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# Early Childhood Education

in Nebraska Public School District,  
Educational Service Unit and Head Start Programs



**2014-2015 State Report**

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Evaluation Report prepared by  
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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. Operated by Nebraska public school districts (hereafter referred to as districts) or Educational Service Units (ESUs), comprehensive early childhood education programs supported the learning and development of children B–5 across home- and center-based settings. Many full- or half-day center-based programs were provided in partnership with community agencies.

In 2014–2015, Sixpence services were funded in 25 districts who were implementing one of three models: family engagement services (17), center-based infant/toddler care (6), or a combination of the two (2). Family engagement services included weekly individualized sessions in the family's home. For some families, the individualized sessions were provided in a community location. Family engagement services included group opportunities for children and families to gather together in learning activities. The majority of the center-based programs provided full-day services.

Districts and ESUs served children that represented a full range of abilities and disabilities and the social, linguistic, 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 assisted children to reach their full potential and increase the likelihood of their later success in school.

The Early Childhood Education programs met the following federal and state requirements:

- *NDE Rule 11—Regulations for Early Childhood Programs*
- *NDE Rule 51—Regulations and Standards for Special Education Programs*
- *NDE Rule 52—Regulations for Early Intervention Services Provided by School Districts*
- *United States Department of Education Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*
- *Head Start Performance Standards*

### PROGRAM FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY

NDE requirements for Early Childhood programs included:

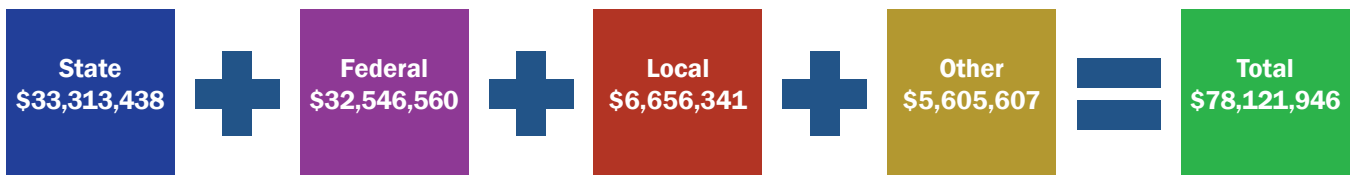
- Use of developmentally appropriate curriculum and authentic assessment
- Inclusive programs and services
- Attention to research-based elements of effective programs
- Teachers in classrooms hold a Nebraska teaching certificate with an approved early childhood endorsement.
- Teachers in home-based 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 early childhood programs were funded with multiple sources. In 2014–2015, over 78 million dollars supported ECE programs.

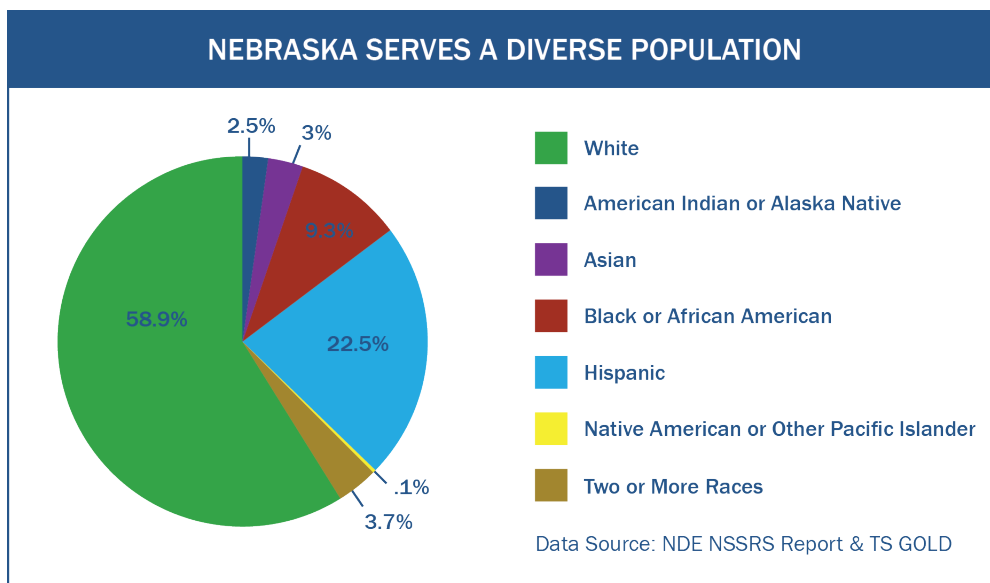
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FUNDING SOURCES			
STATE	FEDERAL	LOCAL	OTHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Grant Program-Ages Three through Five (3–5)</li> <li>• TEEOSA (state aid)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IDEA Part B</li> <li>• Head Start/Early Head Start</li> <li>• Title 1 Part A</li> <li>• Title 1 Migrant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local District</li> <li>• Parent Fees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sixpence Early Learning Fund</li> </ul>



