



2023-24

Early Childhood Education State Report
for Nebraska's Public School District, Educational
Service Unit, & Head Start Programs



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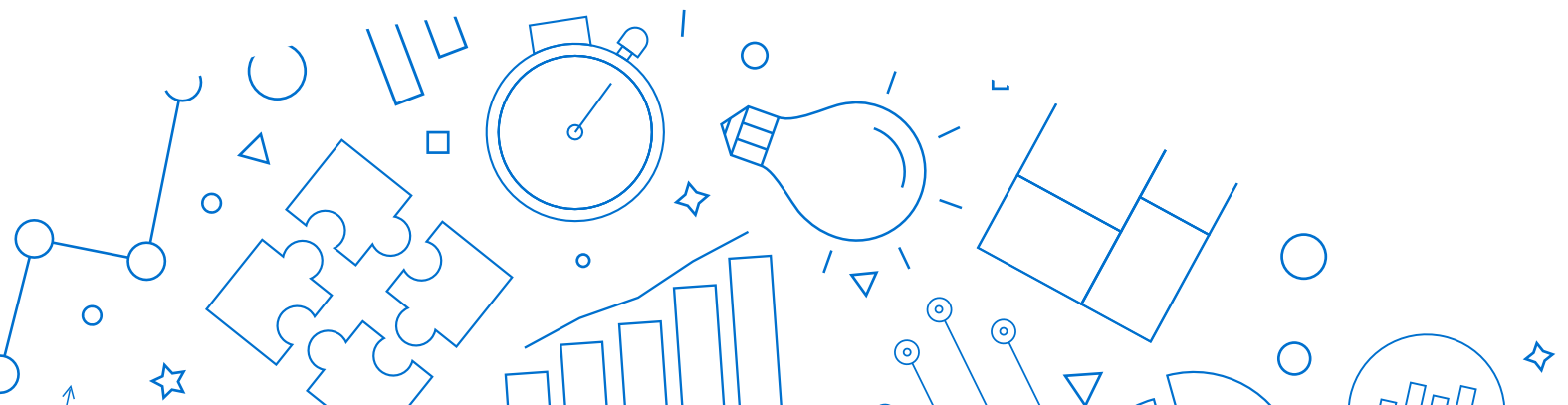
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Supporting Children's Success

The Early Childhood Education Program-Birth through Age five (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 districts and ESUs that cannot fill an early childhood teaching vacancy with certified staff to 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. Seven hundred seventy-nine teachers met the requirement for Rule 11. Fifteen school districts used the waiver process compared to eleven school districts in 2022-2023; however, there were eight less teachers in 2023-2024 who accessed the waiver process. Thirty teachers were working toward the proper endorsement as required by Rule 11. Fourteen of those thirty teachers were continuing their work on an endorsement from the previous year.

A quality curriculum is vital to an early childhood program. School districts can decide which curriculum best fits their needs and should ensure that the curriculum aligns with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines. While a program may choose a curriculum for a specific area of learning such as literacy, social emotional or handwriting, all areas of learning should be addressed through a curriculum.

When choosing a curriculum or assessing a current curriculum, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) advocates for a curriculum that is:

- Thoughtfully planned for both teacher and environment
- Challenging and engaging for children
- Developmentally appropriate and adaptable to each child's needs
- Responsive to culture, linguistics, and family
- Comprehensive- focusing on all aspects of learning, not just one or two areas
- Promotes positive outcomes for children

Comprehensive curriculums that are used across the state of Nebraska include Creative Curriculum and High Scope. Curriculums that focus on one specific area of learning used by Nebraska early childhood programs include Second Step, Handwriting without Tears, and World of Wonders.

Integrated Funds Expanded Early Childhood Services

Nebraska's district and ESU operated early childhood programs were funded with multiple sources. In 2023-24, over 170 million dollars supported these ECE programs.

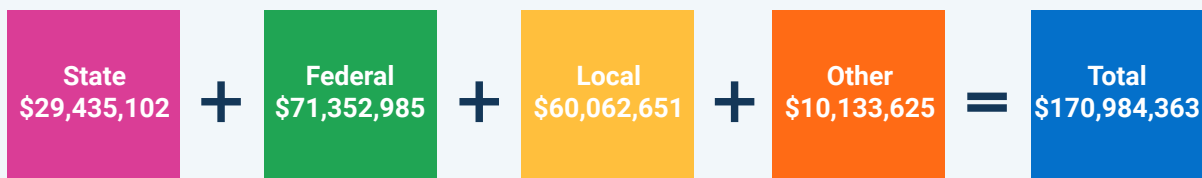
Federal dollars accounted for the majority of Early Childhood Education funds and were provided through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Head Start, Title 1 Part A, and Title 1 Migrant.

