

Sixpence



Sixpence Early Learning Fund

Biennial Report to the Legislature: 2012-2013

From the time a child is born, there are approximately 1,000 days until he or she turns three years of age. It is the most critical stage in the development of a young child's brain.

Throughout these first thousand days, young children form key relationships, develop trust, and explore the world around them.

During this crucial time, children's experiences, either positive or negative, determine how well their brains are wired for future learning and health.

Children's first thousand days lay the foundation for essential social skills, and the qualities of mind necessary for future academic and workplace success.

Landmark Legislation

Since 1990, Nebraska has invested in early childhood grants to school districts that serve children birth to kindergarten-entrance age. These grants were designed to encourage high quality environments, promote partnerships between public schools and community-based providers, and require a local match for the purpose of better integration and maximization of resources.

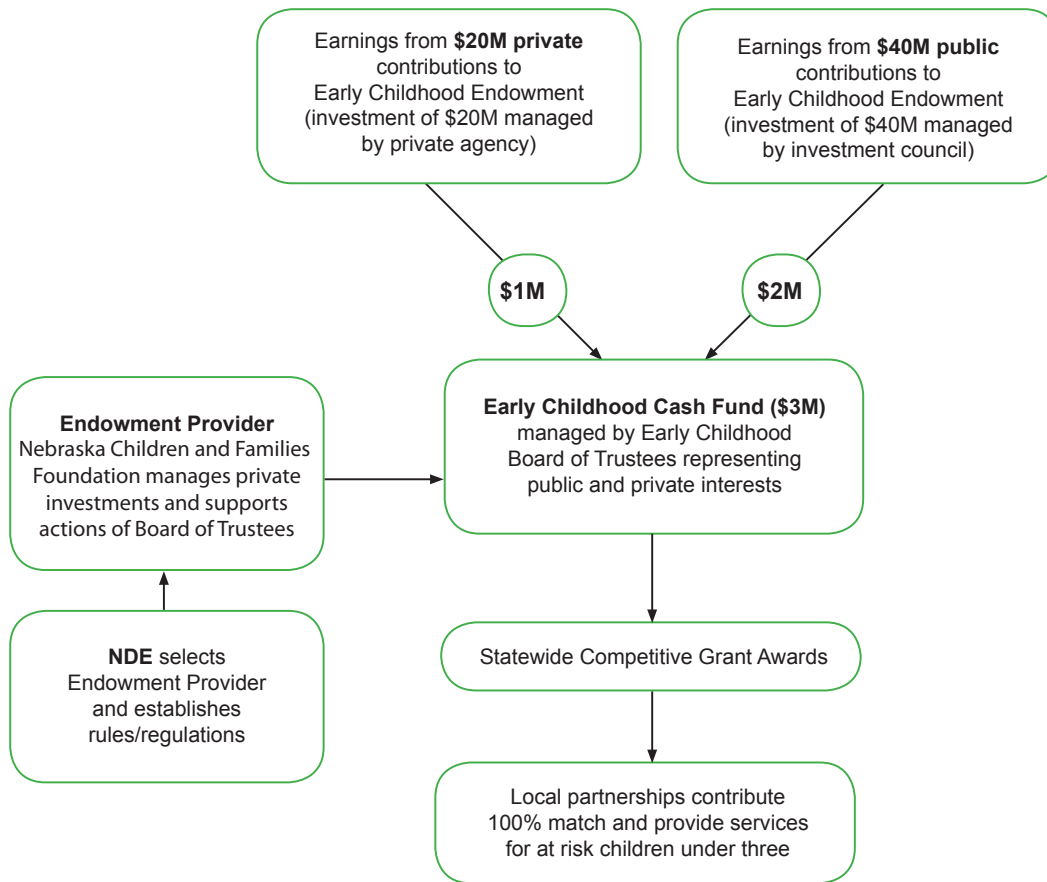
Recognizing the first three years as the most critical time to invest in children, Nebraska passed landmark legislation establishing a dedicated funding source to serve infants and toddlers in high quality environments - one of a handful of states to do so. The architects designed the legislation to be built on the same principles of high quality environments, strong partnerships, and local matching funds.