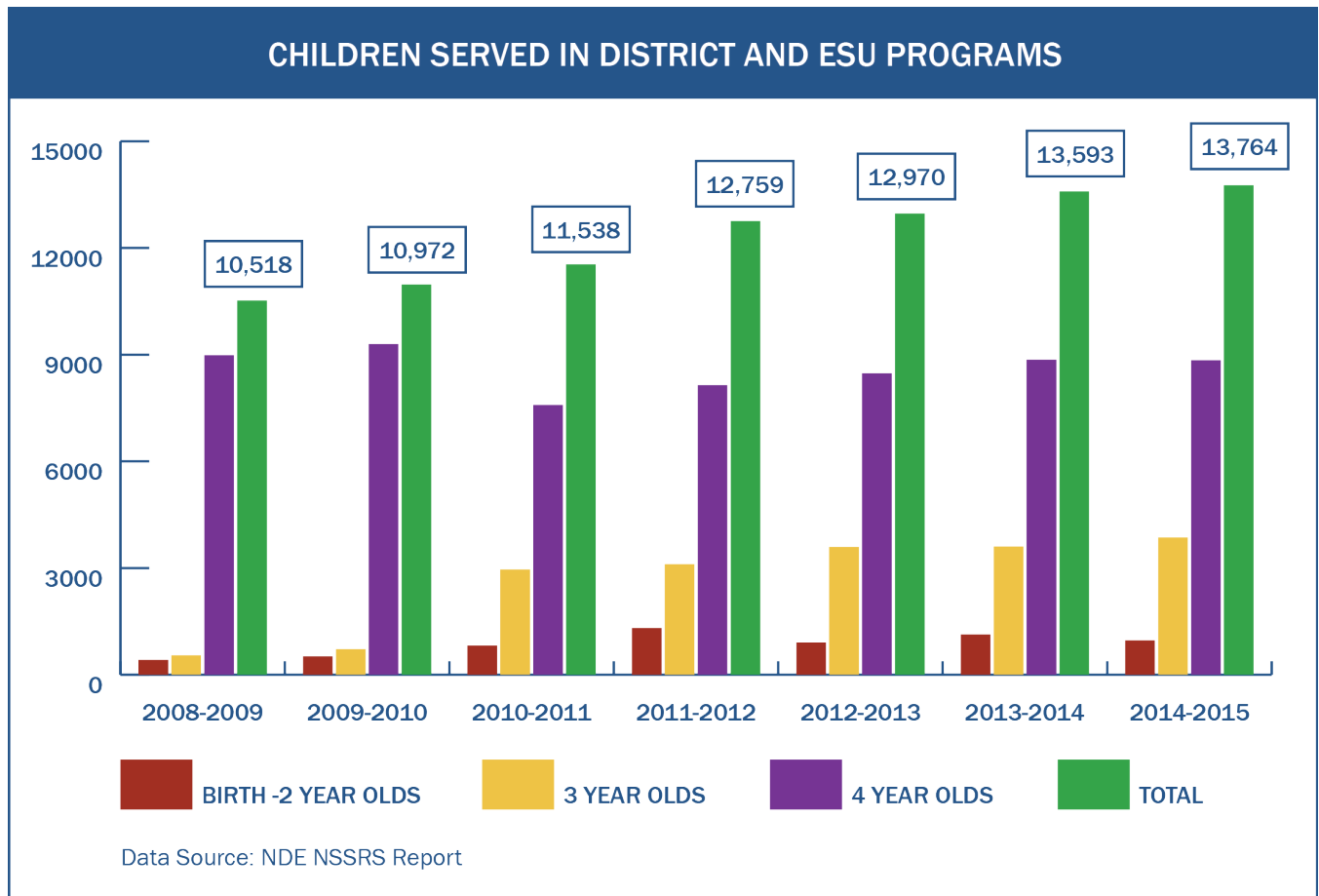
## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

Nebraska school districts and ESUs provided early childhood programs and services to 13,764 children, aged birth to five. Of the total number of children served:

- 53% qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch
- 14% were English Language Learners
- 26% had an IEP or IFSP



Based upon longitudinal data, there has been a 31% increase in the total number of children served since 2008. There has been an increase in the number of infants, toddlers, and three year olds who have received services.



## 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.



The overall 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, and
- Provide data to demonstrate results.

The intent of *Results Matter* in the classroom is to:

- Promote the use of ongoing child and program quality assessments as a standard practice in individualized teaching and learning, as well as program improvement, and
- Inform decisions regarding instruction and intervention based upon data.

Implementation of *Results Matter* leads to:

- Increased depth of understanding of child development,
- Increased awareness of the link between the environment, curriculum, assessment and child outcomes,
- Improved communication with families, and
- Improved quality of accountability.

## 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.

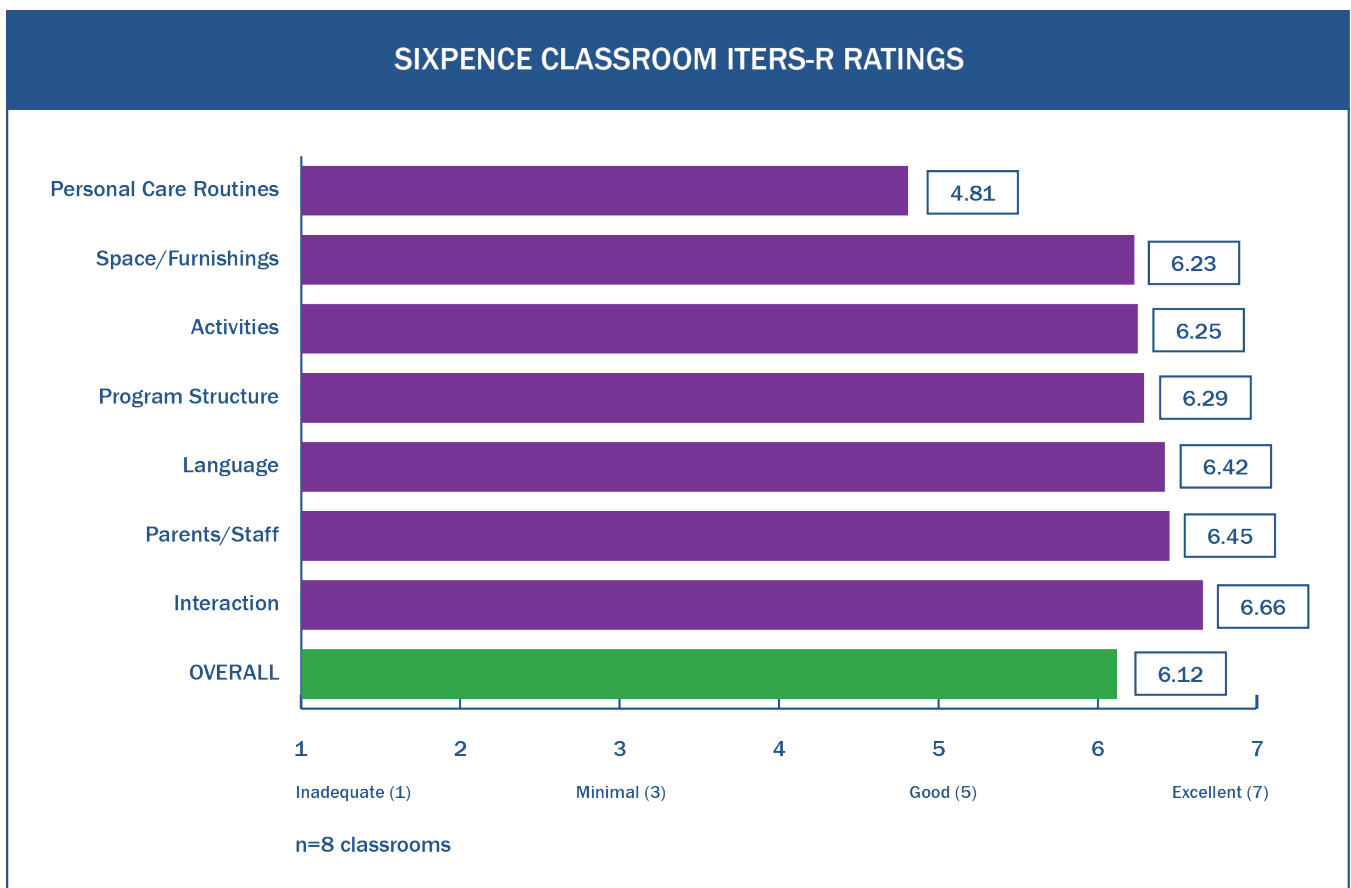
Program quality is measured through onsite observations. The assessment tools used measure how the classroom environment supports children's physical, cognitive, social-emotional, language and literacy development.

