



# **Early Childhood Education**

**in Nebraska Public School Districts  
and Educational Service Units**



**2012-2013 State Report**

Evaluation Report prepared by  
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# SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S SUCCESS

The Nebraska Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program—Birth to Kindergarten eligible entrance age (B-K) includes all children who are part of Nebraska public education programs supported through the blending of multiple funding sources. Operated by Nebraska public school districts (hereafter referred to as districts) or Educational Service Units (ESUs), comprehensive early childhood education programs support the learning and development of children B-K across home- and center-based settings. Many full or part-day center-based programs are provided in partnership with community agencies.

Districts and ESUs serve children that represent a full range of abilities and disabilities and the social, linguistic, and economic diversity of families within the community. The purpose of the ECE Program is to provide high quality early childhood education experiences that assist children to reach their full potential and increase the likelihood of their later success in school.

The Early Childhood Education programs are responsive to Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) *Rule 11: Regulations for Early Childhood Programs, Rule 51: Regulations and Standards for Special Education Programs*, and the federal mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C (birth to age three) and Part B-619 (ages three to five).

## PROGRAM FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY

NDE requirements for ECE programs include:

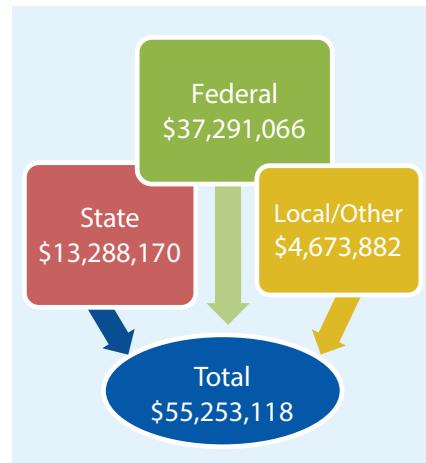
- ◆ Teachers hold a Nebraska teaching certificate with an endorsement in early childhood education, early childhood special education, early childhood unified, or early childhood along with any special education endorsement.
- ◆ Teachers in home-based programs under Rule 51 hold a Nebraska teaching certificate with an endorsement in early childhood education, early childhood special education, early childhood unified, or early childhood along with any special education endorsement.,
- ◆ Staff in home visiting programs with a degree in early childhood education, early childhood special education, social work, nursing or related field
- ◆ Use of developmentally appropriate curriculum and authentic assessment
- ◆ Inclusive programs and services
- ◆ Attention to research-based elements of effective programs
- ◆ Home-school-community partnerships



## INTEGRATED FUNDS EXPAND EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Nebraska early childhood programs are funded across multiple sources. In 2012-13 over \$55 million dollars supported the programs. Federal funds account for the largest percentage (67%) of support. Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Act (TEEOSA) (24%) and IDEA Part B (51%) account for the largest single sources of funding.

FUNDING RESOURCES BY CATEGORY		
Local/Other	State	Federal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local district</li><li>• Parent fees</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early Childhood Grant Program – Ages three through five (3-5)</li><li>• Sixpence Early Learning Fund</li><li>• TEEOSA (state aid)</li><li>• Special Education Flexible Funding</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• IDEA Part B</li><li>• Head Start</li><li>• Title 1 Part A</li><li>• Title 1 Migrant</li><li>• HHS Child Care Subsidy</li></ul>

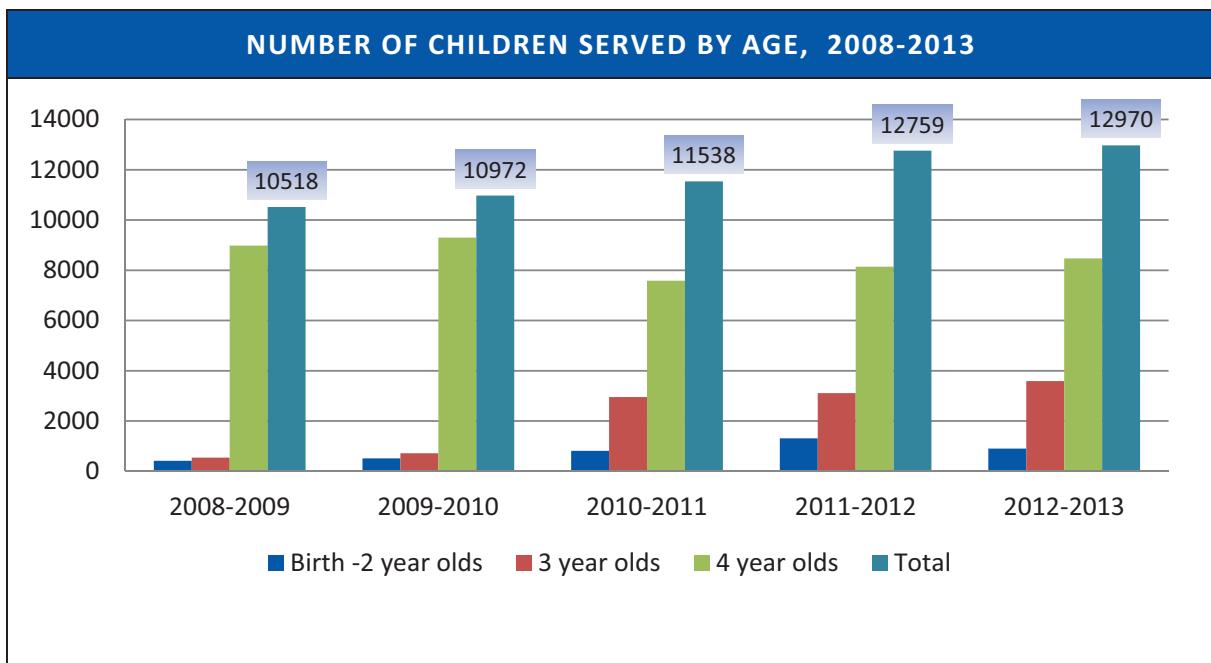


## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

One hundred and sixty-eight (168) districts reported an early childhood center-based program and five ESUs provided a center-based program for an additional twenty-four districts. Overall, 12,970 children were served across all district and ESU operated early childhood programs. A diverse population of children are served with respect to both ethnicity and race (41%) and language (13%). Children who are Hispanic represented the largest minority group (23%). In addition, slightly over half of the children were eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL). Smaller percentages of children served were English Language Learners (ELL) or had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES OF CHILDREN SERVED					
	Minority %	FRL %	ELL %	IEP or IFSP %	Total Served
All Children Served (Birth - 5)	41%	51%	13%	28%	12,970