In 2006, the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Program was established in state statute. A \$60 million statewide, public-private partnership was born with the state committing \$40 million from the Educational Lands and Trust Fund, and the private sector committing \$20 million of which they would raise over a five-year period. The dollars are invested separately and the combined earnings placed in a joint account at the Nebraska Department of Education. The Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Board of Trustees representing both public and private interests, oversees the administration of the fund through Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the private provider selected by the Nebraska Department of Education. Grants are made to fund school districts in partnership with local providers to provide high quality birth to three programs.

Permanent Funding Mechanism in Place Through a Constitutional Amendment

The Educational Lands and Trust Fund dollars were defined in Nebraska's Constitution as "for use by the common school." Because the Educational Lands and Trust Fund was the source of the state portion of funding for the endowment, Nebraska had to pass a constitutional amendment that would permit the use of those funds to be used for early childhood educational purposes and define early childhood (birth to kindergarten-entrance age) as an allowable use of those funds. Amendment 5 was placed on the statewide ballot in November of 2006, and passed by a 55%-45% margin.

Early Childhood Public-Private Partnership for At-Risk Children Under 3 Years of Age



Raising the Private Dollars

The private community's commitment to raise \$20 million in support of the endowment was immediately complicated by changes in the national economic outlook. The Years 2007 - 2011 saw one of the largest economic downturns in history, posing serious challenges to fundraising. Although donors lost confidence in the market, they remained committed to the idea that early childhood was a sound and fiscally-responsible investment, and in 2011 the \$20 million commitment was met, with \$16.5 million having been received at the writing of this report.

Branding the Endowment Program – Sixpence

Another significant challenge related to the endowment revolved around the messaging strategy that would be used in the course of fundraising. In terms of name recognition and ease-of-use, the

"Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Program" was a less than ideal choice. Rebranding the program was a logical first step in presenting it to prospective donors and other target audiences.

In 2007, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation in its capacity as the endowment provider developed the name "Sixpence" to refer to the fund. The rationale behind the new brand was twofold. First, the name drew upon the beloved early childhood nursery rhyme, *Sing a Song of Sixpence* – a name which symbolically evoked the recitation of nursery rhymes as an early literacy activity. Just as importantly, the name "Sixpence" (that is, six pennies) coincided with the funding model upon which the endowment was based – every \$1 private contribution, is matched by \$2 from the public sector. That \$3 investment is then matched by the local community who receives the grant - thus a \$6 investment for every \$1 of private monies.

Standards and Accountability

Sixpence was built on two fundamentals – high quality standards and accountability. Years of research provide a framework for what high quality looks like for infants and toddlers. Whether it is an early childhood setting or at home with family, infants and toddlers need lots of individualized attention, positive adult-child interactions, responding to verbal and non-verbal cues, plenty of eye contact and encouraging tones.

To ensure the high quality is maintained, dedicated one-on-one technical assistance is offered to all Sixpence programs. With dedicated technical assistance, we are ensuring the highest accountability for the dollars and the greatest impact for the children and families served. A robust evaluation of the children receiving services and the programs is embedded as a fundamental. There is consistent measurement of the impact of the services and one-on-one technical assistance to maintain the high quality.

Public-Private Partnership at all Levels

The Sixpence model is predicated on the power of partnerships – between public and private funders, between the Nebraska Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, and between the state and local level.

Demographics

Sixpence Early Learning Fund is currently supporting 11 sites throughout Nebraska to provide evidence-based services to children birth to three and their families who face an array of risk factors. These risk factors include premature birth and low child birth rate, teenage and single parenthood, low levels of parental education, low family income and homes where English is spoken as a second language. For some communities the service includes center or home-based care for infants and toddlers while their parents work.