### QUALITY MEASURES FOR SIXPENCE INFANT AND TODDLER PROGRAMS

Two tools were chosen to evaluate the quality of Sixpence classrooms, the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)* and the *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scales-Revised (ITERS-R)*. The *ITERS-R* assesses classroom quality, with a focus on classroom structure, activities, and play materials. Newer teachers were assessed using the *ITERS-R* while teachers who had been a part of the Sixpence program previously, and already met quality benchmarks on the *ITERS-R* in prior years, were assessed using the *CLASS*. A random sampling of half of the classrooms (or a minimum of two classrooms for smaller programs) was assessed per program.

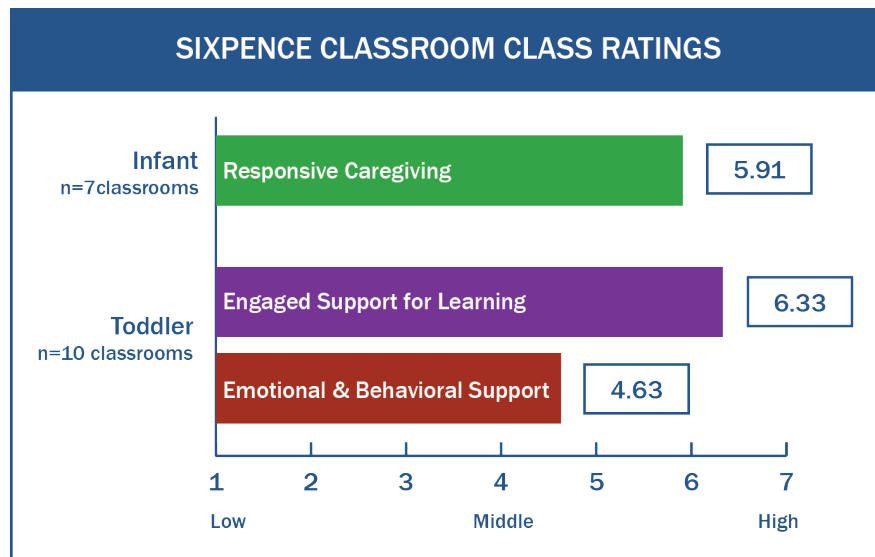
**ITERS-R:** The *Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R)* was used to evaluate the overall quality of the Sixpence classrooms. The *ITERS-R* is an observational assessment of 39 items across seven subscales, designed to assess center-based programs for children birth to 2½ years of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

Nine Sixpence classrooms were observed. All of the classrooms met the overall rating for quality in the 2014–15 program year based on the *ITERS-R*. A majority (63%) met the quality criteria across all seven subscales. Thirty-seven percent of the programs did not reach the program goal in Personal Care Routines subscale; however, the program score average across all subscales was still above the quality standard of five. The highest average scores were in the subscales of Interactions, Language, and Parent/Staff.



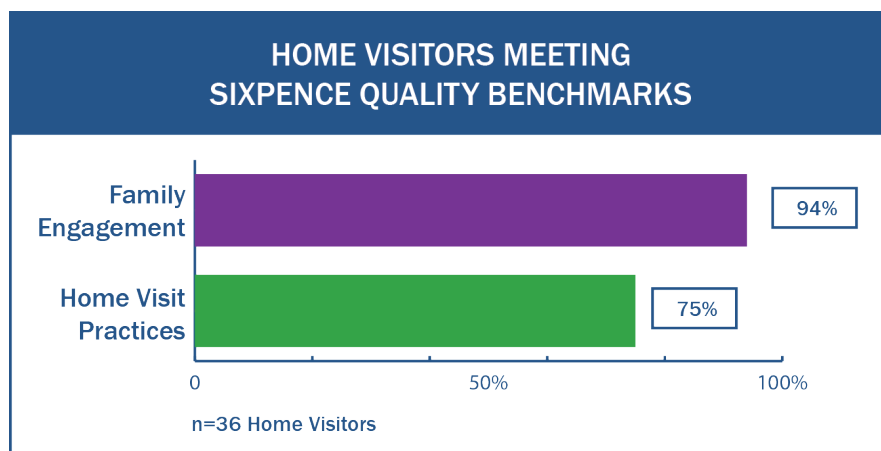
**CLASS-Infant or CLASS-Toddler:** Sixpence classrooms that met a set criteria for quality in previous years on the *ITERS-R*, were assessed using the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)–Infant or Toddler*. Both the *CLASS-Infant* and *CLASS-Toddler* rate teacher-child relationships and social-emotional supports. The *CLASS-Toddler* includes an additional domain, Engaged Support for Learning, to measure how teachers engage the children in discovery, promote critical thinking, and provide rich language experiences. Scoring is based on a 7 point scale with 7 indicating highest quality. The assessment results for 17 classrooms are presented below.

Sixpence classrooms demonstrated high quality in the area of teacher-child relationships. The teachers were consistently warm, responsive, flexible, and supportive towards children. Over 85% of the classrooms scored above a 5 in this area. Sixpence classrooms created an environment of mutual respect between teachers and children and in peer to peer interactions. Engaged support for learning was in the moderate range. In this domain, 50% of the classrooms scored above a 5.



**HoVRS-A+:** The *Home Visit Rating Scales-A (HoVRS-A+)* is designed to assess the quality of family engagement sessions. The measure includes seven items that are collapsed into two scales for the purposes of analysis. The scales are based on a 7 point scale with 7 = good.

In 2014–2015, 36 home visitors were assessed; of this number, 33% were new to the program. The results of the *HOVRS-A+* indicated that the majority of home visitors met the program quality benchmark (a score of 5) indicating incorporation of best practices during their sessions.

