



2022-23

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STATE REPORT

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

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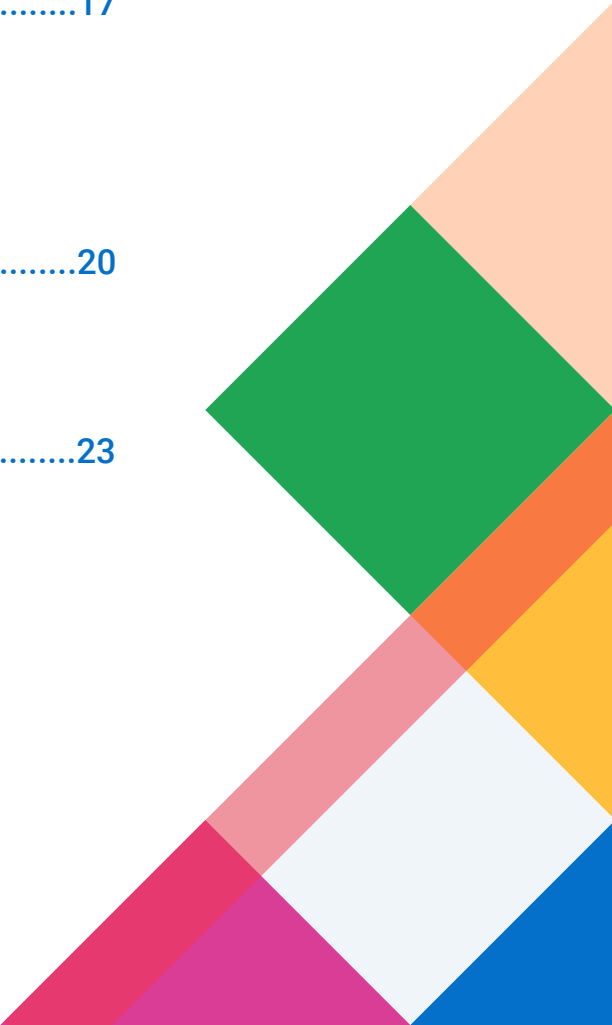
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Supporting Children's Success

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 part-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 include:

- 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
- Paraprofessionals 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 that promote a strong family development and support component to recognize the central role of families in their children's development

The latest revision of [Rule 11: Regulations for the Approval of Prekindergarten Programs established by School Districts or Educational Service Units](#), introduced the waiver procedure for any staff member that does not meet the requirements for an early childhood teacher. Rule 11 5.05A requires a teacher to have a Nebraska teaching certificate with an approved early childhood endorsement. Nine hundred teachers met the requirement for Rule 11. Thirty-eight teachers were working toward the proper endorsement as required by Rule 11. Eleven of those thirty-eight teachers were continuing their work on an endorsement from the previous year.

Integrated Funds Expanded Early Childhood Services

Nebraska’s district and ESU operated early childhood programs were funded with multiple sources. In 2022-23, over 160 million dollars supported these ECE programs. Federal dollars accounted for the majority of Early Childhood Education funds and were provided through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (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 Special Education and the Early Childhood grants, as well as parent fees were included in local funding sources. Some districts also received funding from the Sixpence Early Childhood Education Endowment to support birth to three programs.

The total funds reported below represent a 2% decrease in funding from the 2021-2022 school year. While the total funds spent on district prekindergarten programs has increased greatly over the past 10 years, this 2% decrease is the first drop in funds used to support prekindergarten programs that Nebraska has seen.



Funding Breakdown



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. During the 2022-2023 school year, 220 approved district-operated early childhood programs were located across the state along with two programs that were ESU operated and one ESU operated program for three districts. Of the over 1,000 early childhood classrooms across the state of Nebraska, 662 were part-day classrooms and 382 were full-day. Those numbers were down just slightly from the previous year.

These approved Nebraska school districts and ESUs provided early childhood programs and services to 20,851 children, age birth to five. Included in this total child count are 39 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	1,731	8%
The NDE non-Grant Funded Early Childhood Education Programs serving children ages three to five	11,459	55%
Early Childhood Birth to Age Three Endowment Grant Programs (Sixpence)	2,049	10%
Home-based Early Childhood Education Program serving non-special education children ages birth to five	209	1%
Special Education and Early Development Network services provided to children ages birth to five in homes and community settings	5,364	26%
Unidentified	39	<1%
Total	20,851	100%

Demographics of Children in District & ESU Programs

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 settings across the state.