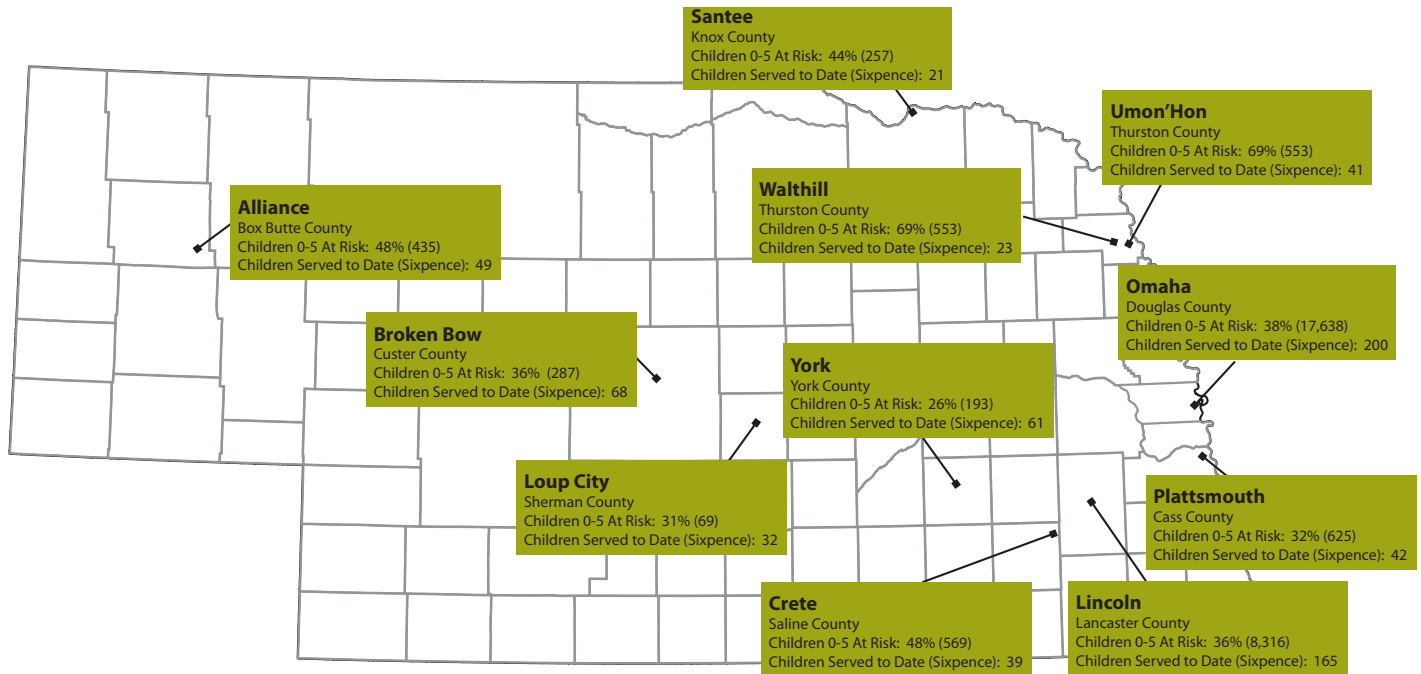
For communities in which teen parents are finishing school, Sixpence can provide care for the teen’s child while the teen receives individualized attention regarding their infant’s developmental needs. Other communities have determined that working individually with a family in their own home on how to interact with their child produces the best results. In the end, it is the communities that determine the strategy that best works to meet their needs.

Sixpence program implementation has occurred in a variety of communities including rural and urban areas, prison facilities, as well as Native American reservations. Regardless of place, Sixpence allows communities to level the playing field for infants and toddlers who are at risk of failure in school, so they have the same opportunity to enter kindergarten on par with their more advantaged peers.

Sixpence Board of Trustees

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Map of Sixpence Programs



Impact

The Board of Trustees believes measuring the impact of the blended public and private Sixpence funds is critical to closing the achievement gap, ensuring the integrity of the investment, and preparing for the sustainability of funds. A thorough evaluation of all Sixpence programs is conducted by the University of Nebraska Medical Center’s Munroe-Meyer Institute.

Evaluation results show that toddlers demonstrated significant gains in vocabulary skills, with the majority meeting age-level expectations. This is seen as an indicator that, through high quality standards and accountability, Sixpence is closing the achievement gap for children who are very much at risk of failing in school and later in life.