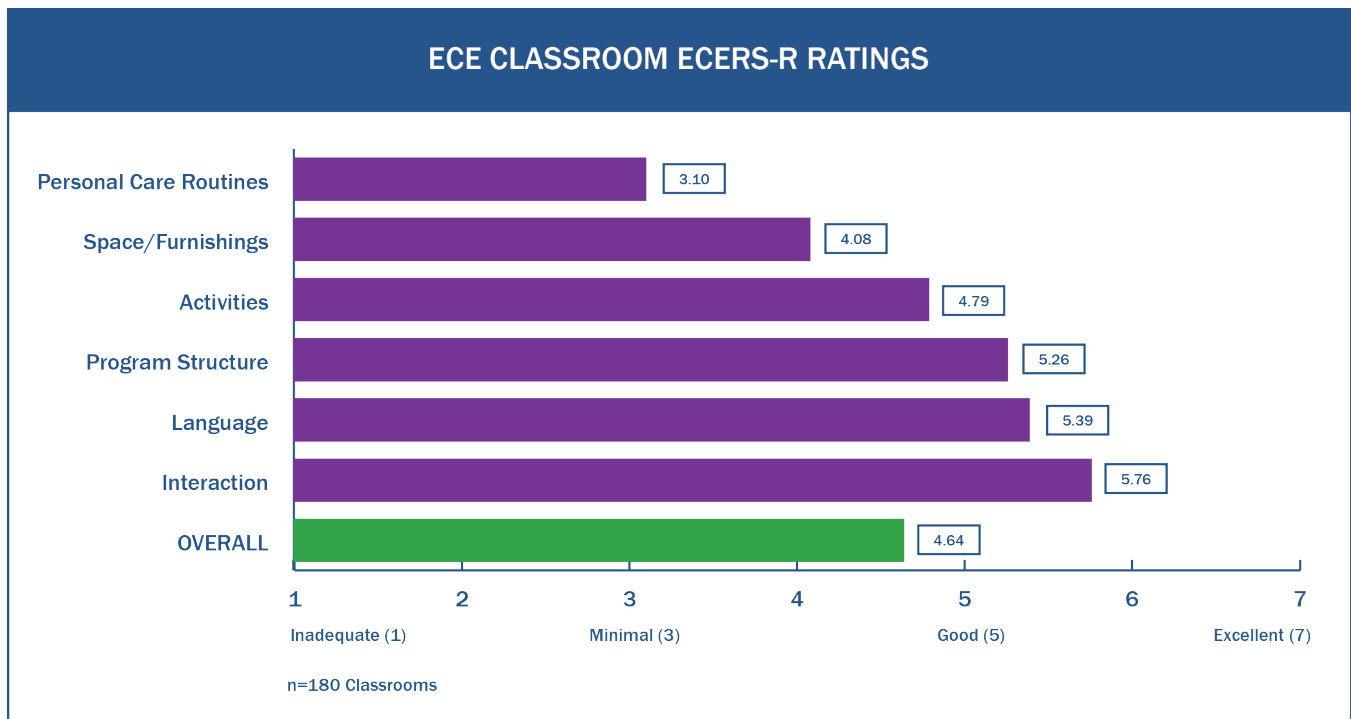




## QUALITY MEASURES FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

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 program standard of quality is a rating of five across all seven subscales (based on a 7 point scale with 7 = excellent). The *ECERS-R* rates seven areas: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff. NDE does not include the Parent and Staff subscale as part of the observation.

NDE selected the district classrooms in which observations were conducted. A total of 180 classroom observations were completed which was a 545% increase compared to 2013-2014. The results showed that classroom quality was strongest in the subscales of Interaction, Language/Reasoning, and Program Structure. The lowest ratings were in Space and Furnishings and Personal Care Routines.



# CHILD OUTCOMES

## CHILD ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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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. NDE has identified Teaching Strategies (TS) GOLD™ as the research-based, authentic assessment system to be used by district and ESU programs. TS GOLD™ is also used by many federally funded Head Start programs. This report includes data from district and ESU programs and Head Start programs which are part of a data sharing agreement with NDE.

TS GOLD™ child assessment data can be analyzed in multiple ways. This report summarizes data across six areas of development and learning for all children birth to age five.

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.
- **Cognitive:** Demonstrates positive approaches to learning, classification skills, and uses representational skills.
- **Language:** Learns to understand and use words/gestures to effectively communicate.
- **Literacy:** Engages in emergent reading and writing behaviors.
- **Mathematics:** Explores spatial relationships and demonstrates knowledge of patterns and number concepts.

TS GOLD™ data is collected on an ongoing basis for all children B–5 served by districts, ESUs, and Head Start. TS GOLD™ is an observation-based child assessment system. Children are observed as they engage in everyday routines and activities, with people they know, across a variety of settings. Children's 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 program year. Ongoing progress data is used by teachers and programs to inform and improve instruction, to tailor and adjust curriculum, and 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 six areas.

