

Sixpence



Biennial Report to the Legislature: 2013–2014

The evidence is in—evaluations show Sixpence is effective in closing Nebraska’s achievement gap

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.

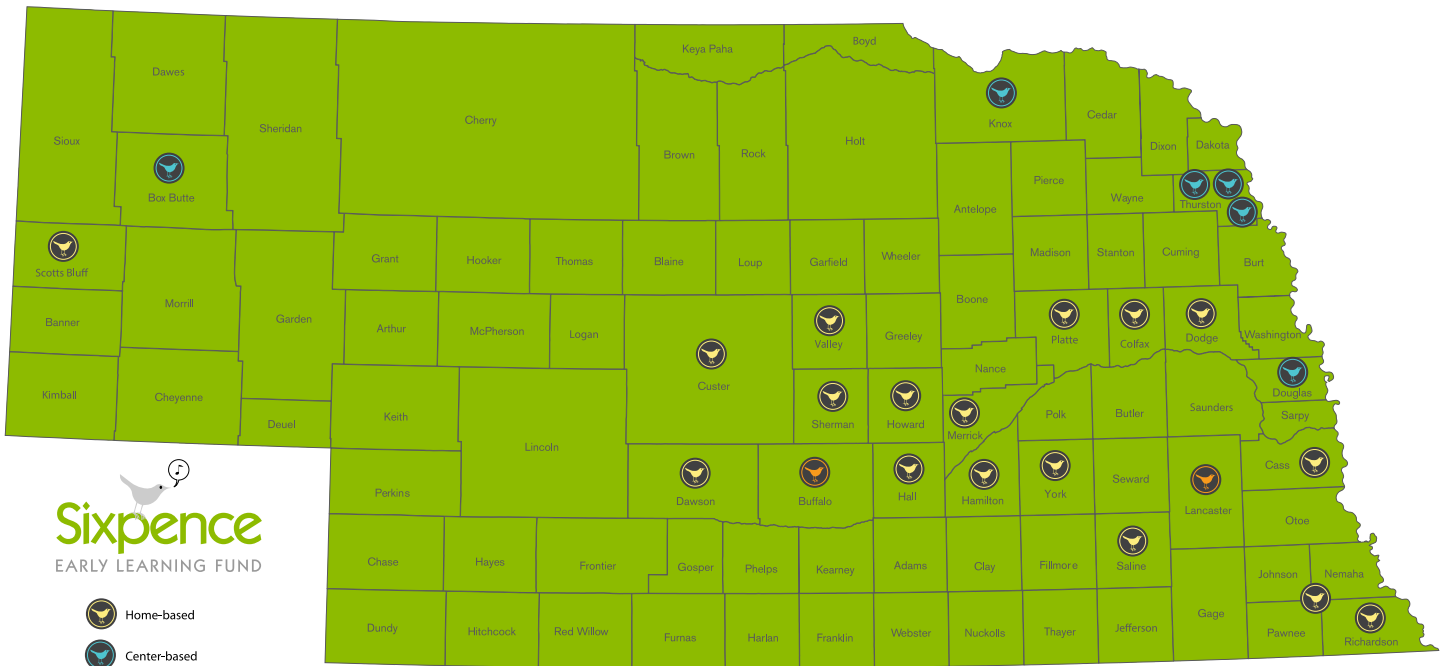
In 2006, the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Program was established in state statute. A \$60 million statewide, public-private partnership was born with the state committing \$40 million from the Educational Lands and Trust Fund, and the private sector committing \$20 million of which they 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

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. Children’s earliest 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.



January 1, 2014



- Home-based
- Center-based
- Combination

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the private provider selected by the Nebraska Department of Education. Nebraska Children and Families Foundation also provides intensive technical assistance to support grantees in meeting quality indicators. Grants are made to fund school districts in partnership with local providers to provide high quality birth to three programs.

Building upon the successes of the 11 original grantees, recent legislation has offered additional funding to expand services to now include 25 grantees, serving almost 700 infants, toddlers and their families across the state.

Sustainable Funding 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.

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 \$18.1 million having been received at the writing of this report.

Branding the Endowment: 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. Re-branding 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 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.

