



2020-21

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STATE REPORT

for Nebraska's Public School District,
Educational Service Unit
& Head Start Programs



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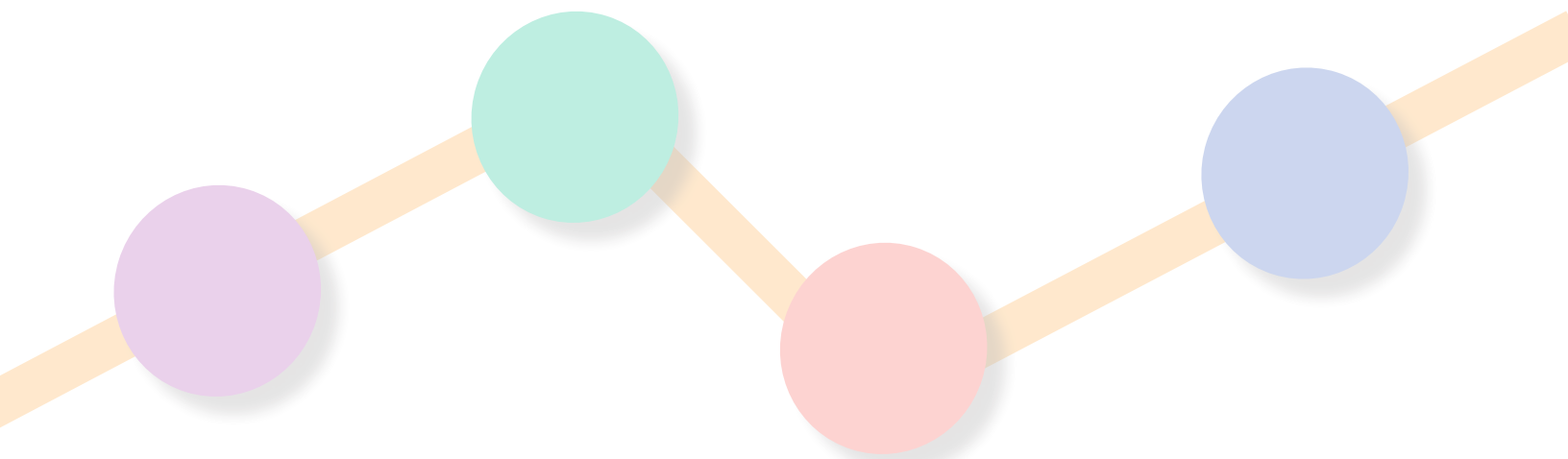
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SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S SUCCESS

The Early Childhood Education Program – Birth through Age 5 (B–5) included all children who were part of Nebraska public education programs that were supported through the blending of multiple funding sources. Comprehensive early childhood education programs operated by Nebraska public school districts (hereafter referred to as districts) or Educational Service Units (ESUs) supported the learning and development of children B–5 across home- and center-based settings including Sixpence programs. Many of these full- or half-day programs received support through partnerships with community agencies.

Districts and ESUs served children who represented a full range of abilities, languages, and economic diversity of families within the community. The purpose of the Early Childhood Program was to provide high quality early childhood education experiences that empower children to reach their full potential and increase the likelihood of their later success in school.



PROGRAM FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) requirements for Early Childhood programs included:

- Use of developmentally appropriate curriculum and authentic assessment
- Inclusive programs and services
- Attention to research-based elements of effective programs
- Teachers in classrooms hold a Nebraska teaching certificate with an approved early childhood endorsement
- Para professionals in classrooms have 12 credit hours in early childhood education or its equivalent
- Teachers in home-based Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Programs hold a Nebraska teaching certificate with an approved endorsement
- Staff in home visiting programs hold a degree in early childhood education, early childhood special education, social work, nursing or related field
- Home-school-community partnerships

INTEGRATED FUNDS EXPANDED EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Nebraska's district and ESU operated early childhood programs were funded with multiple sources. In 2020-21, over 135 million dollars supported these ECE programs. Federal dollars accounted for the majority of Early Childhood Education funds and were provided through IDEA, Head Start, Title 1 Part A, and Title 1 Migrant. State sources of funding were provided through early childhood grants for ages three through five, state aid, Special Education, and general funds. Local district funds, including matching fund requirements for SPED and the Early Childhood grants, as well as parent fees were included in local funding sources. Districts also received funding from the Sixpence Early Childhood Education Endowment to support birth to three programs.