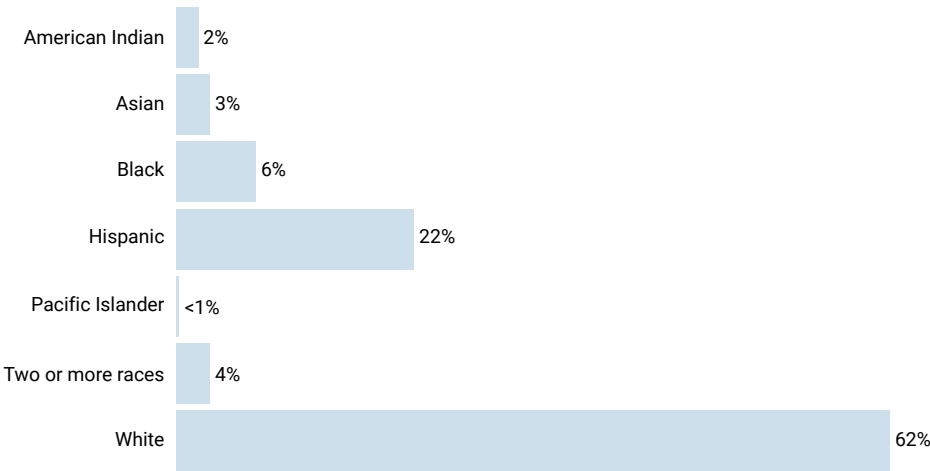
Of the total number of children served, the following categories show the number of children considered at-risk for possible poor outcomes in future academic settings:

- 9,765 (47%) had an IEP or IFSP (center-based or home-based)
- 9,066 (43%) qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch
- 2,607 (13%) had a home language other than English
- 266 (1%) were reported as English Learners

The number of children with an IEP or IFSP and the number of children who qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch increased by 2 and 3 percentage points when compared to the previous year. The number of children with a home language other than English increased one percentage point while the percentage of children reported as English Learners stayed the same.



Demographics



Ten-Year Trend Data

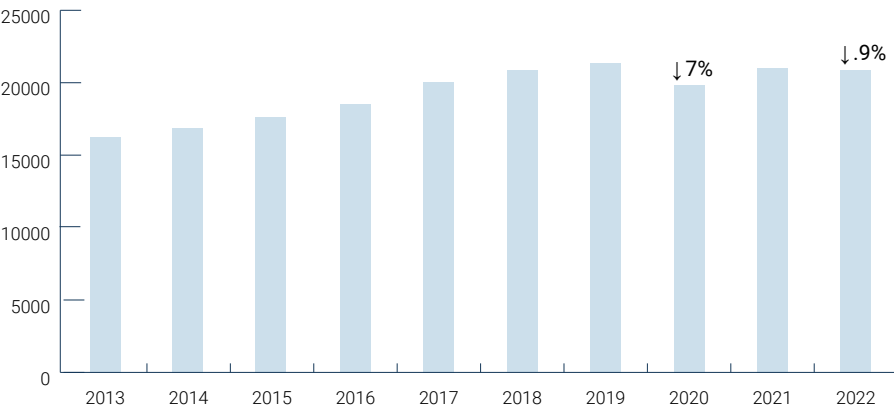
Longitudinal data was reviewed to track the pattern of children served by district and ESU operated programs across ages. The graph below represents children served in programs that were home-based or center-based, and children ages birth to five who received services in homes and community settings.

Enrollment numbers for Nebraska early childhood programs steadily increased between 2012-13 and 2019-20. During the 2020-2021 school year, a decrease in the number of children enrolled in Nebraska early childhood programs reflected the nationwide decline in early childhood enrollment numbers attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic (Weisenfeld, 2021). While Nebraska enrollment increased during the 2021-2022 school year, a decrease in Pre-K enrollment was again seen during the 2022-2023 school year.

Nebraska's Pre-K enrollment decreases have coincided with a decrease in K-12 enrollment during the 2022-2023 school year. For the last ten years, enrollment has increased for both Pre-K and K-12. Since 2019-2020, both Pre-K and K-12 have shown slight decreases. The reasons for the reduced numbers are unclear but may be due to a decreased birth rate, the growth in students enrolled in private schools, and an increase in homeschooling or virtual school options (Merod, 2023 K-12 Dive By the Numbers).