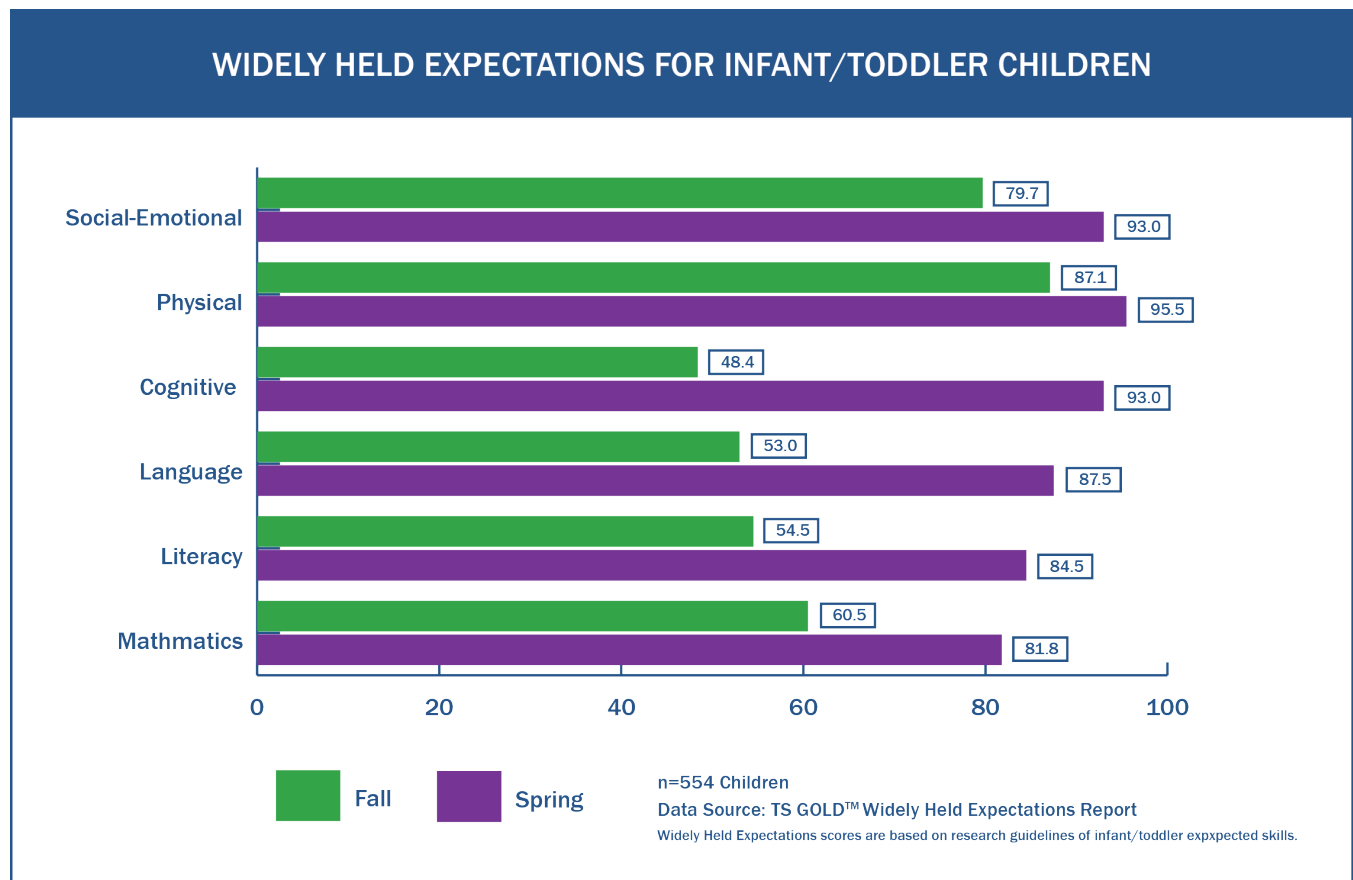
## PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WITHIN AGE EXPECTATIONS

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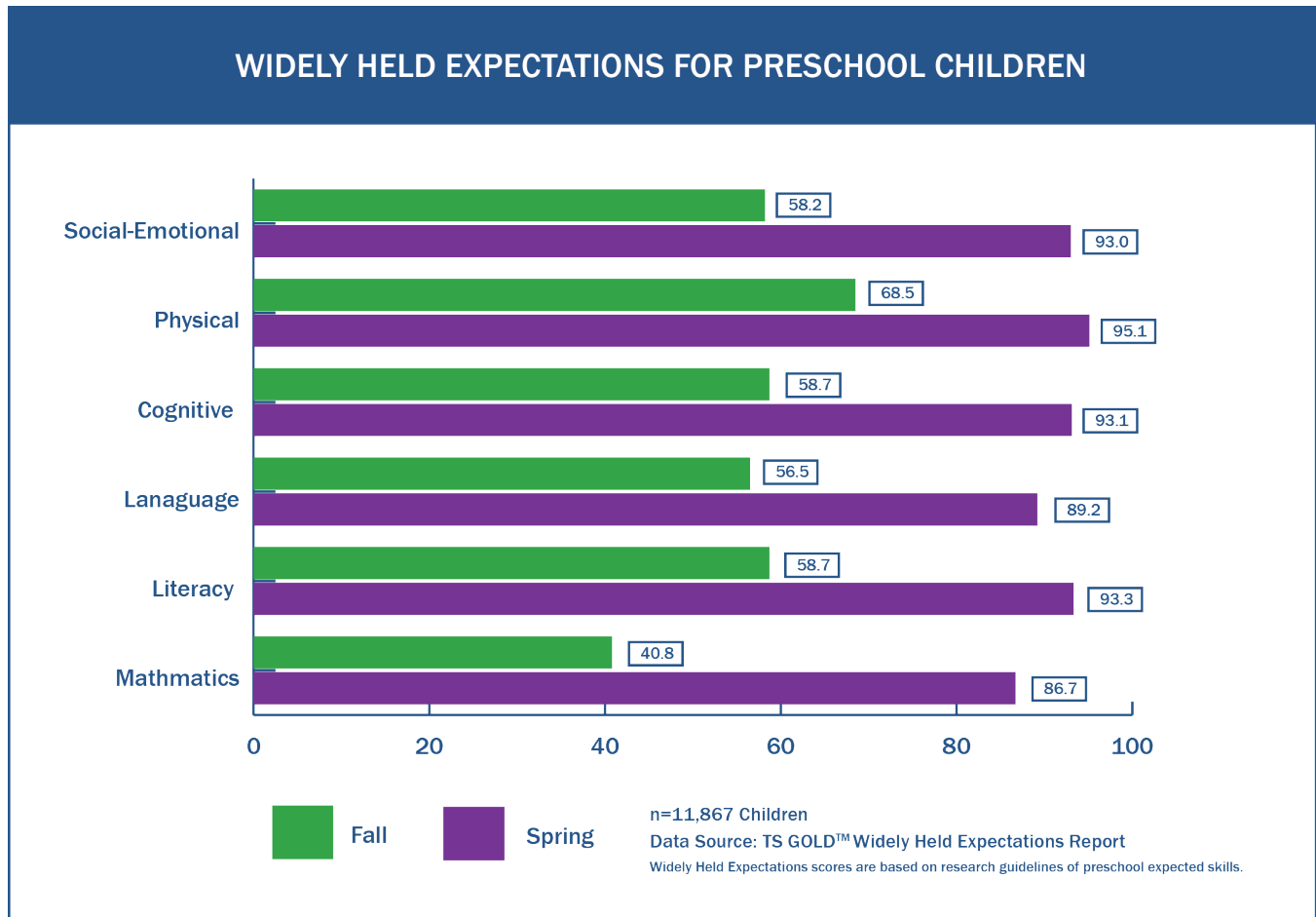
A total of 12,421 children had completed assessment data at both the Fall and Spring checkpoints. Of the children observed, 18% had an IFSP or IEP.