Longitudinal data was reviewed to track the pattern of children served by district operated programs across ages. Overall there was a 23% increase in the number of children served since 2008. In addition, there was a steady increase of infants, toddlers, and three year olds who were receiving services. In contrast, there was a decrease in the number of four year olds served in 2010-11. Since 2010-11, there has been a small increase in 4 year olds enrolled, but the enrollment has not reached the level served in 2009-10.



## RESULTS MATTER IN NEBRASKA: A COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

*Results Matter in Nebraska* is a child, family, and program outcomes measurement system designed and implemented to improve programs and supports for all young children birth to age five, served through districts, ESUs, the Early Development Network and community partners, which include Head Start and other community early childhood programs. The system uses child, family, and program outcomes data to impact early childhood program practices and policy.



The purpose of *Results Matter* is to:

- ◆ Improve experiences, learning, development, and lives of young children and their families.
- ◆ Inform program practices.
- ◆ Demonstrate program effectiveness.
- ◆ Guide the development of local and state policies and procedures.
- ◆ Provide data to demonstrate results.

The central outcomes of *Results Matter* indicate that:

- ◆ The use of ongoing child and program quality assessment is becoming standard practice in programs.
- ◆ Decisions regarding instruction and intervention are better informed by data.
- ◆ Reporting for accountability is improving.

The benefits of *Results Matter* are:

- ◆ Increased depth of understanding of child development.
- ◆ Increased awareness of the link between curriculum, assessment and child outcomes.
- ◆ Improved communication with families.
- ◆ Increased use of technology.
- ◆ Improved program quality.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Quality early childhood education programs have been linked to immediate, positive developmental outcomes, as well as long-term positive academic outcomes (Campbell & Pungello, 2012). Nebraska promotes quality programs through ongoing training and technical assistance.

Nebraska measures program quality through onsite observation or a self-assessment process. All district operated programs complete a self-assessment in a percentage of classrooms as outlined by the Results Matter Nebraska Technical Assistance Document. The self-assessments are completed by program observers who have participated in training. Each year NDE determines a small subset of ECE classrooms for onsite observation. Only findings from assessments completed by an approved observer were included in this report. The rating scales measure how the classroom environment supports children's physical, cognitive, social-emotional, language and literacy development. For Sixpence programs only, the programs are initially evaluated with an environment rating scale. Once criteria are met, observations of specific instructional practices are assessed in the following year. A formal evaluation of the quality of Sixpence home-visiting was completed by an evaluator trained to reliability.

### QUALITY OUTCOMES FOR SIXPENCE INFANT AND TODDLER PROGRAMS

The *Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R)* was used to evaluate the overall quality of the Sixpence classrooms. The *ITERS-R* is an observational assessment of 39 items across seven subscales items designed to assess center-based programs for children birth to 2½ years of age. The state standard of quality is an overall program score of at least a five and a score of at least a five on each of the seven subsections (based on a 7 point scale with 7 = excellent). The *ITERS-R* seven subscales: space and furnishings, personal care routines, listening and talking, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff.

Seven Sixpence classrooms were observed. The results were:

- ◆ 100% of classrooms had an overall program score above a 5.
- ◆ 75% of classrooms had a score of 5 or above on all seven subscales.
- ◆ Program strengths were in the areas of Listening and Talking (7.00), Space and Furnishings (6.66) and Interaction (6.71).
- ◆ The most challenging area was Personal Care Routines (5.43).
- ◆ The overall average rating was 6.05 (ranging from 5.92-6.19).

The *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)-Toddler* was used to evaluate the overall quality of the Sixpence classrooms that in previous years met the state standard for the *ITERS-R*. The *CLASS-Toddler* is an observational assessment with seven dimensions across two areas, Emotional Support and Instructional Support. The *CLASS* is based on a 7 point scale with 7 = high range. No state standard has been set at this time. The results of observations from 8 classrooms found:

- ◆ The overall average for Emotional Support was 6.59 (6.25-6.90) and for Instructional Support was 5.12 (3.90-6.50).
- ◆ 100% of the classrooms had a score of 6 or higher on Emotional Support.
- ◆ 50% of the classrooms had a score of 5 or higher on Instructional Support.

#### ASSESSMENTS FOR INFANT AND TODDLER PROGRAMS:

**ITERS-R**  
**Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised**

*Authors: Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2006*

**CLASS - Toddler**  
**Classroom Assessment Scoring System**

*Authors: Pianta, Paro & Hamre, 2012*

**HoVRS-A**  
**Home Visit Rating Scale**

*Authors: Roggman, Cook, et al, 2008*

The *Home Visit Rating Scales-A (HoVRS-A)* is designed to assess the quality of family engagement sessions from a video of a direct observation. The measure includes seven items that are collapsed into two scales for the purposes of analysis. The scales are based on a 5 point scale with 5 = good. Eleven Sixpence home visitors were rated.