Number of Children in District & ESU Operated Programs



Early Childhood Grant Funding Across the State of Nebraska

The Early Childhood Grant funds are one of three sources of state funds to support district-operated prekindergarten programs. The amount of funding allocated to the Early Childhood Grant program is less than 10% of the total state funds supporting prekindergarten programs. According to the 2021 State of Preschool Report, Nebraska ranks 42nd for the amount of state funding spent on these programs (Friedman-Krauss, et al. 2021).

The majority of grant funds are utilized within districts to pay for the salary and benefits of certified teachers. A total of \$3,054,861 were budgeted for salaries and benefits of staff members which accounts for almost 92% of the total allocation.

Districts are eligible to apply for grants for new prekindergarten programs which provide funding for three years to support the implementation of a district-operated program that targets 4-year-old children. Programs that are already in existence are eligible to apply for expansion grant funds for one year to add classrooms to their program. Following the three years of the new grant or the one year expansion grant, continuation funding may be available for districts if the amount of inferred early childhood state aid is less than the Early Childhood Grant.

Early Childhood Grant funds have been utilized by more than half of the school districts across the state as the district began or expanded the prekindergarten program. During the 2022-2023 school year, 44 districts received state grant funds while 179 districts did not receive any state grant funds. Some districts had a mixture of state grant funded classrooms and non-state grant funded classrooms.



Stories from the State

“Our preschool programs were supported through the NDE Early Childhood Grant Program. The grant we received was instrumental in building our early childhood program, and the Office of Early Childhood staff has been supportive throughout the process. The financial and professional assistance we received has benefitted 147 students in our district. We are fortunate that the Nebraska Department of Education is invested in the future of our students!”

—*Early Childhood Coordinator,
Lakeview Community Schools*

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 (Morgan, 2019). 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 Birth- to Five-Year-Old Programs

The Environment Rating Scale® (ERS) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS) were used to evaluate the overall quality of prekindergarten programs. The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition® (ITERS-3) is used when assessing a Birth through Three Year Old Classrooms and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition® (ECERS-3) is used to assess a Three to Five Year Old Classroom.

ITERS-3 is an observational assessment of 33 items across six subscales designed to assess center-based programs where the majority of the children are 36 months or younger. 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. ITERS-3 rates six areas: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language and Books, Activities, Interaction, and Program Structure.

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 Furnishing, 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 Pre-K 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.

During the 2022-2023 school year, the OEC implemented a [Support Plan system](#) to determine which district programs would be observed. After analyzing various data, all Nebraska districts were determined to be on a Standard, Focused, or Advanced Plan. Observations of district programs on a Focused or Advanced Plan were completed using the ERS tool (either ITERS-3 or ECERS-3). Districts on a Standard Plan could choose between the ERS observation tool (either ITERS-3 or ECERS-3) or the CLASS observation tool. For the 2022-2023 school year, 72 observations were completed including 55 ECERS-3, 6 ITERS-3, and 11 CLASS observations. The six ITERS-3 observations were in non-Sixpence classrooms.

Stories from the State

"Observations have benefitted my classroom by giving me the opportunity to step back and evaluate the classroom environment. In doing so, I was able to make positive changes that have improved my classroom, and the students have loved the changes!"

—PreK Teacher, Leap into Learning Partnership, Loup City

Program Assessment Data

ITERS-3

ITERS-3 observations were completed in six classrooms. These classrooms were funded through the local district to support a need in their community. The results showed that classroom quality was strongest in the subscales of Language and Books, Interaction, and Program Structure. The Language and Books subscale focuses on how adults talk with, encourage and respond to children’s communications as well as how adults use books with children and encourage children to use books. The Interaction subscale evaluates the supervision of gross motor and non-gross motor learning and play along with staff-child interaction and guidance of children’s behavior. Program Structure looks at the schedule, transitions, free play, and group activities.

The lowest ratings were in the Activities and Personal Care Routines subscales. The Activities subscale evaluates fine motor skills, and how nature/science, math/numbers, art and blocks are supported throughout the program. The Personal Care Routines subscale focuses on meals/snacks, toileting/diapering, health practices, and safety.