One of the most significant ways to positively impact a child’s life and prepare them for success in school is to strengthen the parent-child relationship. In addition to measuring child outcomes, Sixpence evaluation includes several measures involving parents and the home environment, revealing a 21% increase in parent/child engagement from 2008-2009 to 2011-2012.

Interactive parenting

Participation in Sixpence resulted in significant improvement in parenting for those who scored low on parenting assessments. Measured in both fall and spring, 12 key parenting behaviors are assessed across three primary areas (building relationships, promoting language, and supporting confidence). Sixpence parents achieved positive gains in their interactions with their children.¹

Positive changes in the home environment

Sixpence evaluation showed that good home environments are directly linked to and support children’s language outcomes. Further, participation in Sixpence helped families close the gap in their ability to support their children’s cognitive and emotional development.²

Parent-child engagement

Measuring child engagement, parent-child engagement, and parent-child interaction, results (on a 5 point scale) show that Sixpence programs are having a positive impact on the quality of parent-child engagement, both from fall to spring on any given year, but also over a cross-year comparison.³

Child outcomes

The results of statistical analysis show that while maintaining their language skills,⁴ participation in Sixpence resulted in significant improvements in self-regulation and decreases in behavior concerns. With these “protective factors” securely in place, children who would otherwise arrive at kindergarten developmentally behind their more advantaged peers will be able to use appropriate behavior to meet their needs, build healthy relationships, and succeed in school.

Personal Success Story

When I started my junior year in high school, I was uncertain of my future; I was different than other kids. I was a mom.

Sixpence has made so many differences in our lives. Over the years I have learned new ways to interact and play with Matthew. I have learned to follow his lead, and talk to him more about the things he is doing. I sit next to him and ask him questions about what he is making. I have a better understanding of what a difference being an involved parent can make on my child. I read to him a lot, I know because of this he will not only be better in school tomorrow, but also be better in school years from now.

Often my home visitor would come and talk about how Matthew was doing developmentally. She was able to show me what kind of things a typical child should be able to do and through that we were able to come up with goals on what we needed to work on with Matthew. She helped me be able to teach him new things. I had the opportunity to be around other teen moms and their children. The friendships I formed gave me extra support and I felt as though I wasn't alone.

Confidence isn't something a teen mom has a lot of. Even today when I am at the park a mom will say, “you look young” When I say that I was sixteen when I had him, I get the “stereotypical look” you know, I must be a bad parent, dropped out of high school, etc. York's Program taught me that I was better than the stereo type. I was an incredible mother who could do anything. One day my visitor came over with a laminated piece of paper. It was a score sheet on a parent interaction video that they had recorded with Matthew and me. I had a perfect score!! Being a part of the Sixpence program gave me the self-esteem I needed. I now know that I am a wonderful mom who just happens to be a teen.

Matthew's preschool teacher tells me he is doing wonderfully, playing well with new friends, and is eager to learn new things. I feel like everything we have done for him over the last three years has made such a huge difference in how ready and happy he is.

I'm proud to say that I am now a sophomore in college pursuing my nursing degree thanks to Sixpence.

Citations

- ¹ The KIPS (Keys to Interactive Parenting Scales) assesses 12 key parenting behaviors across three primary areas, including building relationships, promoting language, and supporting confidence. Parent-child interactions were scored to evaluate the quality of their interactions.
- ² Positive changes in the home environment are measured using the Home Inventory-Short Form. The HOME-SF is a standardized assessment of the home environment and maternal-child interaction. It consists of 18 items (8 based on maternal report and 10 items based on provider observation). The scale measures both cognitive stimulation and emotional support.
- ³ HoVRS-A (Home Visit Rating Scales-A) is designed to assess the quality of family engagement (specifically parent-child interaction) from a video of direct observation. The measure includes seven rating scales that are collapsed into two scales for the purpose of analysis. The scales are based on a 5 point Likert scale.
- ⁴ The majority of the infants and toddlers met age expectations related to their language production and comprehension skills. Toddlers demonstrated significant gains in vocabulary skills.



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