Based on district expenditures reported to the NDE, local programs have been spending increasing amounts to support Early Childhood Education programs. The total funds reported below represent a 31% increase in funding from the 2019-2020 school year.

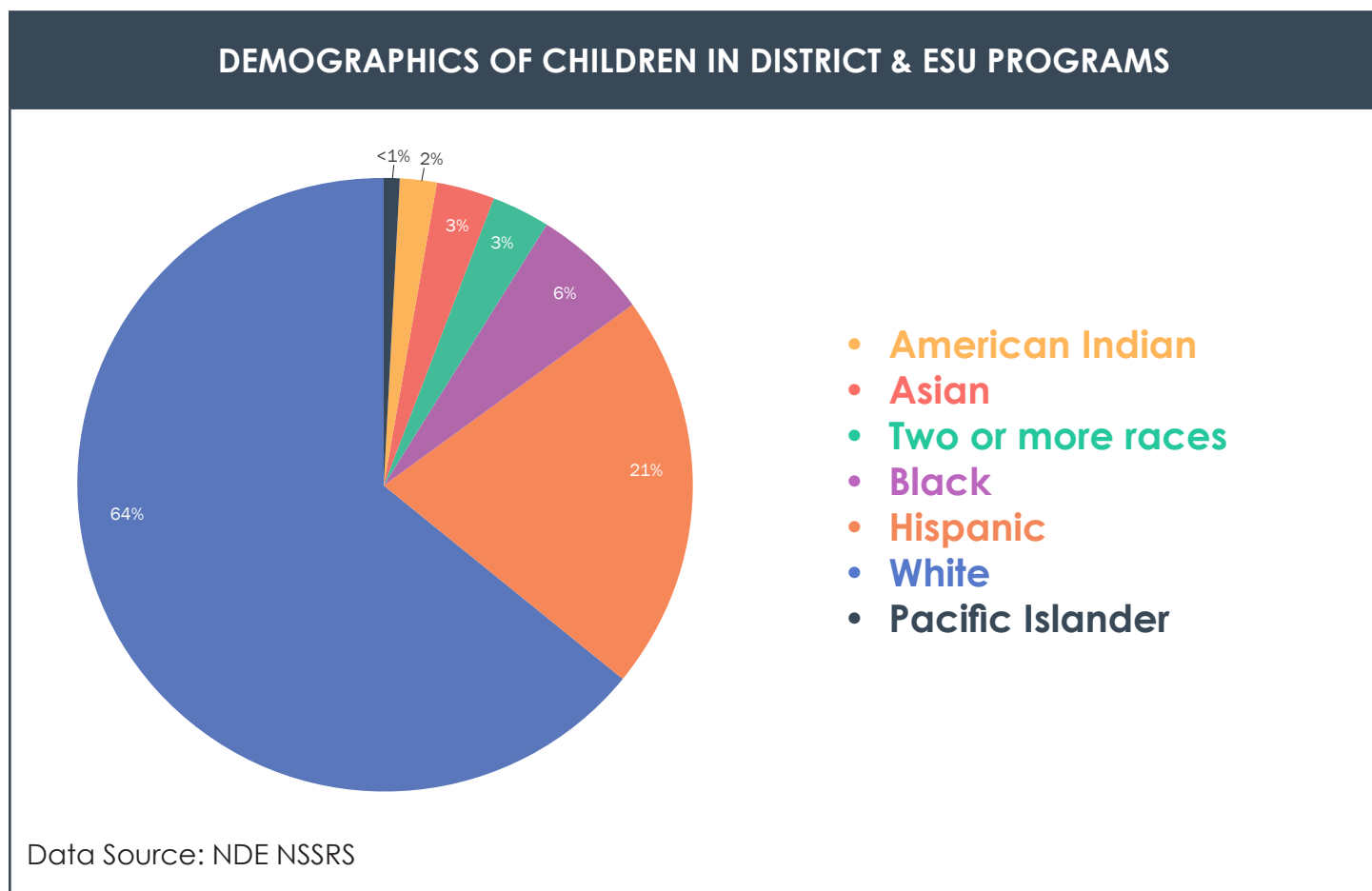


EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

The Nebraska Department of Education began approving district-operated early childhood programs based on compliance with Rule 11 in 2004. At that time, there were only 23 approved programs. For the 2020-21 school year that number grew to 223 approved district-operated early childhood programs. These approved Nebraska school districts and ESUs provided early childhood programs and services to 19,843 children, age birth to five. Included in this total child count are sixteen children whose programs and/or services were not identified by the district serving them.