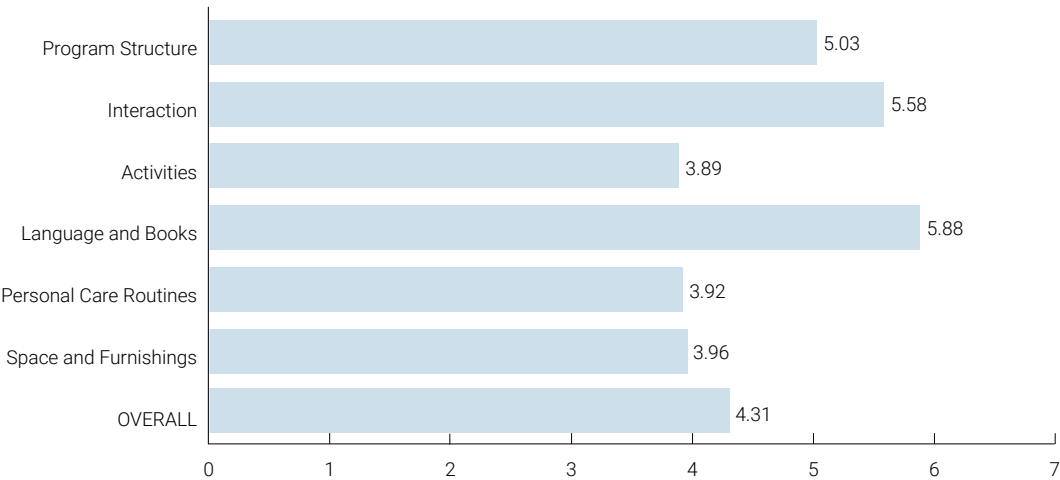


Stories from the State

“Having an infant and toddler program in our community gives us the opportunity to build strong relationships with families from the start of their child’s educational journey. Focusing on Early Childhood Education positively impacts students, families, and communities.”

– PreK Principal,
Morrill Public Schools

Birth to Age Three Classroom ITERS-3 Ratings n=6



ECERS-3

ECERS-3 observations were completed in 55 classrooms. The results showed that classroom quality was strongest in the subscales of Interaction, Language and Literacy, and Program Structure. The Interaction subscale focuses on how adults interact with children through supervision of gross motor activities, individualized teaching and learning, staff-child interaction, peer interaction, and discipline. The Language and Literacy subscale includes vocabulary, children's use of books, and becoming familiar with print. The Program Structure subscale evaluates how the program is set up for whole group activities, play, and transitions.

The lowest ratings were in Learning Activities and Personal Care Routines. The Learning Activities subscale identifies how the classroom and staff support learning throughout the day including fine motor skills, dramatic play, nature/science, math, and technology. The Personal Care Routines subscale focuses on meals/snacks, toileting/diapering, health practices, and safety.

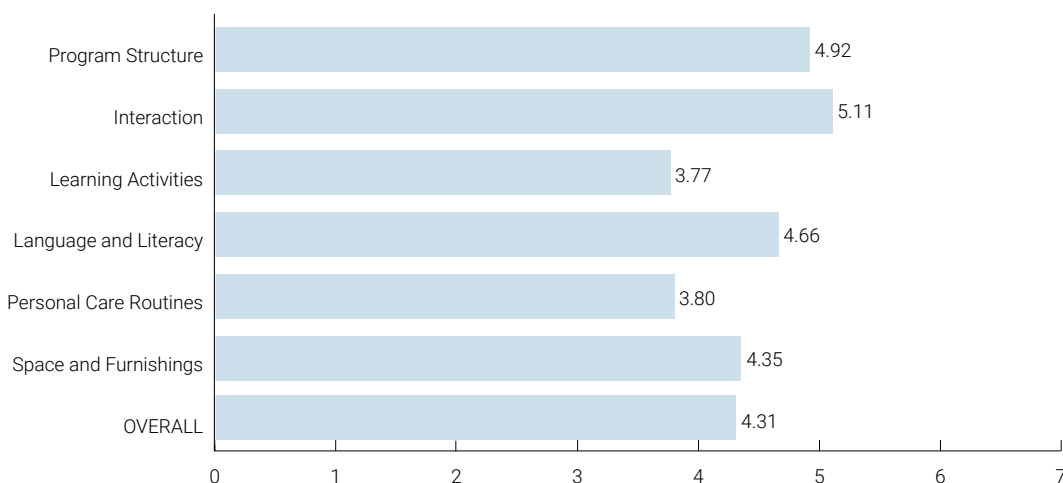


Stories from the State

"I love receiving feedback to improve my classroom for my students. My ECERS-3 observation helped influence my classroom setup by pushing me to think about what is safest for students and showing me how to take action right away."