- ◆ The family educators were effective in their practice as evidenced by the engagement of the parent and child (a rating of 4.55) during the session with their instruction to parents rated slightly lower (4.15). Scores reflect high quality practices.
- ◆ The strengths of the instruction by the family educators were their skills in establishing positive relationships with the family and the strategies used to guide the parent-child interaction.

## QUALITY OUTCOMES FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

The *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)* was used to evaluate the overall quality of the classrooms. The *ECERS-R* is an observational assessment of 43 items across seven subscales designed to assess center-based programs for children 2½ - 5 years of age. The state standard of quality is an overall program score of at least a five and a score of at least a five on each of the seven subsections (based on a 7 point scale with 7 = excellent). The *ECERS-R* rates seven subscales are: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff. A total of 335 classroom observations and self-reports were completed. A total of 22 (7%) were completed by approved observers.

### PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT

**ECERS-R**  
**Early Childhood**  
**Environment Rating Scale-Revised**

*Authors: Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2005*

The results from the observations of 22 classrooms are:

- ◆ 91% of classrooms had an overall program score of 5 or higher.
- ◆ 32% met the state standard in all seven areas.
- ◆ Program strengths were in the areas of Interaction (6.2), Parent and Staff (6.4), and Program Structure (6.6).
- ◆ The area that was most challenging for programs was Personal Care Routines (4.1).
- ◆ The overall average rating was 5.37 (ranging from 4.86-6.89).



## CHILD OUTCOMES

Early Childhood programs are informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches that provide teachers with information about children's learning and development. Teaching Strategies (TS) GOLD, a research-based, authentic assessment system for children birth through kindergarten was selected by NDE for use in district and ESU early childhood programs. This selection was based on the recommendation of the state level Results Matter Task Force.

### CHILD OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT:

#### TS GOLD

Teaching Strategies GOLD

*Publisher: Teaching Strategies, Inc.*

## ASSESSMENT PROCESS

These developmental domains are:

- ◆ **Social-Emotional:** Regulating emotions and building relationships with others.
- ◆ **Cognitive:** Demonstrates positive approaches to learning, classification skills, and uses representational skills.
- ◆ **Language:** Learns to understand and use words/gestures to effectively communicate.
- ◆ **Physical:** Demonstrates traveling, balancing, and coordinated physical manipulation skills.
- ◆ **Literacy:** Engages in emergent reading and writing behaviors.
- ◆ **Mathematics:** Explores spatial relationships and demonstrates knowledge of patterns and number concepts.

The three functional outcomes are:

- ◆ **Outcome A:** Children have positive social skills including positive social relationships.  
Positive social relationships involve relating with adults and other children, and for older children, following rules related to groups or interacting with others. This outcome includes attachment, expressing emotions and feelings, learning rules and expectations, and social interactions and play.
- ◆ **Outcome B:** Children acquire and use knowledge and skills including language/communication.  
Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills involves thinking, reasoning, remembering, problem solving, using symbols and language, and understanding physical and social worlds. This outcome includes early concepts such as symbols, pictures, numbers, classification, spatial relationships, imitation, object permanence, and language skills.
- ◆ **Outcome C:** Children take appropriate action to meet needs (e.g., self-help and initiative).  
Use of appropriate behaviors to meet needs involves taking care of basic needs, getting from place to place, using tools, and for older children contributing to their own health and safety. This outcome includes integrating motor skills to complete tasks and self-help skills (dressing, feeding, grooming, toileting, and household responsibility).

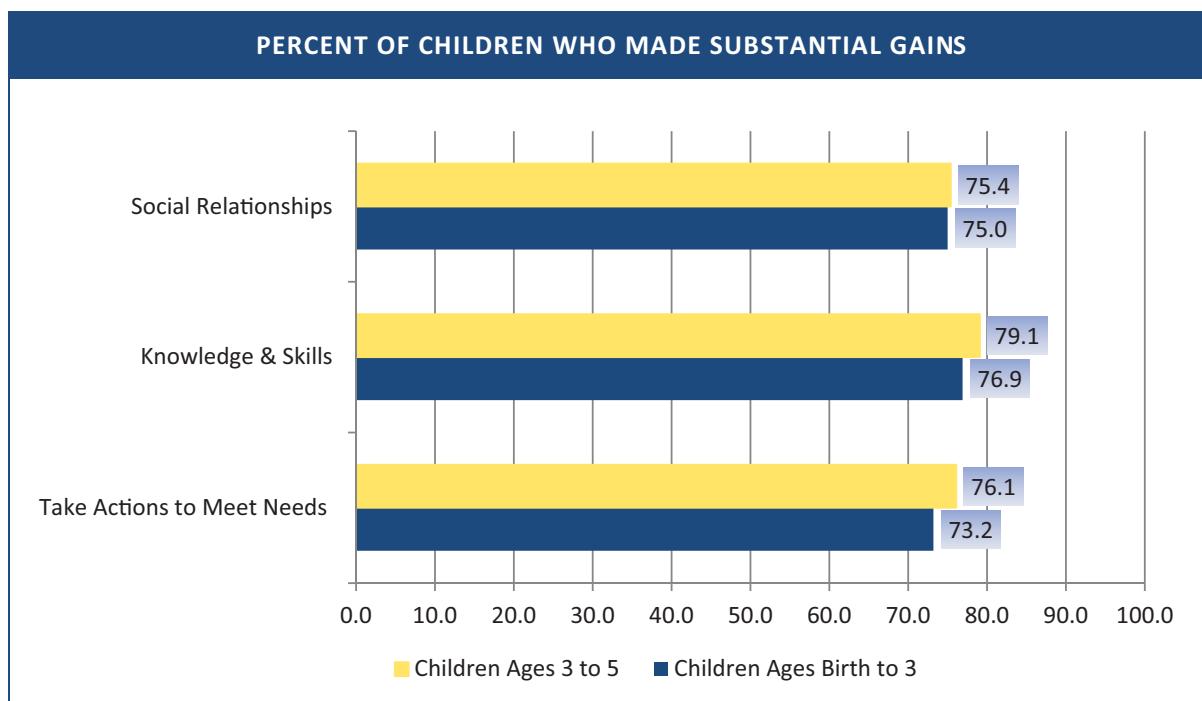
The outcome areas cross developmental domains, reflecting the integration and progression of child development and learning. Child outcomes reflect the child's ability to be successful in the context of everyday living.