The *TS GOLD™ Widely Held Expectations* report identifies children who met or exceeded age expectations. The report indicated that a greater percentage of infants and toddlers, as well as preschool aged children, obtained age expected skills than those that did not.

The infant and toddler data includes primarily children in Early Intervention, Sixpence and Early Head Start programs. Between the Fall and Spring checkpoints, the greatest gains were in the areas of cognitive, language and literacy development. By the end of the program year, the highest number of children met the widely held expectations in the areas of physical, social emotional and cognitive development.

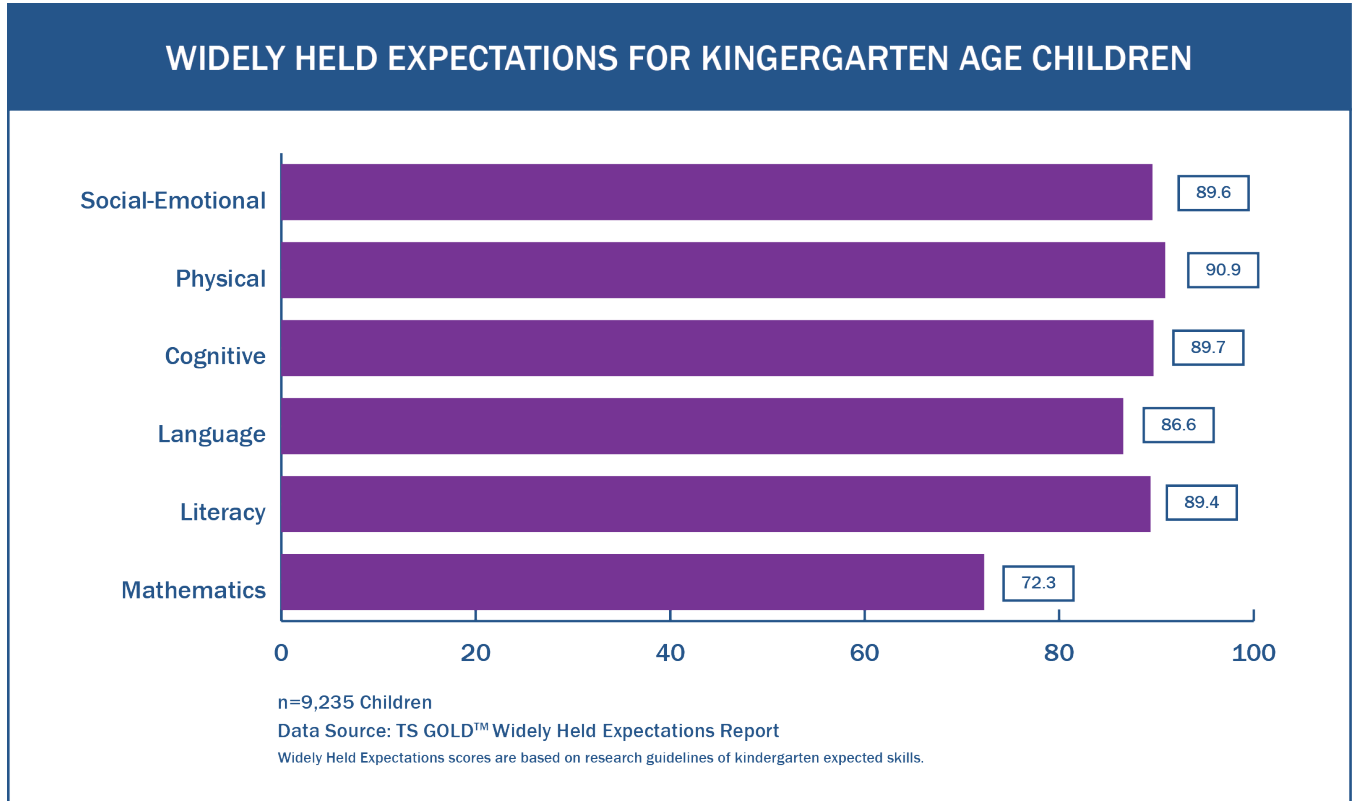


The preschool data includes primarily children in district, ESU and Head Start classrooms. Between the Fall and Spring checkpoints, the greatest gains were in the areas of mathematics, social-emotional and literacy development. By the end of the program year, the highest number of children met the widely held expectations in the areas of physical, literacy and cognitive development.



## OUTCOMES FOR 2015 - 2016 KINDERGARTEN AGE ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

To evaluate the growth and learning of the 9,235 children age eligible for kindergarten in 2015–2016, data was analyzed based on six areas of development and learning in the Spring of 2015. These children participated in district, ESU, and/or Head Start programs. The majority of children age eligible for kindergarten demonstrated the foundational skills for entrance to school.



## 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 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 NDE’s annual targets are being met for the three outcomes. 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.

The functional outcome areas across areas of development and learning, 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. 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).

Each year the results are compared to state targets. The chart below shows the status of children who exited between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015.

COMPARISON OF CHILDREN’S PART C OR B OUTCOME DATA TO STATE TARGETS				
SUMMARY STATEMENTS	PART C N=798		PART B N=1,868	
	TARGETS (% OF CHILDREN)	ACTUAL (% OF CHILDREN)	TARGETS (% OF CHILDREN)	ACTUAL (% OF CHILDREN)
<b>OUTCOME A: POSITIVE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>				
Showed greater than expected growth	39.5%	58.9%	80.1%	74.8%
Exited the program within age expectations	43.7%	29.2%	73.1%	69.9%
<b>OUTCOME B: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS</b>				
Showed greater than expected growth	40.2%	50.4%	81.2%	75.2%
Exited the program within age expectations	33.5%	26.7%	73.0%	69.9%
<b>OUTCOME C: TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTIONS TO MEET NEEDS</b>				
Showed greater than expected growth	55.8%	71.5%	81.6%	75.6%
Exited the program within age expectations	71.3%	53.7%	77.4%	75.2%

Nebraska did not meet the state set targets for Part B Child OSEP outcomes data for the preschool children (ages 3–5). A number of factors were identified that contributed to that decrease: 1) the variability in scores may be the result of teachers improved reliability in administering the tool now that Nebraska providers have more training and experience with the assessment; 2) an increase in behavioral referrals and family behavioral concerns for preschool children over the last couple of years may have affected Outcome A; and 3) a modification in the tool in the area of Outcome C influenced scores. The consistent drop across all Outcome Summary Statements reinforces that this was a result of the collection and scoring of data (measurement issue) rather than a reflection of the changes in the efficacy of intervention.