—PreK Teacher,
North Bend

Age Three to Five ECE Classroom ECERS-3 Ratings n=55



CLASS

Eleven CLASS observations were completed. CLASS has three domains:

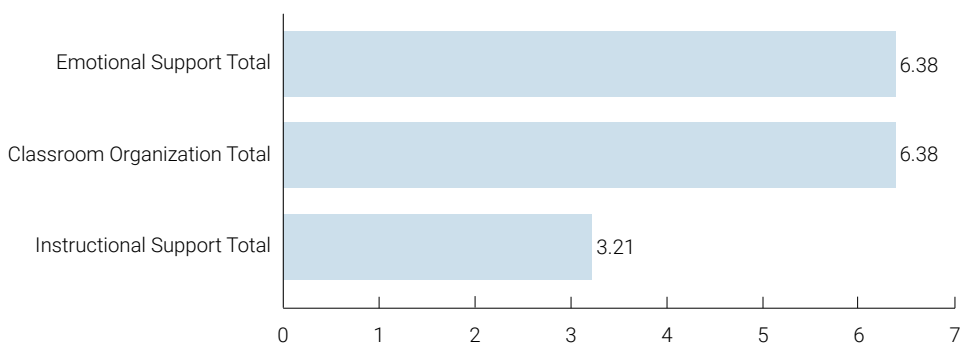
- Instructional Support
- Classroom Organization
- Emotional Support

The results showed the strongest ratings in Emotional Support and Classroom Organization.

The Emotional Support domain determines the positive or negative climate in the classroom as well as measuring teacher sensitivity and how teacher interactions show an understanding of the child's point of view. The Classroom Organization domain focuses on how smoothly the classroom operates along with ensuring that children are engaged in productive learning activities. The Instructional Support domain, which received the lowest state-wide scores, emphasizes how teachers promote higher-order thinking skills, provide effective feedback, and encourage the development of children's language skills.



Age Three to Five ECE Classroom CLASS Ratings n=11



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 participating through an NDE umbrella purchase option.

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 other program staff 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 & Learning are:



Social-Emotional

Regulate emotions and build relationships with others.



Physical

Demonstrates large motor skills, such as traveling, balancing, and coordinated physical manipulation skills.



Language

Learn to understand and use words/gesture to effectively communicate.



Cognitive

Demonstrate positive approaches to learning, classification skills, and use representational skills.



Literacy

Engage in emergent reading and writing behaviors.



Mathematics

Explore spatial relationships and demonstrate knowledge of patterns and number concepts.



Child Assessment Data

Over the course of the 2022-2023 school year, 20,555 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 toward achieving widely held expectations for children ages three to five. Additional child data for children birth to age two can be found within the Sixpence and/or Special Education 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. During the 2022-2023 school year, an average of 14,776 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 2023, the majority of children aged three to five years old met widely held expectations in every area assessed, with the highest number of children meeting widely held expectations in the areas of literacy, social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development. The strongest gains were made in the areas of math and literacy.

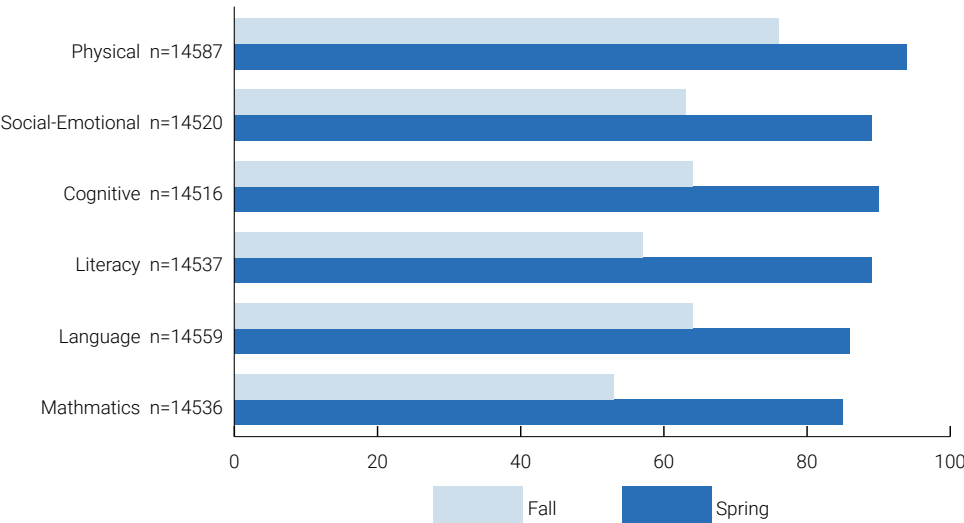


Stories from the State

“GOLD assessment data has allowed us to look at patterns, both at the program and classroom levels, in order to make instructional changes. Upon finding a decreased percentage of children meeting expectations in numeracy, our staff intentionally sought out learning opportunities to increase exposure to math concepts throughout the day.”