Program Type	Child Count	Percent
The NDE Grant Funded Early Childhood Education Programs serving children ages three to five	1,564	8%
The NDE non-Grant Funded Early Childhood Education Programs serving children ages three to five	11,242	57%
Early Childhood Birth to Age Three Endowment Grant Programs (Sixpence)	1,817	9%
Home-based Early Childhood Education Program serving non-special education children ages birth to five	252	<1%
Special Education and Early Development Network services provided to children ages birth to five in homes and community settings	4,952	25%
Unidentified	16	<1%
Total	19,843	100%

According to district data submitted to the Nebraska Department of Education, the demographics represented a similar picture to the demographic of children served in K-12 setting across the state.



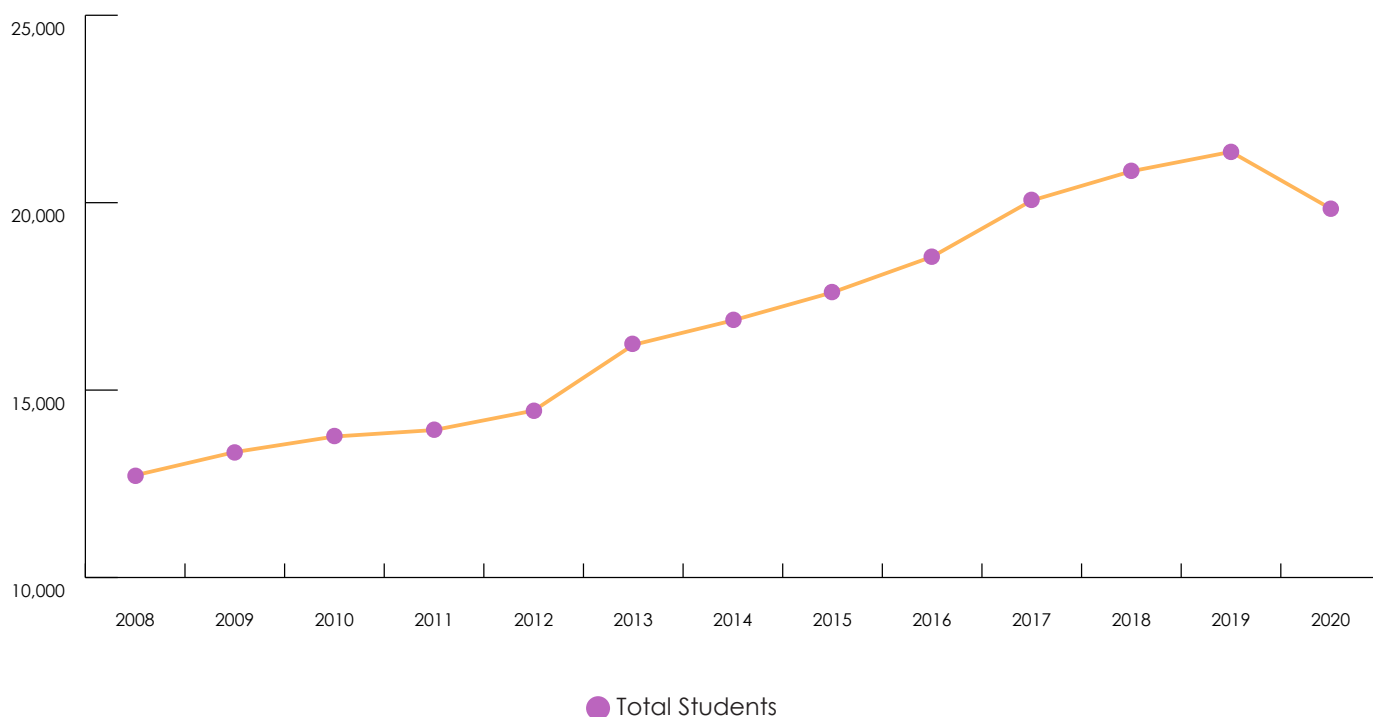
Of the total number of children served, the following categories show the number of children considered at-risk for possible poor outcomes in future academic settings:

- 9,090 – 46% had an IEP or IFSP (center-based and home-based)
- 8,075 – 41% qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch
- 2,034 – 10% had a home language other than English
- 221 – 1% were reported as English Learners

Longitudinal data was reviewed to track the pattern of children served by district and ESU operated programs across ages. The graph below represents children served in programs that were home-based, center-based and services provided to children ages birth to five in homes and community settings. Reports prior to 2008-09 used only home-based and center-based numbers of children served. After 2008-09, data included home-based and center-based numbers along with services provided in homes and community settings. This difference appeared to skew the increase of children served when comparing numbers prior to 2008-09. The current numbers more accurately reflect the increase of the number of children served since 2008-09.

For the first time since 2008-2009, the number of children enrolled in district and ESU operated early childhood programs declined during the 2020-2021 school year. Data showed a decrease of 7.1% when compared to the 2019-2020 school year. Each age group also reflected a decrease in the number of children enrolled from the previous year — a decrease of 10.4% for 4 year olds, a decrease of 4.4% for 3 year olds, and a decrease of 3.6% for birth through 2 year olds. This trend was reflected in state prekindergarten programs across the nation with a 17% decline in state-funded prekindergarten program enrollment across America (Weisenfeld, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic, which continued throughout the 2020-2021 school year, undoubtedly contributed to these statistics.

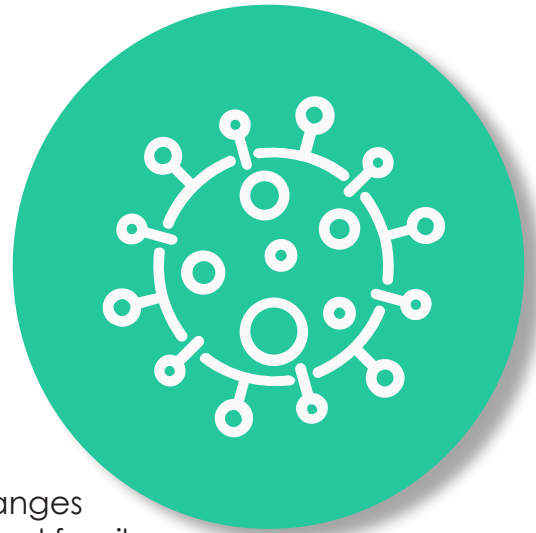
NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN DISTRICT & ESU OPERATED PROGRAMS



Data Source: The NDE NSSRS

NEBRASKA PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS IN A PANDEMIC

A survey of districts was sent out at the at the end of the 2020-2021 school year to review supports districts provided to preschool students and their families throughout the school year. One hundred forty districts, or 63%, provided responses. Of the districts that responded, 100% provided in-person preschool programming and one district reported a closure due to COVID, which lasted 10 days. Twenty-two percent of the districts reported implementing additional cleaning routines and allowing limited or no visitors. Other changes reported by districts for 2020-2021 included mask wearing, virtual family engagement activities, less access to centers and materials, varied classroom scheduling, more classroom time outside, static groups, meals/snacks distributed as opposed to family-style dining, and increased distancing between seated students. Home visits were conducted in-person by 56% of the districts. A variety of accommodations were enacted to complete home visits including the use of phone calls, sending more information and reports to the home, and meeting outside, virtually and at the school.



While 14 districts reported using some remote programming, less than 4% of preschool students (approximately 664) utilized remote learning throughout the school year. Remote learning included digital support, virtual participation, providing manipulatives and paper-based materials as well as meals, and access to pre-recorded videos. Student engagement and attendance were reported as the biggest challenges districts faced in providing remote learning. Other challenges were technology, materials, family communication, and parent engagement. To address inequities for remote prekindergarten students, districts provided technology devices, remote learning plans, technology support, internet services, meals, delivery of physical materials, resource information, and increased communication with families.

On hundred percent of the districts planned to operate their prekindergarten program in-person for the 2021-2022 school year. Policies implemented during the pandemic that districts plan to continue include: additional scheduled cleanings, increased in-depth cleaning of more materials, illness and symptom monitoring such as consistent temperature checks, the use of masks, having more class time outside, entrance and exit procedures, use of additional support staff, increased communication with families, and the use of technology to connect with families and students when in-person is not possible.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS PROVIDED THROUGH COVID

During the fall of 2020, the Office of Early Childhood at the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) sent a survey to early childhood programs across the state. The survey focused on the needs of early childhood staff and how the NDE could best support those needs.

