



Early Learning - Math and Literacy

In response to the COVID pandemic, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), in partnership with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF), formed the *Together, Better Initiative*, which is a series of strategic investments in authentic, evidence-based and reimagined learning supports and family and community engagement. NDE and NCFF are collaborating to address these critical needs for students, families, and communities with five strategies, and this report provides an update on one of them: a deepening partnership to support early learning, particularly in early literacy.

For nearly ten years, the Sixpence Early Learning Fund has shifted the odds of lifelong success in favor of a growing number of Nebraska's infants and toddlers at risk. An innovative collaboration between our state's public and private sectors, Sixpence provides funding and enhances the quality and

efficiency of early learning and development services offered in communities throughout Nebraska. Sixpence demonstrates how targeted investments in the school-readiness of our youngest, most vulnerable children are also investments that strengthen our families, communities and state.

From the new American Rescue Plan, substantial new funding is now available to many local communities extending over at least a 36-month period. These funds are provided through provisions in the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III) portion of the Act. Using these funds, NDE and NCFF have strengthened their partnership and have hired an Early Literacy Education Specialist to continue supporting Nebraska's youngest children.

Highlights:

- Provided technical support to Educational Service Units and public school districts throughout the state related to the development and implementation of Nebraska's strategies to advance early literacy practices and the exploration of the Revised English Language Arts State Standards.
- Developed and delivered synchronous and asynchronous professional learning experiences related to the Science of Reading, K-2 evidence-based structured literacy practices, and acceleration of student learning.
- Continuous collaboration across multiple Nebraska Department of Education offices, including Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Early Childhood Education, Special Education, Family Engagement, and NeMTSS.

Ongoing work/Next steps:

- Continue with the support of Nebraska schools and educational entities in planning for learning acceleration in the areas of early and family literacy, including supporting students with disabilities and Multi-Lingual learners.
- In accordance with the Nebraska Standards Implementation framework, transition support to the implementation phase of the Revised English Language Arts State Standards through the guidance and recommendations on the selection and implementation of high-quality instructional materials and assessments for early literacy and family literacy.
- Begin work, in collaboration with Nebraska Department of Early Childhood Education and Sixpence Early Learning, to promote equitable access to inclusive programs and services in Early Literacy and provide professional development, technical assistance, and resources for personnel in early childhood care and education settings.
- Conduct a landscape analysis related to early mathematics education and develop recommendations for a statewide strategy and resources to support early childhood mathematics.