The results of this year's Part C Child Outcomes data indicated that the state is meeting the targets across all outcomes in Summary Statement 1 (children demonstrated greater than expected growth). The state did not meet any of the outcomes in Summary Statement 2 (children exited the program within age expectations). The Part C data is based on new cut scores based on recent revisions to TS GOLD™. These recent revisions of the infant/toddler assessment scores impacted the decreased percentages this year in Summary Statement 2. New targets will need to be established due to this revision.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS: LONGITUDINAL STUDENT OUTCOMES

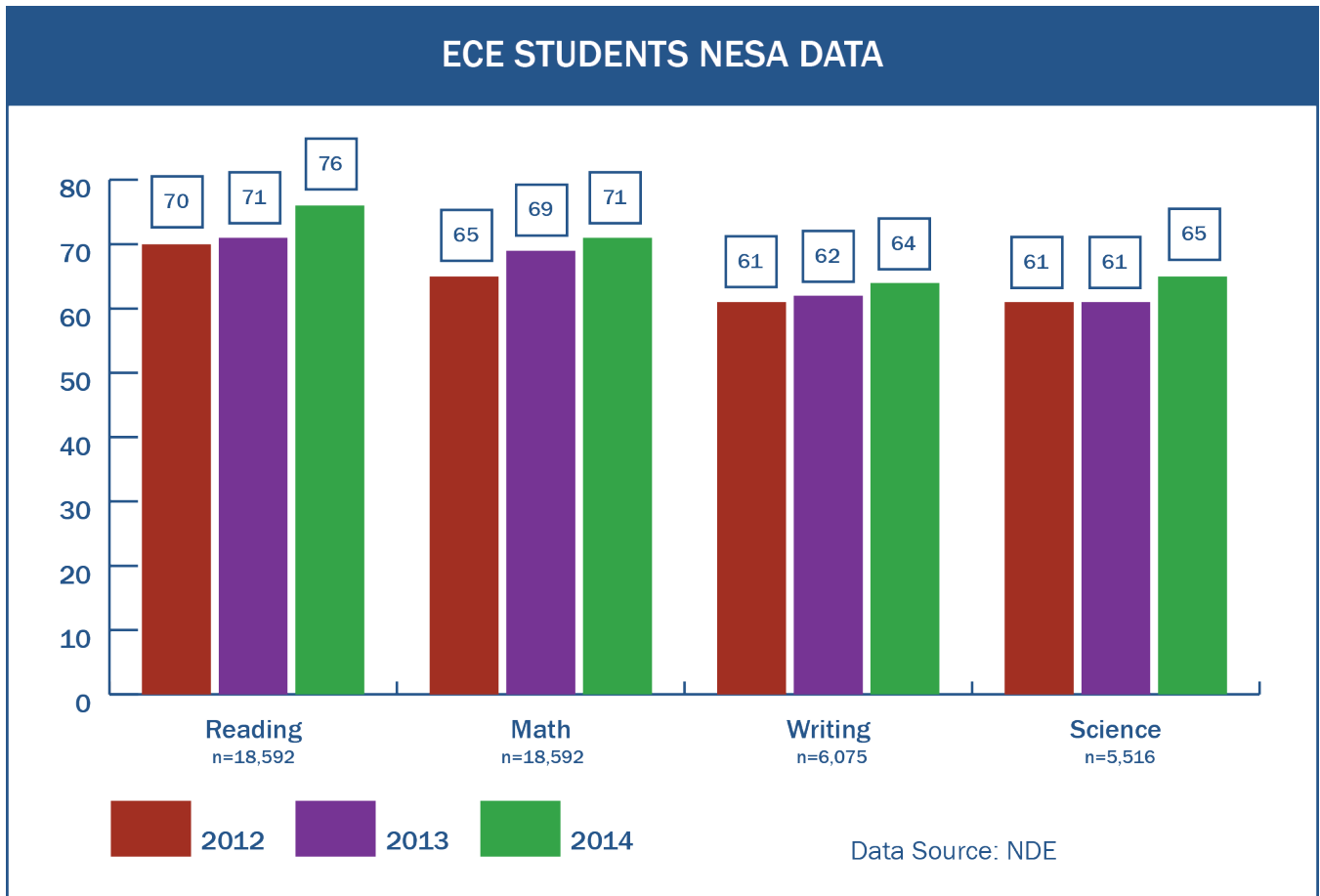
District and ESU early childhood education (ECE) programs are designed to serve an at risk population which might not otherwise have access to an early childhood program to positively impact long term success in grades K–12. The goal is for students to achieve at academic levels comparable to, or higher than, the classroom peers who did not participate in district or ESU programs.

Of the students in grades 3 through 5 with Nebraska Statewide Assessment (NeSA) results during the 2014–15 school year, 18,592 had previously attended a District or ESU ECE program. Of that group, 61% qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) and of this subgroup, 49% qualified for free lunch. Approximately 47% of the total public school population within Nebraska was eligible for FRL.

### PERCENT OF CHILDREN MEETING OR EXCEEDING STATE STANDARDS

NeSA reading and math assessments were analyzed from grades 3 through 5. Data was summarized by: 1) ECE student progress on NeSA data from the FY2012 through FY2014 and 2) students with an ECE experience as compared to the school age population as a whole.