The 150 districts that responded to the survey ranked the following supports in order of importance:

1. Collecting data for child outcomes
2. Use of technology with early childhood students
3. Developing partnerships with families
4. Delivering content to early childhood families
5. Connecting with families through remote visits

Districts also expressed a need for access to online professional development. Resources and information provided to programs reflected the five areas that were ranked in the survey along with other topics such as COVID information and guidance for health practices. In response to the need for virtual trainings, the NDE approved trainings were offered virtually including GOLD trainings for child assessment, CLASS and ECERS trainings for program quality, and Early Learning Guidelines: Nebraska's Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards. Professional development opportunities available from partners including Reflective Practice FAN Program, CHIME — Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators, The Learning Child statewide webinars, and Circle of Security were also shared with districts. Resources and guidance for early childhood programs were provided on the NDE Launch Nebraska website (launchne.com) and shared through a variety of methods including e-newsletters such as the Office of Early Childhood bi-monthly Preschool Post, virtual meetings, emails, phone calls, and on the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System (NECPRS). Additional supports extended to programs consisted of flexibility for the Rule 11 required instructional hours along with a waiver for those hours, and the implementation of a teacher waiver.



RESULTS MATTER IN NEBRASKA: A COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

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 (EDN), Early Head Start, Head Start, Tribal and Migrant seasonal Head Start programs, and community partners. Child, family, and program outcome data is used to inform early childhood program practices and policy.



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). The NDE promotes quality programs through ongoing training and technical assistance.

Program quality is measured through onsite observations. Assessment tools measure how the classroom environment supports children's physical, cognitive, language and literacy, mathematical, and social-emotional development.



QUALITY MEASURES FOR THREE TO FIVE YEAR-OLD PROGRAMS

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale® (ECERS-3) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS) were used to evaluate the overall quality of prekindergarten programs.

ECERS-3 is an observational assessment of 35 items across six subscales, designed to assess center-based programs for children 3–5 years of age. The program standard of quality is a rating of five across all six subscales and is based on a 7-point scale with 7 being excellent. ECERS-3 rates six areas: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language and Literacy, Learning Activities, Interactions, and Program Structure.

CLASS is an observational tool designed to measure the interactions between teachers and children as well as how those interactions affect children's learning. CLASS encompasses 10 dimensions that are divided into three broad domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Each domain is scored on a 7-point scale with 7 being excellent.

The NDE selected the district classrooms in which observations were conducted. Observations of district programs receiving Early Childhood State Grant funds are completed using the ECERS-3. Districts not receiving early childhood grant funds may choose which tool, ECERS-3 or CLASS, is used for their observation.

In a typical year, approximately 45 ECERS-3 and CLASS observations are completed in district programs across the state. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NDE determined that individual districts would be able to decide whether to have an observation during the 2020-2021 school year. As a result, only five classroom observations were conducted during the 2020-2021 school year.

Program quality is a high priority and onsite observations provide comprehensive data for increasing and sustaining quality in early childhood programs across the state of Nebraska. As the NDE looks toward the future, it is anticipated that observations will return to their previous numbers.



CHILD OUTCOMES

CHILD ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Early Childhood programs are informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches that provide teachers and families with information about children's learning and development. MyTeachingStrategies GOLD™ is a research-based, authentic assessment system used by district and ESU programs, as well as in many federally funded Early Head Start and Head Start programs. This report includes data from district and ESU programs and Early Head Start/Head Start programs through a data sharing agreement with the NDE.



GOLD™ data is collected through observation of six areas of development and learning on an ongoing basis for all children B-5 served by districts, ESUs, and Early Head Start/Head Start. The data is used by teachers and programs to inform and improve instruction to meet the needs of individual children and groups of children. The NDE uses 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 six areas.