TS GOLD data is collected on an ongoing basis for all children B-5 served by school districts or ESUs. TS GOLD is an authentic child assessment system, which means that children are observed as they engage in everyday routines and activities, with people they know, across a variety of settings. Their skills, abilities and knowledge are documented from multiple sources using a variety of methods, including photos, recordings, anecdotes, and/or samples of the children's work. Child documentation is gathered throughout the year, and the data is finalized at three checkpoints: Fall, Winter and Spring. This ongoing progress data is used by teachers and programs to inform and improve instruction – to tailor and adjust curriculum and activities to scaffold learning to meet the needs of individual children and groups of children.

NDE uses TS GOLD data for state and federal reporting purposes. Fall and Spring checkpoint data is analyzed and used to monitor district progress toward achieving widely-held expectations across the three outcomes. To meet annual reporting requirements of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), child program entry and exit checkpoint data is analyzed to determine if NDE's annual targets are being met for the three outcomes. Data for NDE's Part B and Part C Annual Performance Reports (APRs) is reported for children with IEPs or IFSPs. In order to be included in the APR, the child must have exited during that year; have complete entry and exit data; and have been in the program for at least six months.

## **PERCENT OF CHILDREN WHO MADE SUBSTANTIAL GAINS**

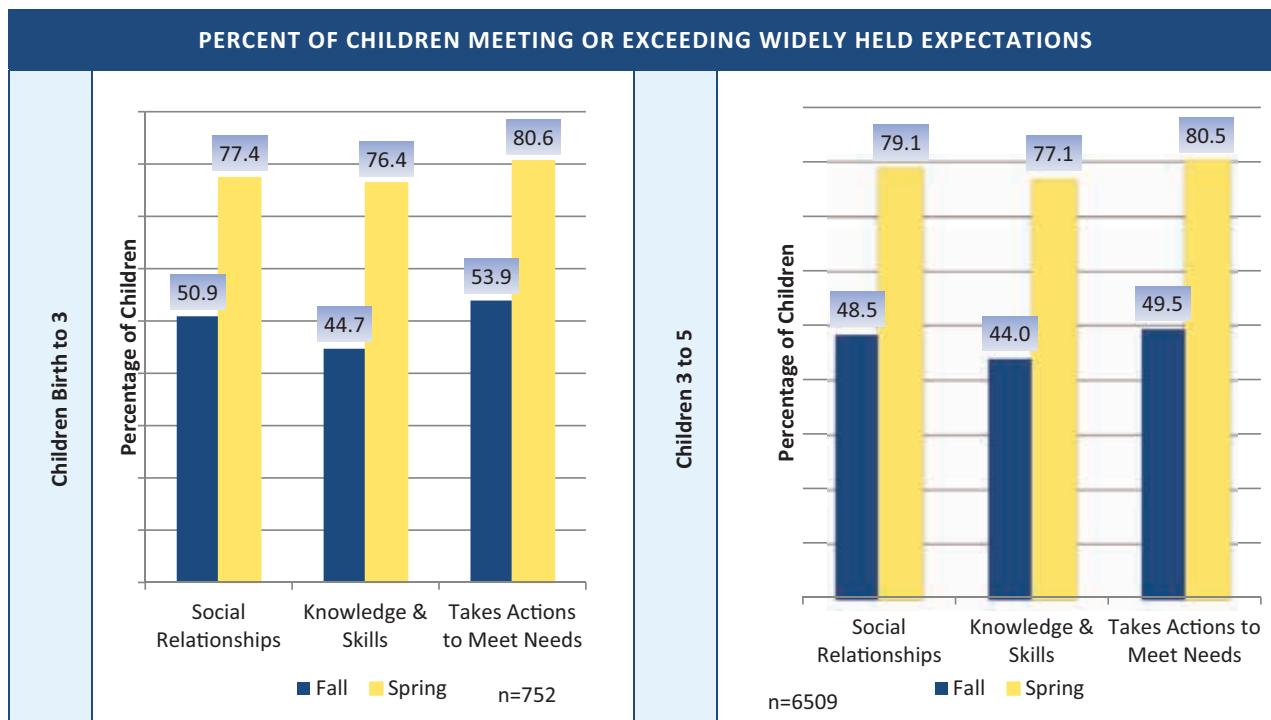
High percentages of children across programs are demonstrating substantial gains in each of the functional outcomes. It is anticipated that this growth will help to narrow the gap between children at risk<sup>1</sup> or children with an IFSP or IEP and their typically developing peers. Slightly larger percentages of children in preschool programs made greater than expected gains. The greatest growth for all children was in the area of knowledge and skills.



<sup>1</sup> - Throughout this report, "children at risk" is defined as children whose family income qualifies them for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) program and/or children who reside in a home where English is not the primary language.

## PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN MEETING OR EXCEEDING WIDELY HELD EXPECTATIONS

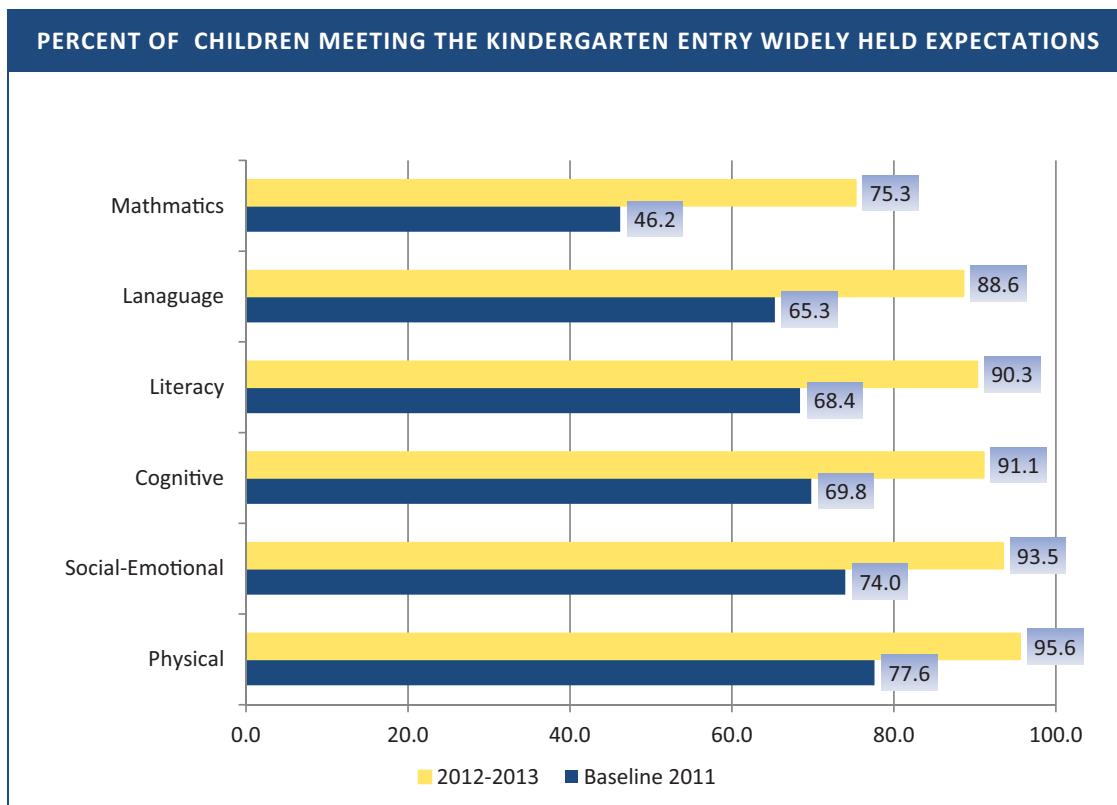
TS GOLD has established widely held expectations for each age group. These widely held expectations are the skills that children within a given age range are typically expected to obtain. The percent of children who met the widely held expectations was compared from the fall and spring checkpoints. Fewer children met expectations in the area of knowledge and skills in the fall, yet in the spring this area had the largest increase in the percentage of children meeting expectations. The areas of strength for both infants/toddlers and preschool age children were “Takes Actions to Meet Needs” and “Social Relationships”. Across all areas 76% to 81% of the children were meeting expectations. Of the 7261 children with TS GOLD data 40% had an IEP or IFSP.



## PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN WHO WERE ELIGIBLE FOR KINDERGARTEN IN 2013-2014

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In order to evaluate the performance of children who were eligible for kindergarten in 2013-2014, data was analyzed based on six developmental domains in the spring of 2013. These domains parallel those found in the assessment metric for school age children.



A total of 3,614 children were assessed using TS GOLD in the spring prior to their entrance into kindergarten. The results found that the highest percentage of children met widely held expectations in the areas of social-emotional (94%) and physical development (96%) with fewer children meeting these expectations in math (75%). Baseline data was first available in 2011-2012. A comparison between the past two years found an increase in the percentages of children who had accomplished the tasks typical of children beginning kindergarten as compared to the baseline data. This increase may in part reflect teachers' improved assessment skills as well as their ability to use data to inform instruction and intervention.

## CHILD OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH AN IFSP OR IEP

In addition to the NDE annual Early Childhood Education State Report, OSEP requires NDE to annually report child outcomes for infants and toddlers with disabilities (IDEA Part C, ages Birth to 3) and preschoolers with disabilities (IDEA Part B, ages 3-5). The NDE Annual Performance Reports to OSEP includes the number and percentage of children who: 1) showed greater than expected growth and 2) who function within age expectations. Children showing substantial gains at exit acquired skills at a faster rate than at entry into the program.

Each year results are compared to state targets. The chart below shows the status of children who exited between July 1, 2012 and June 30, 2013. 2012-13 was the first year that child outcomes were based only on TS GOLD data.

MEASURABLE AND RIGOROUS TARGETS/ ACTUAL DATA FOR CHILDREN EXITING 2012-13				
Summary Statements	Part C n=499		Part B n=1390	
	Targets (% of children)	Actual (% of children)	Targets (% of children)	Actual (% of children)
<b>Outcome A: Positive social relationships</b>				
1. Showed greater than expected growth	71.9%	66.0%	64.1%	80.9%
2. Exited the program within age expectations	75.1%	37.1%	73.9%	72.0%
<b>Outcome B: Knowledge and skills</b>				
1. Showed greater than expected growth	62.2%	58.5%	61.9%	81.5%
2. Exited the program within age expectations	71.8%	33.7%	62.3%	72.1%
<b>Outcome C: Take appropriate actions to meet needs</b>				
1. Showed greater than expected growth	75.3%	60.0%	64.7%	81.8%
2. Exited the program within age expectations	70.4%	26.1%	75.5%	76.5%

The results of the OSEP child outcomes data for preschool children (ages 3-5) showed that Nebraska met all of its targets, with the exception of children meeting age expectations in the area of positive social relationships. Results were slightly under the state target.