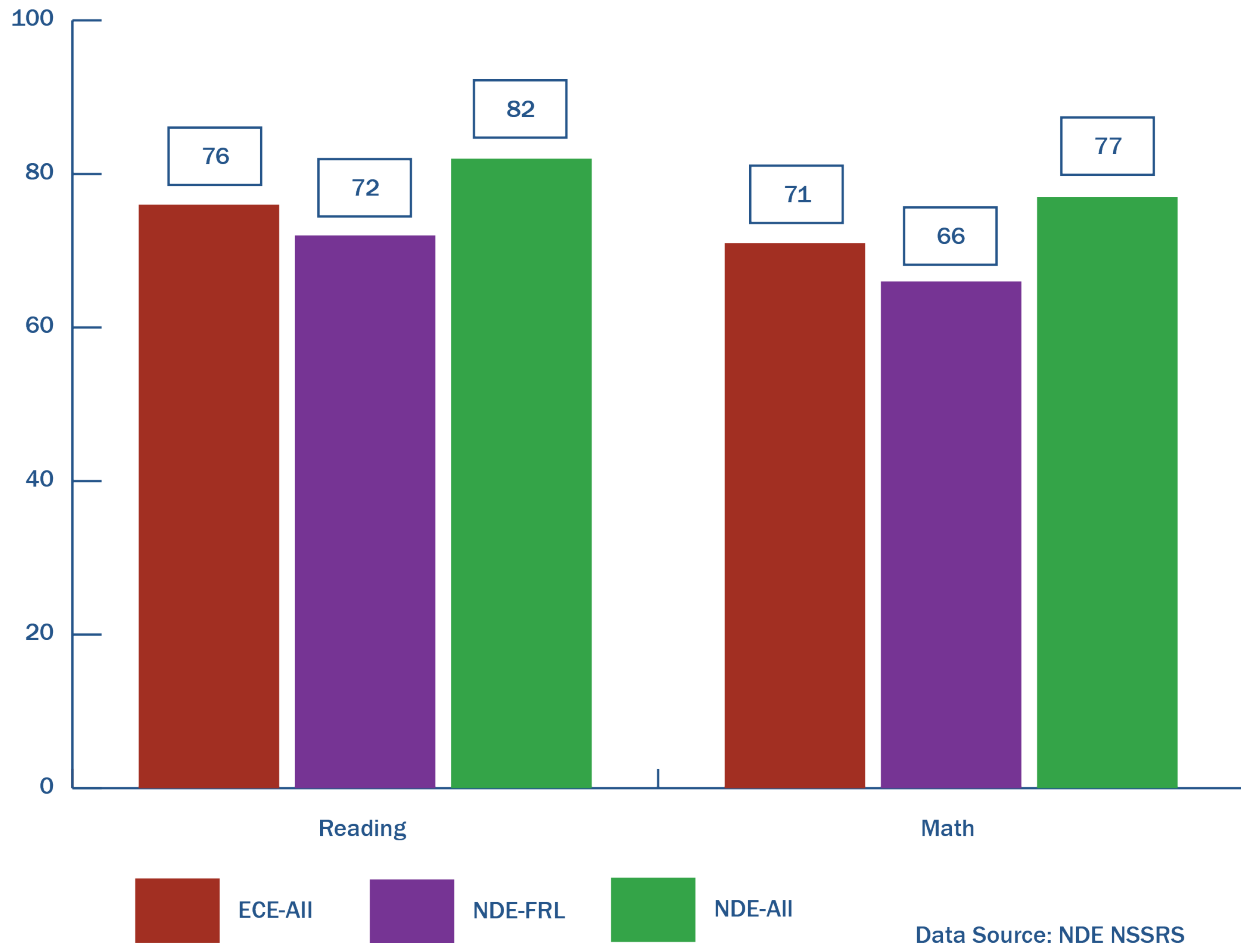
**ECE Student Progress on NeSA Data across Three Years: FY2012 through FY2014.** The percentage of students with an ECE experience that were proficient on NeSA assessments were compared across a three year period. For 3rd through 5th grade students in FY2014, there were higher percentages of students who were proficient as compared to previous years. Strengths were in Reading and Math.





**Comparisons of Students with an ECE Experience to their Peers.** Comparisons were also made between students who had an ECE experience to all student results (ECE students were part of this NDE sample). The results showed that the majority of the ECE students across grade levels met or exceeded the state standard of proficiency. Students who had an ECE experience did out-perform children who were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Students who participated in ECE programs represented a higher percentage of poverty (as defined by FRL) than the total number of students.

### STUDENTS WITH AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE



	READING	MATH
NDE FRL CHILDREN	32,724	32,936
ALL ECE STUDENTS	18,592	18,592
ALL NDE CHILDREN	69,372	69,647

## FAMILY OUTCOMES

Data is collected to assess the impact of infant and toddler programs. The primary focus of the program is family engagement as a means to support children's development. Family data from two programs is summarized including Sixpence and the Early Development Network (EDN).

### IDEA PART C: EARLY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

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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. A total of 1,040 surveys were completed in 2014 - 2015, which is a return rate of 69.8%. 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. Meeting the targets is attributed to the program's strong belief in the importance of family involvement in all areas of Early Intervention.

### SIXPENCE

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For children and families participating in the Sixpence programs, family outcomes focused on parent-child interaction and the degree to which families embraced protective factors (e.g., access to services, social connections, knowledge of child development, parent resiliency, and parent nurturing and attachment). These outcomes were assessed through the family's completion of a survey and coding of a videotape of the parent's interaction with their child. Parents had a positive relationship with their children and demonstrated significant improvements in overall parent-child interactions as well as in building relationships and supporting their children's learning. Parents who were associated with lower risk factors (<3), were in Sixpence for more than one year or whose language was English demonstrated the highest level of parenting skills. The following factors were associated with the highest level of parenting skills:

- less than 3 risk factors;
- participated in Sixpence for more than 1 year; or
- English as the primary language.

Parents in Sixpence had high levels of protective factors that remained stable over time. Sub-group comparisons found that parents who were ELL or were in center-based settings demonstrated higher nurturing and attachment skills. Parents whose primary language was English had a better system of concrete supports. Parents who were in the program less than a year demonstrated higher skills in child development knowledge and nurturing and attachment. Risk factors had a negative impact on parent protective factors. The full report of these findings is posted at: <http://www.singasongofsixpence.org/>.

# OUTCOMES SUMMARY

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

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- The majority of the infant/toddler classrooms met the program quality standard score.
- Home-based programs were of high quality with family educators establishing positive family engagement.
- The majority of the preschool classrooms scored highest in the areas of interaction and language/reasoning.
- Infant/toddler and preschool classrooms were evaluated as part of a continuous improvement process with technical assistance provided to improve quality.

## CHILD OUTCOMES: AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PERSPECTIVE

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- The majority of infants/toddlers and preschooler children met or exceeded the expected growth pattern for children's acquisition of skills.
- The majority of kindergarten bound children demonstrated the foundational skills for entrance to school.

## STUDENT OUTCOMES: A LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

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- The majority of students in an ECE classroom met or exceeded the state standards for reading, writing, science, and math.
- Overall, higher percentages of ECE students were proficient across areas in FY2014 than in FY2012 or FY2013.

## 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 demonstrated improvements in overall parent-child interactions.

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