Partnership Done Right: Sixpence in Broken Bow

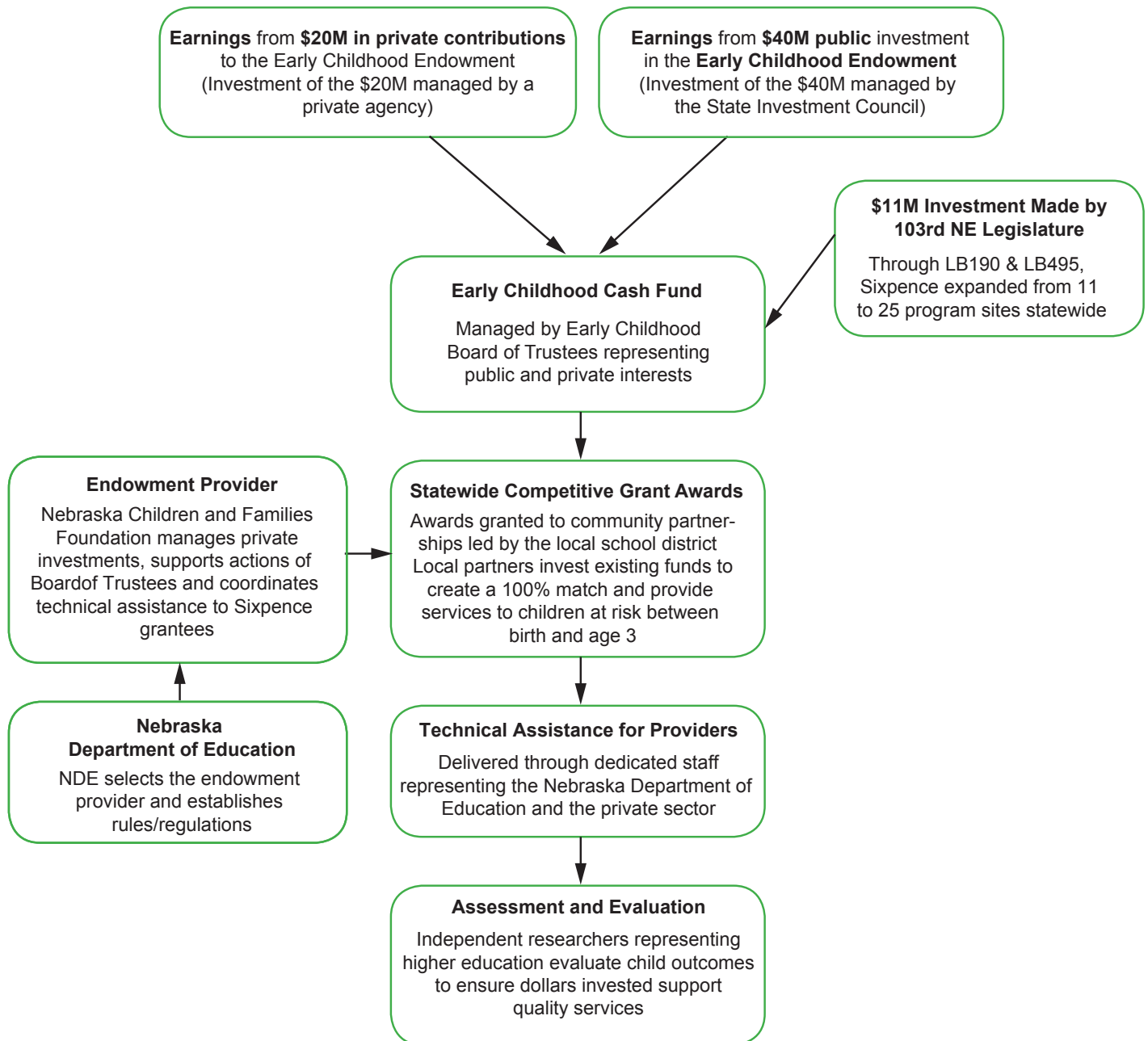


“Today we’re going to do puppet play and learn about emotions,” said Jackie Chandler of the Central Plains Center for Services at a recent family socialization event hosted by the Sixpence program in Broken Bow. But it’s not just the children who are learning these skills—their parents are learning right along side them.