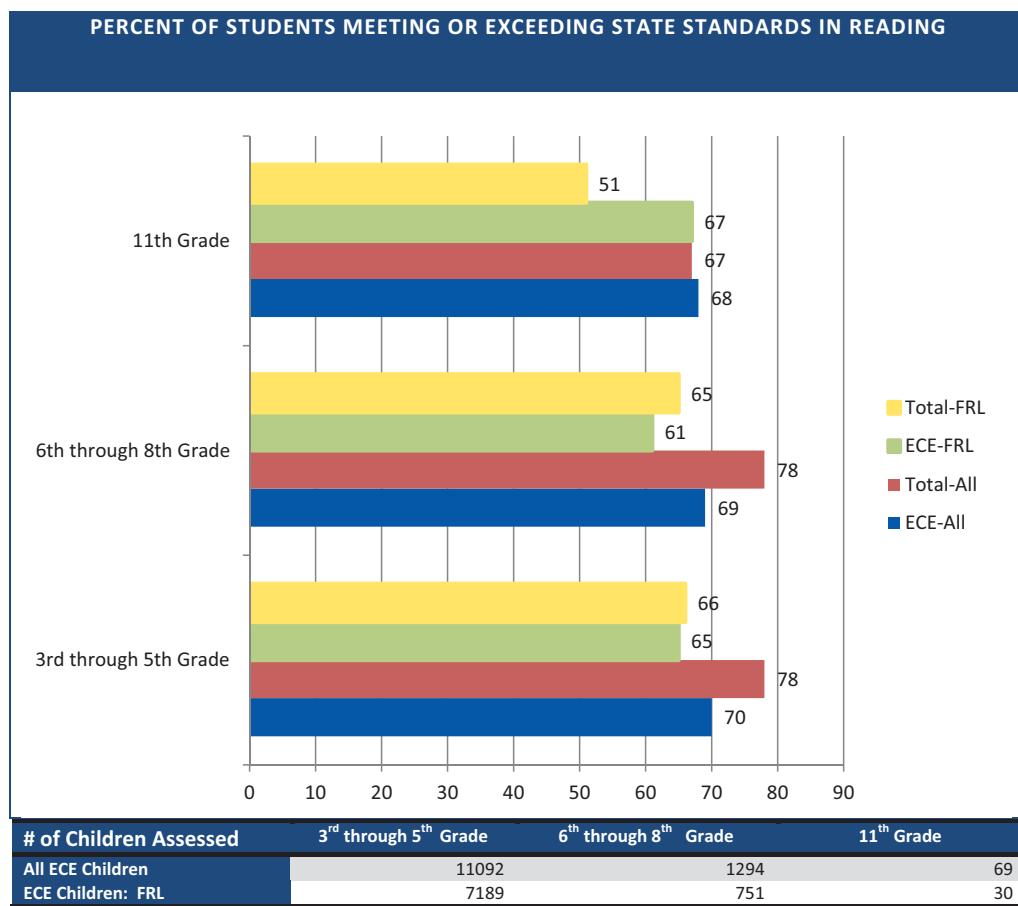
Part C data showed results quite discrepant from previous years. Summary Statement 1 and Summary Statement 2 results were significantly lower than in previous years. The hypothesis for this decrease is that 2012-13 was the first year child outcomes were based only on TS GOLD entry and exit data. Prior to that, outcomes data were based on data from the three assessment systems previously used. There was limited TS GOLD entry and exit data in 2011-12, when districts were transitioning to TS GOLD. Therefore, TS GOLD results did not impact the overall findings. The higher entry/exit scores in previous assessments offset the lower numbers in GOLD. Since Nebraska is now using GOLD as its single statewide assessment system, new targets will need to be established. By 2014-15, Nebraska will have child outcomes data from two full years of statewide GOLD implementation. This will provide more valid and adequate data on which to set new targets and measure child outcomes.