– Early Childhood Supervisor,
ESU 6

Widely Held Expectations for Children Aged 3-5 Years Old



Data Source: TS GOLD™ Widely Held Expectations Report
Widely Held Expectations scores are based on research guidelines of preschool expected 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 incoming kindergarten students. With an increased focus on transition agreements required by Title 1, 166 districts reported utilizing a kindergarten transition agreement with Head Start programs within the community and 146 districts reported utilizing a kindergarten transition agreement with child care programs.



Stories from the State

“Thoughtful and intentional transition agreements between sending and receiving schools set children and their parents up for success in kindergarten by aligning expectations, delegating roles and responsibilities and always allowing room for individualization when needed.”

– *Director,
Dodge County Head Start*

Outcomes for Children Entering Kindergarten in 2023-2024

To evaluate the growth and learning of children eligible to enter kindergarten in 2023-2024, data was gathered during the spring of 2023 for children who participated in district, ESU, and/or Head Start programs and would be eligible for kindergarten in the fall of 2023. The data for more than 9800 children was analyzed in six areas of development and learning and showed the percentage of children meeting the kindergarten readiness standards. The varying numbers of children for each of the areas indicate 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 physical, literacy, and cognitive skills. Each of the areas increased in the percentage of children who met or exceeded the widely held expectations for children entering kindergarten when compared to the previous year. Literacy and math made the largest gains with increases from 16 and 12 percentage points. All areas had more than 80% of children meeting widely held expectations.

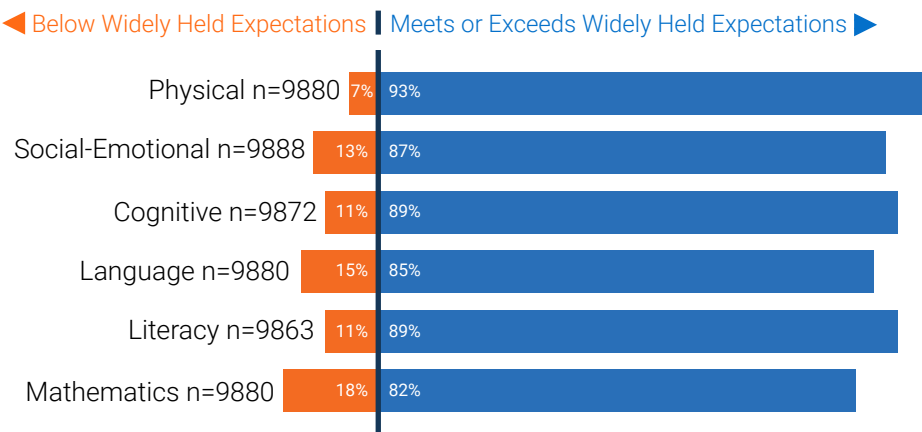


Stories from the State

“For the last 5 years, our Kindergarten teachers have been using GOLD to evaluate and share how children are progressing in their classrooms. This approach works well for both parents and staff in understanding each child’s development, as well as strongly support the transition from preschool to kindergarten.”

– Student Services Director,
Wayne Community Schools

Widely Held Expectations for Children Entering Kindergarten 2023-24



Data Source: TS GOLD™ Widely Held Expectations Report

Partnerships

District prekindergarten programs are working in partnerships. All school districts are required to provide special education services for children 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 the 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:

- Show 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 the 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 Planning Region Team (PRT) Annual Performance Report and IDEA Part B State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report, which are located on the Public Reporting page of the NDE Special Education website: 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 page of the NDE Special Education website: 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 from birth to age 3. Sixpence serves children and families through center-based and home-based programs. Forty-four 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 program 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 Sixpence Report and analysis can be found at: singasongofsixpence.org/resources/resource-library.html



Head Start Programs

There are 19 Early Head Start/Head Start grant recipients across the state of Nebraska: 15 regional recipients, 3 Native American Tribal recipients, and 1 Migrant/Seasonal grant recipient. These Head Start programs provide a variety of programming options, including center-based options for infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children, home visiting programs, and childcare partnerships, to over 5,000 children ages Birth to Five. Of the 15 regional recipients, five are direct awards to either a school district or ESU.

District Pre-K and Head Start Partnerships

School district and ESU early childhood programs funded by the NDE augment services provided to children and families by engaging in partnerships with a variety of community-based organizations and providers including federal Head Start programs.