The areas of development and learning are:

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

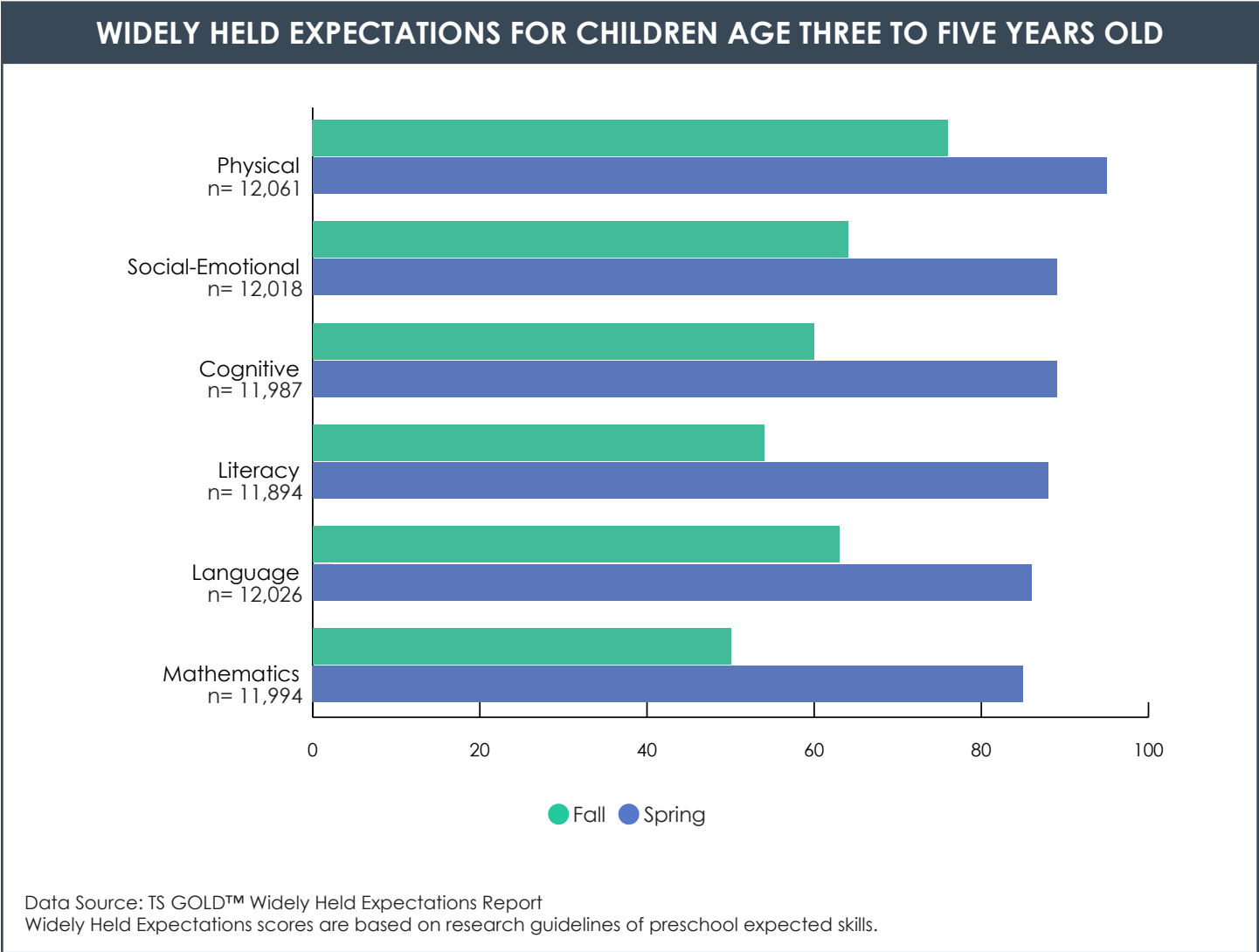
CHILD ASSESSMENT DATA

Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, 18,335 children birth to age five were assessed utilizing GOLD across various settings. For this report, fall and spring checkpoint data were analyzed to monitor children's progress towards achieving widely held expectations for children ages three to five. Child assessment data for children birth to age two can be found within the Sixpence, Special Education and/or Head Start reports, linked later in this report.

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AGED THREE TO FIVE YEARS OLD

The preschool data included children within early childhood settings that were either one or two years from entering kindergarten. Of the 15,484 children ages three to five with assessment data in the 20-21 school year, an average of 11,997 children had finalized assessment data by both the fall and spring checkpoint date in at least one of the six areas of development. The varying numbers in the graph for each of the developmental areas indicate the number of children with finalized checkpoint data in both the fall and spring. Checkpoint data may not be available for children across all areas based on a variety of factors limiting teachers' ability to gather data including extended child absences, discontinuation of services, and family mobility. By the spring of 2021, the majority of children aged three to five years year old met widely held expectation in every area assessed, with the highest number of children meeting widely held expectations in the areas of social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development. The strongest gains were made in the areas of math and literacy.