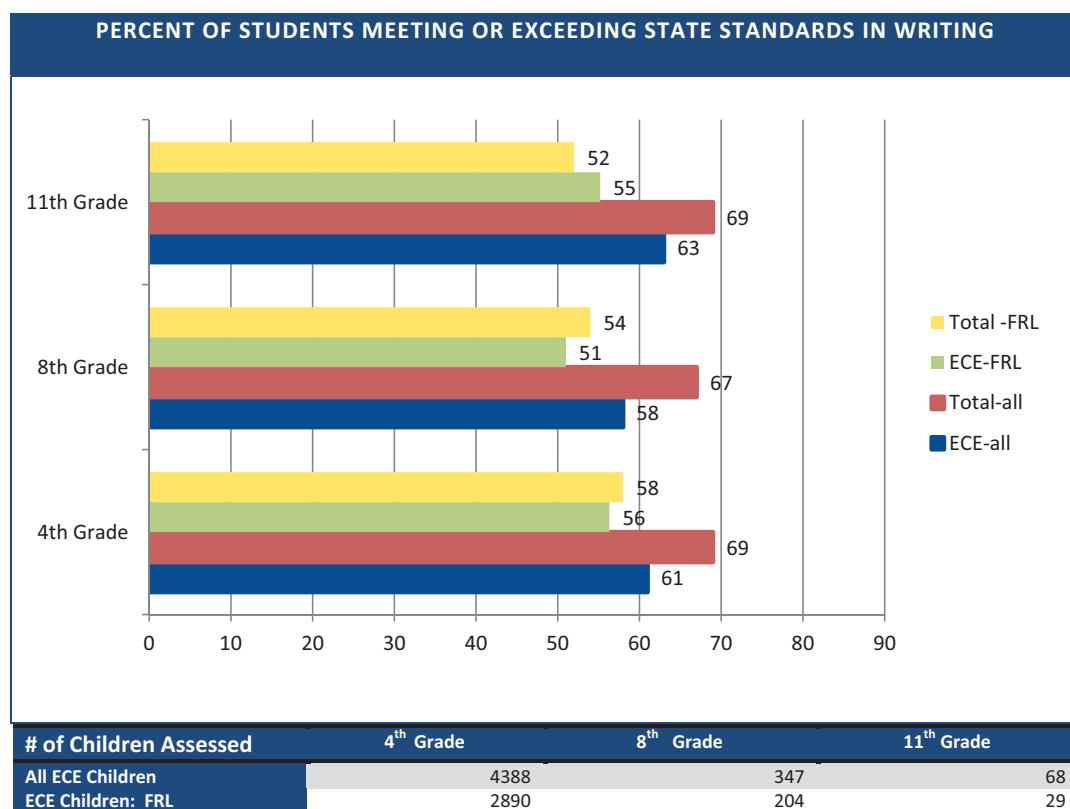
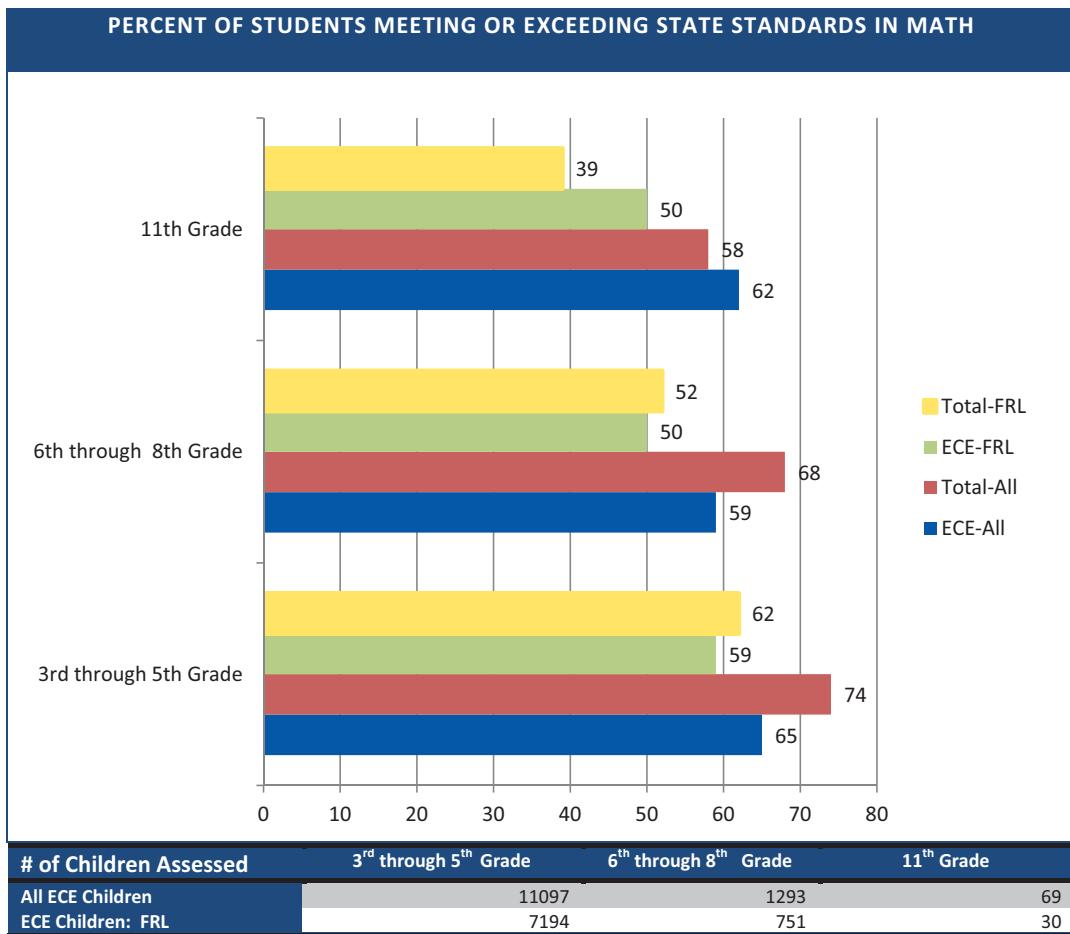
## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAMS: LONGITUDINAL STUDENT OUTCOMES