These partnerships vary in scope depending on individual community needs and can range from very informal interactions to formal written agreements which include shared funding considerations. Informal interactions center around transition-related activities including child file transfers and Kindergarten classroom visits or shared professional development opportunities around curriculum, observation/assessment and child outcomes. More formal partnerships include Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for disabilities or special services, rental/lease agreements for space, shared staff for supplemental health, nutrition, and family support services or written contracts for paid enrollment slots.

During the 2022-2023 school year, 166 district Pre-K programs reported kindergarten transition agreements with Head Start and 65 district Pre-K programs reported shared funding through Head Start. Each of these unique partnerships is designed to meet the needs of the children, families, and communities in the service area in which they are located.

One such partnership existed in the western Nebraska Panhandle region. As the designated federal grant recipient for Head Start funding in Scottsbluff, Morrill, and Cheyenne counties, ESU 13 maintains formal written agreements with 7 school districts in the service area. These partnerships align Head Start Program Performance Standards and Rule 11 requirements to deliver enhanced services to the children and families enrolled and to the staff that are working within these programs.

Supplemental services made possible by the combined federal, state, and local district funding in this featured partnership include:

- Intensive coaching opportunities focused on the CLASS observation for district staff who are interested
- Additional support for districts who request it regarding ECERS observations
- Monthly virtual networking/learning sessions for public school administration with Head Start staff
- Additional health screenings for children not provided by the district including vision, dental, hearing
- Two CLASS observations per year with feedback/resources and/or coaching
- Two behavioral health observations for students per year with feedback/resources
- Additional support with Creative Curriculum/GOLD
- Two or more professional development opportunities presented by Head Start and information about additional PD opportunities being offered in the community/virtually

Additional information regarding access to Head Start and Early Head Start, as well as federal rules and regulations governing the program can be found at: eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov

Additional information regarding Nebraska programs and services can be found at: nhsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/NE.pdf

Additional information on Nebraska school districts collaborating with community-based programs can be found at: education.ne.gov/oec/hssco-head-start-state-collaboration-office



Stories from the State

“Head Start’s partnerships with public school districts grant access to exceptional learning opportunities for a diverse community of children. In addition to our shared goal of helping kids grow, develop, and get ready for school, Head Start stands out by providing comprehensive family services, a resource that goes beyond what many school districts can offer independently. This focus on the entire family enhances support for overall family well-being, encourages active family engagement in children’s learning and development, and lays a foundation for future success in both school and life.”

– *Director,
ESU 13 Head Start*

Supports

Office of Early Childhood Support Plans

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) has implemented a systemized and equitable process to determine the level of Support Plans for early childhood programs in school districts and Educational Service Units (ESUs). Support is offered at the following levels: Standard, Focused, and Advanced.

Through Support Plans, the OEC intends to:

1. Improve support provided to Rule 11 Pre-K programs
2. Determine what additional support is needed
3. Align Pre-K support with the school-age system of support
4. Ensure that support and assistance is provided equitably across the state

Data is submitted by all Nebraska districts from the previous school year and is analyzed by OEC Education Specialists. Points are assigned based on compliance with Rule 11. The more points that are assigned to a district, the more support a district will receive through the Support Plan and OEC Education Specialists. The needs and goals of each district are also considered when determining the level of Support Plan to be provided.

Support Plan Levels
<div>Standard Support Plan<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to NDE publications and resources• Access to NDE sponsored professional development• A percentage of classrooms will be chosen for a fall observation using the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)</div>
<div>Focused Support Plan<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to NDE publications and resources• Access to NDE sponsored professional development• ERS observation-either ECERS-3 or ITERS-3• At least two technical assistance (TA) visits from OEC Education Specialists</div>
<div>Advanced Support Plan<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to NDE publications and resources• Access to NDE sponsored professional development• Quarterly TA visits from OEC Education Specialists• One fall and one spring ERS observation, either ECERS-3 or ITERS-3</div>

For the 2022-23 school year, 185 school districts (83%) were in the Standard Support plan. Of those districts, 21 schools received an observation in the fall.

Thirty-three school districts (14.8%) were in the Focused Support plan. The districts in the focused support plan received a total of 39 ERS observations in the 2022-2023 school year.

Five school districts (2.2%) were in the Advanced Support plan. There were a total of 12 observations that occurred (both fall and spring) for advanced school districts.

The Office of Early Childhood Education Specialists and school districts reviewed the results from ERS and CLASS observations along with other data received from school districts. Through conversations between Education Specialists and school districts, areas of strength and improvement were identified.

