place to be a young child.

As I learned earlier in my career, universities have a central role to play – in education, in research, in developing and supporting public policy – and, in partnering with local communities.

As Texas expands early childhood education, which I am convinced it will, the UT System will be a major provider of high quality early education professionals. All eight of our comprehensive universities offer programs, including Austin, where each year 150 teachers earn their early childhood certification at the College of Education. As part of their training, each student completes a semester long internship in pre-K, Kindergarten, or first grade classrooms.

UT is home to some of the country’s leading scholars and policy experts, who are working to advance the science and practice of early childhood development, and provide the evidence policy makers, and practitioners need to help ensure children get off to a healthy start.

These include Dr. Michael Hole – of both Dell Medical and the LBJ School of Public Affairs -- who I believe is with us this morning. Dr. Hole is engaged with the Early Matters Greater Austin effort that many of you are involved in, and he leads a multi-disciplinary graduate class focused on early childhood development issues.

Many of you know Dr. Cynthia Osborne, also with us, from the LBJ School, one of the experts state agencies turn to most often when they want a rigorous evaluation of one of their child protection and prevention programs. Dr. Osborne is Founder and Director of the Child and Family Research Partnership.

About three years ago, Dr. Osborne co-founded the Texas Early Childhood and Community Scholars Network. Since then she and her colleagues have been bringing together colleagues at UT whose work focuses on early childhood and supporting families – and, helping bring together coalitions around the community focused on the same things.

All to better understand what’s going on in Austin and Central Texas, what the needs are, and how the university can actively partner to help get every child in our community off to a healthy start.

Dr. Osborne’s research group has been chosen by the Pritzker Family Foundation to lead a 50-state initiative called the Policy Research Exchange. This is a big deal, which will involve dozens of UT faculty across many disciplines. It’s going to look at what’s happening in early childhood development across the country, and give advocates and policy makers better insights into what works, and what doesn’t.

All over the state, UT institutions are training the next generation of early childhood educators and, we have national leaders and scholars – like Dr. Susan Landry of UT Health Science Center Houston – breaking new ground. Expert in the biological and environmental factors that affect a child’s development, from birth through adolescence, Dr. Landry is the director and founder of the Children’s Learning Institute, and has been a close advisor to former First Lady Laura Bush on early childhood matters.

The System

With eight academic and six health institutions, we are by far the largest university system in the state, with a wealth of talent and expertise – that puts us in a unique position to help Texas children and their families.

This includes bringing thought leaders together, as the system did last year in convening the state’s first **Pediatric Brain Health summit**. Working with the Department of Family Protective Services and the Department of State Health Services, we pulled together clinicians, policy makers, and the major philanthropic organizations interested in early brain development for a two-day meeting focused on the science, and what to do about it. The agencies found it so successful the planning is underway for a second summit next year.

Another way the system can help value is by taking the state agencies’ data, refining it and developing new models to help understand and act on it. For instance, we developed an **infant mortality map** of the state – showing infant mortality by race and zip code. This enables state decision makers to focus resources where they are most needed.

Because our universities enjoy a high level of trust in their community, they make ideal partners for the state in implementing programs like the **Nurse Family Partnership**. This program, funded by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and implemented by staff at UT Permian Basin, connects specially trained nurses with mothers to provide education, care, and mentoring, from time of referral up to two years after birth. The Commission funds a similar program at UT Health Science Center at Tyler.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples of the ways this university system can leverage its talent, strength and scale to help put children on track for a healthy and prosperous life.

As perhaps the newest Central Texan in the room, I'm pleased with what's been done so far in Austin.

And I congratulate the Success by 6 coalition for the progress it's made.

But we all know there is a lot more to do.

Thank you all for the commitment you've all demonstrated .

I've read the Success by 6 strategic plan, and it's spot on. I know you'll encourage everyone you can to rally around that plan, as if the future of our community depends on it. Because it does.

Thank you, again, for having me.

And thanks for all you do.