Children are keenly sensitive to the interactions, relationships and environments they experience in the first three years of life. Parents play the most important role in those experiences. Programs like Sixpence in Broken Bow coach young parents to better understand and provide for the developmental needs of their youngest children so they are more confident and capable as caregivers and educators.


That partnership between parent educators and families is mirrored by the broader partnership that makes Sixpence in Broken Bow possible. Broken Bow Public Schools, Central Nebraska Community Services’ Early Head Start program, and the Central Plains Center for Services all work in close collaboration to make the most of the available resources and expertise in their community, responding to the specific needs of children at risk in Custer County.

How Sixpence Works: Partnership at Multiple Levels



Public-Private Partnerships

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.

-  **Funding Level:** \$20 million from the private sector and \$40 million from the state are invested separately. Earnings from the investments are combined in a shared pool of funds that are then distributed through grants to public schools in partnership with at least one community provider.
-  **Oversight Level:** The Sixpence Board of Trustees, representing both public and private interests, oversees the administration of the grants. To ensure accountability, dedicated one-on-one technical assistance is provided to programs so high-quality standards are maintained. This technical assistance is jointly provided by the public and private sector. Grantees work with an outside evaluator to measure outcomes using the most comprehensive tracking processes of their kind in the state.
-  **Community Level:** Grants are awarded to school districts in partnership with community-based programs who meet the Sixpence quality standards established by the Board of Trustees. Grant recipients match 100% of the total program costs through existing state and federal funds.

Demographics

The Sixpence Early Learning Fund currently supports 25 communities 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 in Scottsbluff




When Hailee (parent) started in Scottsbluff's Sixpence Program, it was clear that she and her son Jaxen had the odds stacked against them. A single parent in search of permanent housing, Hailee was very concerned about her son's development. At 14 months old, Jaxen showed little sign of acquiring and using language like other children his age.


But when the family enrolled in the Sixpence parent coaching program administered through Scottsbluff Public Schools and other local partners, Hailee and her coach began to see enormous changes in Jaxen's early language skills. After only two months in the program, Jaxen was responding verbally to audible and visual cues like he'd never done before. By the time he and his mother graduated from the Sixpence program, he was talking in full sentences. It wasn't just a milestone for Jaxen, but for his mom as a parent and educator, too.

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.

Evaluations found:

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The Achievement Gap is Closing: Children participating in Sixpence saw improvements in vocabulary, self-regulation and attachment skills that exceeded expected growth. Significant gains in these foundational skills indicate that Sixpence graduates will be better prepared to keep pace with their peers in Nebraska’s classrooms.¹
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Strong Developmental Outcomes: GOLD assessments indicate that 90 percent of the children participating in Sixpence met developmental expectations for the cognitive, social-emotional, linguistic, and physical skills necessary for school success.¹
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Positive Changes in the Home Environment: Standardized assessments of home environments and maternal-child interaction showed significant improvements among parents who had previously struggled to provide supportive home conditions for their children’s learning.²


Improved Parenting Practices: Using the Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS), researchers concluded that Sixpence parents demonstrated strong skills in building relationships with their children, meeting program goals in this area on average.

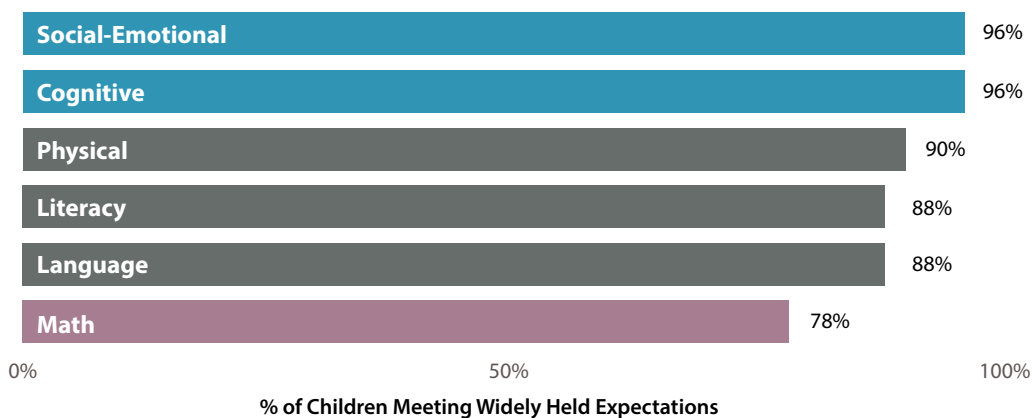
Participating families showed significant improvements in promoting early learning and supporting the growth of confidence in their children. 68 percent of parents met the program goal in building relationships with their child.³