Children three to five reflected the strongest progress in math and literacy skills.



KINDERGARTEN READY

Children are born with the innate ability to learn. The goal of school readiness efforts is to support all children entering kindergarten with the skills, knowledge, health, and attitude to be successful life-long learners. Nebraska law entitles children to receive a free public education the year that they turn five on or before July 31.



TRANSITION AGREEMENTS

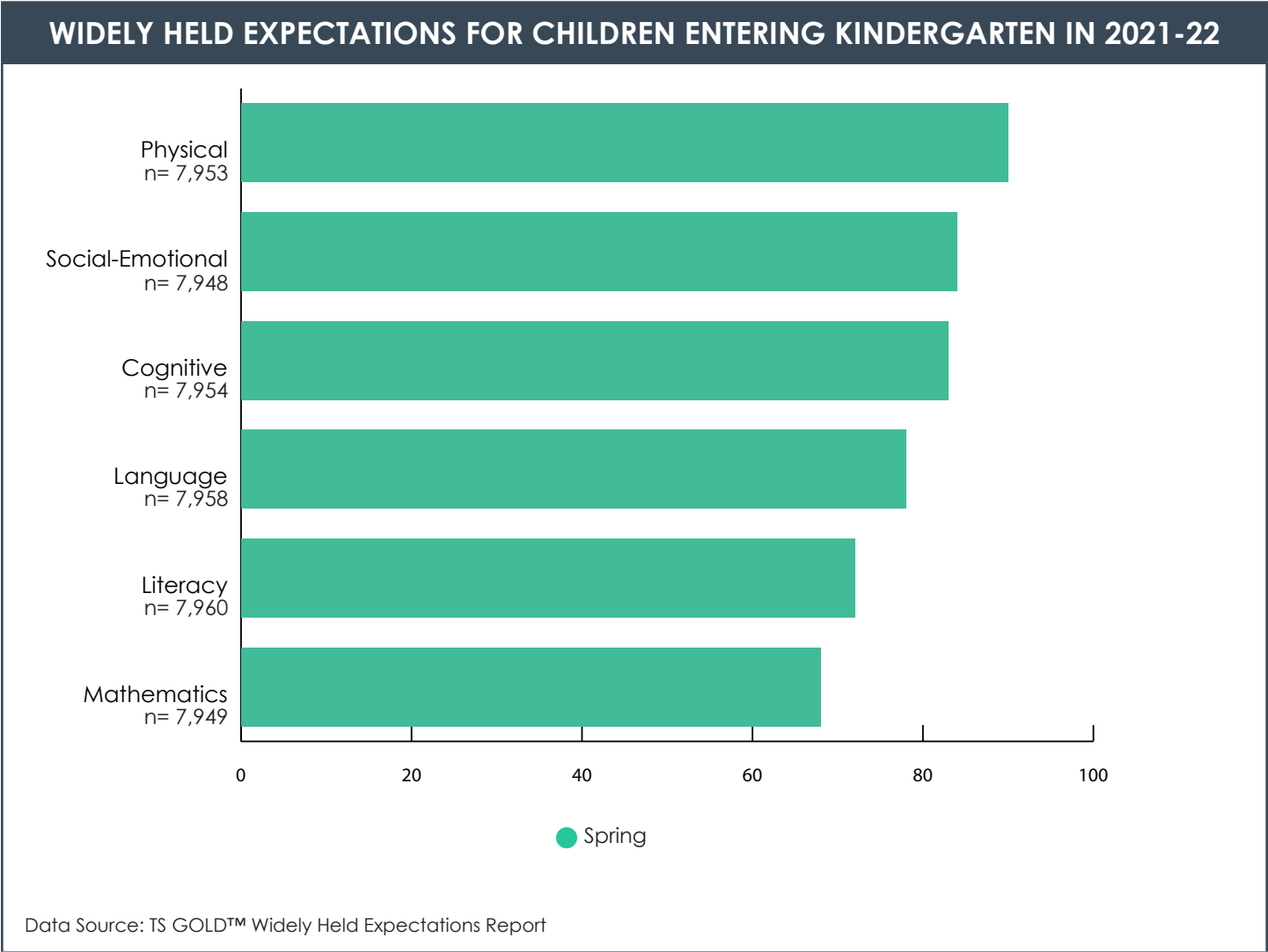
The majority of students entering kindergarten within public school districts do not attend district-operated programs; therefore, districts must work with local partners to ensure the school is ready for the incoming kindergarten students. With an increased focus on transition agreements required by Title I, 151 districts reported utilizing a kindergarten transition agreement with Head Start facilities within the community and 138 districts reported utilizing a kindergarten transition agreement with child care programs.



OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN ENTERING KINDERGARTEN IN 2021-2022

To evaluate the growth and learning of children eligible to enter kindergarten in 2021–2022, data was gathered during the spring of 2021 for children who participated in district, ESU, and/or Head Start programs and would be eligible for kindergarten in the fall of 2021. The data for more than 7900 children was analyzed in six areas of development and learning and shows the percentage of children meeting the kindergarten readiness standards. The varying numbers of children for each of the areas indicates the number of children with finalized checkpoint data. Checkpoint data may not be available for children across all areas based on a variety of factors limiting teachers' ability to gather data including extended child absences, discontinuation of services, and family mobility. Strengths for children entering kindergarten were the physical, social-emotional, and cognitive skills.

The majority of children age eligible for kindergarten for the upcoming fall demonstrated the foundational skills for entrance to school.



PARTNERSHIPS

District prekindergarten programs are working in partnerships. All school districts are required to provide special education services for students with disabilities, including those below kindergarten entrance age. Other partnerships are also utilized to better meet the needs of children and their families. These partnerships often have their own reporting requirements. Information regarding some of those partnerships is included along with links for additional information.



REPORTING CHILD OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH AN IFSP OR IEP

In addition to the NDE annual Early Childhood Education State report, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires the 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). 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 the NDE's annual targets are being met for the three outcomes.

The NDE Annual Reports to OSEP include the number and percentage of children who:

- Showed greater than expected growth
- Function within age expectations

Annual reporting is based on functional outcome areas across areas of development and learning that reflect 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. Each year the results are compared to state targets.

Detailed information regarding the functional outcomes, targets, and comparison of children's Part C or Part B outcome data to the state targets can be found in the IDEA Part C PRT Annual Performance Report and IDEA Part B State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report, which are located on the Public Reporting webpage of the Nebraska Department of Education Special Education website:
www.education.ne.gov/sped/public-reporting.

QUALITY MEASURES FOR IDEA PART C: EARLY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK (EDN)

OSEP requires monitoring of family outcomes for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Three outcomes are 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 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 to gather this information. Data is then analyzed and compared against state determined targets. The results are included in the IDEA Part C PRT Annual Performance Report located on the Public Reporting webpage of the Nebraska Department of Education Special Education website: www.education.ne.gov/sped/public-reporting.

SIXPENCE INFANT AND TODDLER PROGRAMS

The Sixpence Early Learning Fund is a public-private partnership that supports collaboration at the state and local levels. Funds are awarded to school districts with community-based partnerships to serve families and children birth to age 3. Sixpence serves children and families through center-based and home-based programs. Forty five districts across the state have either a Sixpence center-based, home-based program, and/or child care partnership grant. To assess program outcomes and family outcomes, Sixpence programs use assessment tools including: the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scales-Third Edition (ITERS-3), the FRIENDS Protective Factors Survey (PFS), and family interviews. The CLASS is an observational tool designed to measure the interactions between teachers and children as well as how those interactions affect children's learning. The ITERS-3 assesses quality with a focus on classroom structure, activities, and play materials. The PFS measures the perceived presence of protective factors in the caregivers of children.

The results and analysis of these assessments can be accessed complete Sixpence Report and analysis can be accessed at www.singasongofsixpence.org.

HEAD START PROGRAMS

There are 17 Head Start grant recipients across Nebraska. The Head Start grantees provide a variety of programming options including center-based options for infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children, home visiting programs, and child care partnerships. Of these 17 grantees, four are either a school district or ESU. Sixty four districts reported having some sort of partnership with at least one program of the 17 Head Start grantees. These partnerships range from providing referrals to providing comprehensive services to children and their families.

Additional information regarding access to Head Start and Early Head Start as well as services provided can be found at the National Head Start Association Fact Sheet and individual state fact sheets: <https://nhsa.org/resource/2022-state-fact-sheets/>



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