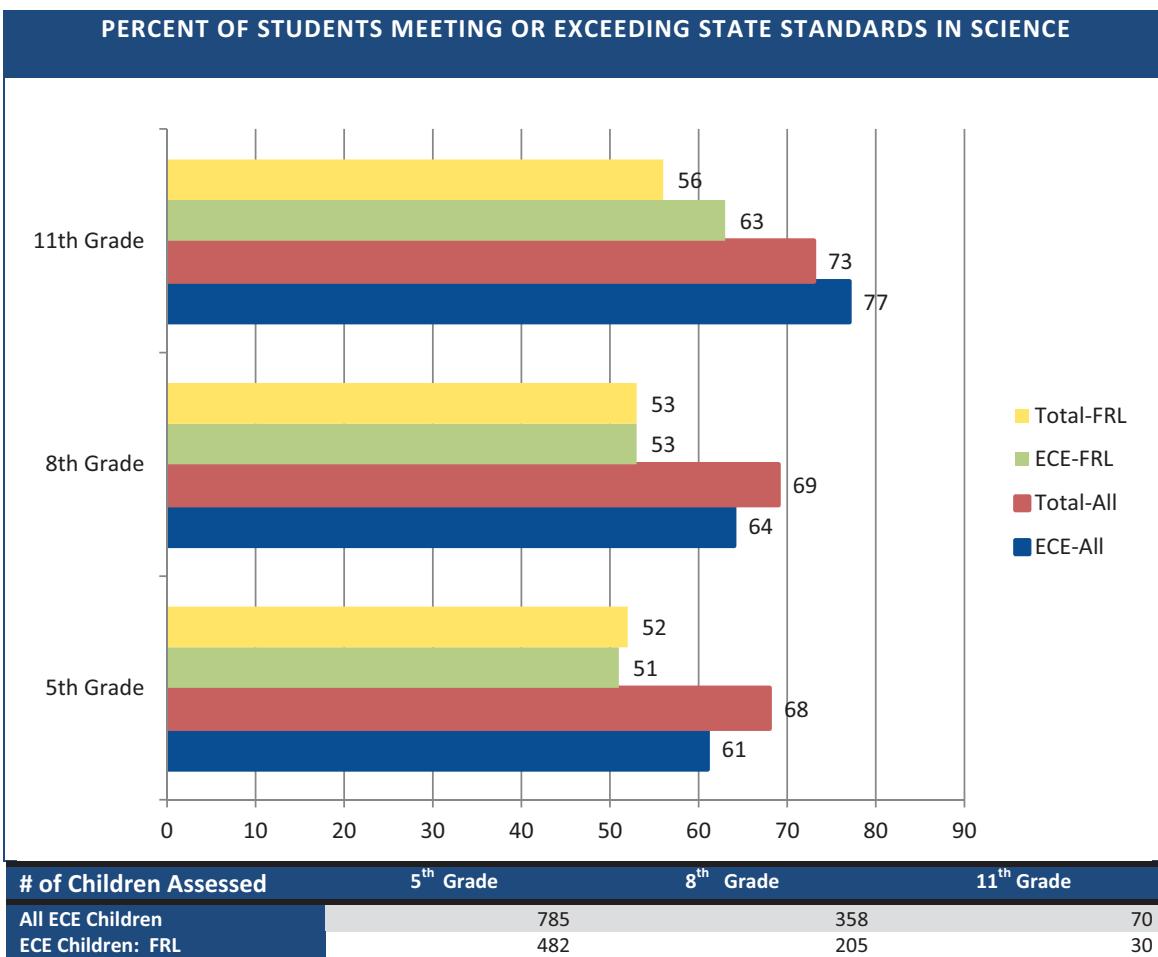
The Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant (ECEG) Program is designed to provide high quality educational experiences that positively impact the long-term outcomes, including continuing success in school. Based on the targeted population, characterized as "at-risk", the goal is for students to achieve at academic levels comparable to, or higher than, their peers who did not participate in a district ECEG program. The longitudinal data reported in this section includes 12,456 students in grades 3 or above and had attended an early childhood center- or home-based program. Of that group, 67% continued to qualify for FRL and of this subgroup, 52% qualify for free lunch. It is important to note that of the total public school population within Nebraska, approximately 40% of the children were eligible for FRL with 35% qualifying for free lunch. As a result, interpretation of the findings should be made with caution as the two groups are substantially different. The Nebraska student population as a whole has fewer children eligible for either free or reduced lunch.

Nebraska Statewide Assessment (NeSA) reading and math tests were administered in grades 3 through 8 and 11. The tests measured skills and determined whether Nebraska students met or exceeded state standards. NESA writing tests were administered in grades 4, 8 and 11, and science test in grades 5, 8 and 11. The majority of students who participated in an ECEG Program, met or exceeded state standards.

### PERCENT OF STUDENTS MEETING OR EXCEEDING STATE STANDARDS







## FAMILY OUTCOMES

Data has been collected to assess the impact of infant and toddler programs whose primary focus is family engagement. Research has shown family engagement programs are an effective means to support children's development.

### IDEA PART C (EARLY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK)

OSEP requires measuring family outcomes for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Three outcomes have been identified for families who have a child with an IFSP. They include the percent of families participating in Part C who report that early intervention services have helped the family:

- ◆ Know their rights;
- ◆ Effectively communicate their children's needs; and
- ◆ Help their children develop and learn.

Each year families are asked to complete a family survey. A total of 930 surveys were completed with a return rate of 65.5%. Data was analyzed and compared against state determined targets. The results found that the state met or exceeded all targets. There was an improvement in scores from the previous year.

### SIXPENCE

For children and families participating in the Sixpence programs, family outcomes focused on parent-child interaction and the degree to which the home environment supports development and provides emotional support. Results found that participation in Sixpence positively impacted families. Parents with low scores on a measure of the home environment that promotes cognitive and emotional support for their child demonstrated significant increases in skills. Parents who scored high on these measures, maintained high quality environments and interaction skills. Parents in the family engagement component demonstrated parent-child interactional skills within the moderate range. The full report of these findings is posted at: <http://www.singasongofsixpence.org/>.



# FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

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- ◆ The majority of the classrooms were of high quality and met the state standard for quality.
- ◆ Home-based Sixpence programs were of high quality with family educators establishing positive family engagement.

## CHILD OUTCOMES: AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PERSPECTIVE

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- ◆ The majority of the children met the widely held expectations and made greater than expected gains across all areas of development, thereby narrowing the achievement gap.
- ◆ Children made the greatest gains in the area of knowledge and skills. Slightly higher percentages of children met widely held expectations in the area of take actions to meet their needs.
- ◆ The majority of the children who were eligible for kindergarten in 2013-2014 met the widely held expectations for children in this age group. Strengths for this group of children were in physical and social emotional skills with lowest scores in the area of math.

## STUDENT OUTCOMES: A LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

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- ◆ The majority of children in an ECE classroom met or exceeded the state standards for reading, writing, and math.
- ◆ Higher percentages of ECE students met or exceeded state standards in reading, than in math, science, or writing.
- ◆ The lowest percentage of children met the state standards for writing.

## FAMILY OUTCOMES

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- ◆ The state targets for all of the family outcomes for children with an IFSP were met.
- ◆ Families who participated in Sixpence programs increased or maintained home environments that promote emotional support and cognitive skills and showed increased parent-child interaction skills.

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