Better Health Outcomes: Nearly all children in Sixpence met all of the designated health indicators: presence of a medical home, immunizations, car seat usage, well-child check-ups and a good overall health status. Sixpence immunization rates were 20 points above the state average of 73 percent.

In addition, all (100 percent) of the pregnant mothers participating in Sixpence received consistent prenatal care, with the majority abstaining from risky behaviors during pregnancy.⁴

Overall, evaluators find that Sixpence-funded programs are indeed closing the achievement gap and improving parents’ abilities to monitor and guide their children’s early development.

High Percentages of Infants and Toddlers in Sixpence Met Widely Held Expectations Across Developmental Domains
(Spring 2014 Assessment)



Source: Jackson, B.; Zweiback, R.; Alvarez, L. (2014). *Sixpence 2013-2014 Evaluation Report*. Omaha, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Munroe Meyer Institute.

Choosing Success

A Sixpence Story from Columbus, NE

From the moment they're born—and arguably even before—children begin to learn from, and respond to the world around them. These early experiences prompt children to develop fundamental traits of cognition and character, the basis for learning, forming healthy relationships with others, reasoning through problems and making good choices as they grow towards adulthood. But children cannot choose these experiences for themselves during the earliest, most critical years of their development. It is up to the adults in their lives to make the right choices so these children have the best chances for lifelong success.

Jaime was not yet a senior in high school when she learned she was expecting her first baby. As frightening as that realization was, Jaime knew she could choose to give her child a better start by seeking help from the Early Steps to School Success program offered through the local Sixpence partnership in Columbus, NE. Working with the program staff, Jaime received prenatal care during her pregnancy, participated in home visiting services, and made healthy choices for herself and her child.

When Violeta was born in May 2014, Jaime continued to meet regularly with early childhood professionals through the Sixpence-funded home visiting program. These specialists taught Jaime how to nurture Violeta's early development by coaching her as her daughter's most important caregiver and educator.

Jaime started school as a full-time senior this year, and is working hard with a goal of continuing her education in college to earn a degree in nursing. Jaime is confident that the Sixpence-funded Early Steps to School Success program had an enormous impact on her life and that of her young daughter.

"The program has helped me make better choices," said Jaime, adding how much she valued the emotional support she received. "I understand that I am very important to someone (her home visitor). It helped me to prepare for the baby, and now that she's here, I have more information about her growth, her development—everything about her."

Sixpence and Early Steps to School Success were instrumental in helping Jaime choose a path to success for herself and her child that might otherwise have been closed to them. Given the right kinds of supports, Jaime is well on her way to becoming a self-sufficient, skilled parent, while Violeta is getting the early interactions, experiences and environments she'll need to thrive in school and beyond.



"The program has helped me make better choices . . . It helped me to prepare for the baby, and now that she's here, I have more information about her growth, her development—everything about her."

Jaime
*Sixpence/Early Steps to
School Success Parent
Columbus, NE*

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Notes

- ¹ Developmental outcomes were assessed using Teaching Strategies (TS) GOLD, adopted by the Nebraska Department of Education to assess children receiving services in school district-funded programs. Outcomes measured by this assessment include cognitive, language, fine motor, social-emotional, literacy and math.
- 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 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.
- ⁴ "Results indicate that nearly every family had a consistent medical provider who they saw for regular check-ups and immunizations, as opposed to using the emergency room for routine health needs. While most of the children were in good health, 8 percent had a chronic medical condition such as asthma." Source: Jackson, B.; Zweiback, R.; Alvarez, L. (2014) *Sixpence 2013-2014 Evaluation Report*. Omaha: University of Nebraska Medical Center, Munroe-Meyer Institute.



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