Strengths of Pre-K programs within Nebraska:

- The benefits of engaging in family and community partnerships
- Experienced staff who are invested in the community
- Collaborating and participating in strategic planning within the district

Areas of Improvement of Pre-K programs within Nebraska:

- The need for professional development especially in the areas of connecting play with math and literacy
- The need for support in curriculum adoption
- Professional development specifically for paraprofessionals

By looking at meaningful data from individual Pre-K programs, school districts and the OEC used the 2022-2023 Support Plans to improve child, program and family outcomes across the state of Nebraska.

PK-2 Professional Development Specialists

As part of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) focused its statewide efforts on five priority areas, including high-quality professional learning and bolstering the teacher pipeline. The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) released a grant application for Educational Service Units (ESU) to apply for funding to support Early Childhood Professional Development Specialists to provide professional learning for preschool through second grade teachers.

Applications were approved for five ESUs for the 2022-2023 school year. Throughout the year, the Education Specialists worked with their respective districts to provide professional learning to early childhood educators within school districts and partnership programs. Educators from 82% of districts within the awarded ESUs took advantage of professional development and coaching focused primarily on Appropriate Teaching Practices within Early Childhood Classrooms and specific training on the Pyramid Model.

Grant funding will continue for one more year with additional money available for ESUs to expand their programming to support PreK-2nd grade educators within the ESU region.



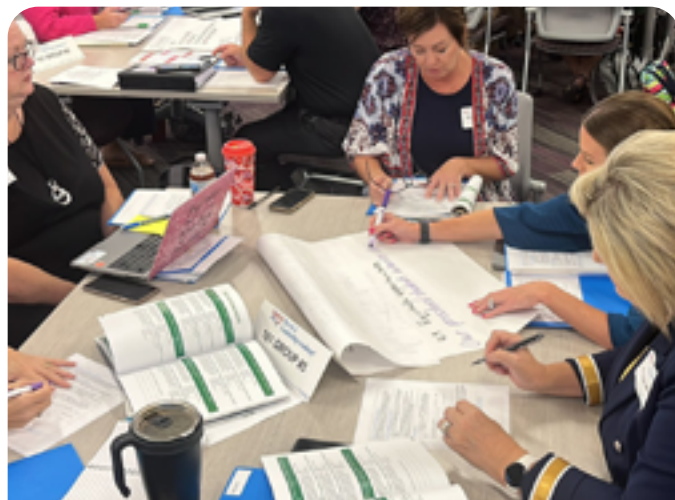
Nebraska's NAESP Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy

Research shows that early childhood classroom outcomes and child outcomes are closely related to positive leadership practices (Kirby, Douglass, Lyskawa, Jones, Malone, 2020).

Nebraska's National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy began in 2019 through funding from the Preschool Development Grant. This year-long professional learning community was designed to encourage school district and community leaders to support preschool through third grade learning environments through alignment and best practices for early grades. The Leadership Academy was designed to build administrator knowledge through a blended in-person, online course utilizing Nebraska educators as advisors to make connections to the work being done within Nebraska schools and Head Start programs with a culminating capstone project to show the growth from the program.

The coursework is structured around NAESP's publication, [Leading Learning Communities: A Principal's Guide to Early Learning and the Early Grades \(Pre-K–3rd Grade\)](#) which focuses on six competencies:

1. Understanding Child Development and Its Implications for High-Quality Instruction and Interactions
2. Develop and Foster Partnerships with Families and Communities
3. Embrace and Enact a Pre-K-3rd Grade Vision
4. Ensure Equitable Opportunities
5. Share Leadership and Build Professional Capacity
6. Promote a Culture of Continuous Improvement



Stories from the State

"I completed the NAESP Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy during my first year as an administrator, and two years later, I still feel that my participation was extremely beneficial and helped me succeed as a young administrator."

– *Principal,
Weeping Water*

Since its inception, the NDE has offered a total of 3 cohorts funded through the Preschool Development Grant, and it has graduated more than 60 participants from across the state including Head Start leaders, principals, Special Education and Curriculum Directors, and teachers. The impact of the Leadership Academy has been felt by more than 16,500 PreK-third grade students across the state. Of those students, 46% qualified for free or reduced lunches.

Evaluation results from the third cohort of Nebraska's NAESP Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy showed increases in knowledge of the participants across all competency areas through pre- and post-tests. Two-thirds of the cohort participants said it greatly exceeded other communities of practice that they have participated in, and all participants rated the support and feedback received from the Nebraska advisor favorably.

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