State sources of funding were provided through Early Childhood Grants for ages three through five, State Aid, Special Education, and general funds. Additionally, beginning in the 23-24 school year, the legislation passed foundation funding. Historically, only districts that were non-equalized received an early childhood calculation as part of the state aid formula. Foundation aid ensure that districts receive funding for all students, including the students the year prior to kindergarten in approved district-operated programs.

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 5% increase in funding from the 2022-2023 school year.

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 2023-2024 school year, 224 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, 658 were part-day classrooms and 355 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 21,079 children, age B-5. Included in this total child count are 22 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	1,473	7%
The NDE non-Grant Funded Early Childhood Education Programs serving children ages three to five	11,759	56%
Early Childhood Birth to Age Three Endowment Grant Programs (Sixpence)	2,133	10%
Home-based Early Childhood Education Program serving non-special education children ages B-5	183	1%
Special Education and Early Development Network services provided to children ages B-5 in homes and community settings	5,509	26%
Unidentified	22	<1%
Total	21,079	100%

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.



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.

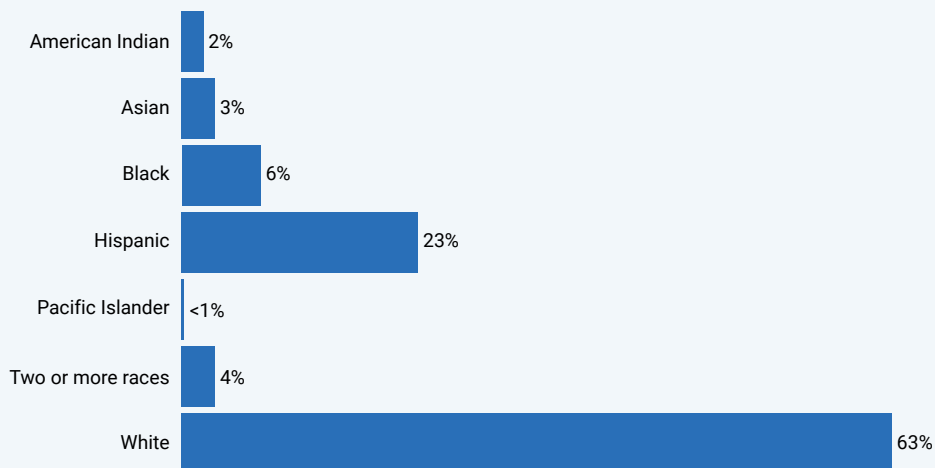
Of the total number of children served, the following categories show the number of children considered at-risk for possible poor outcomes in future academic settings:

- 9,858 (47%) had an IEP or IFSP (center-based or home-based)
- 9,642 (46%) qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch
- 2,672 (13%) had a home language other than English
- 298 (1%) were reported as English Learners

The number of children in each category increased from 2022-2023. The percentage of children with an IEP or IFSP, had a home language other than English and those reported as English Language Learners stayed even with the previous year. However, the percentage of children who qualified for a free or reduced lunch increased from 43% to 46%.



Demographics



Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

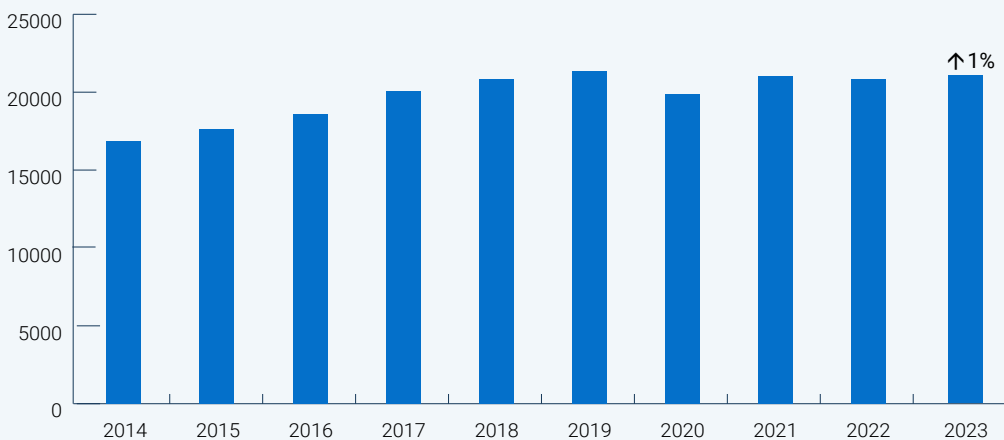
Ten-Year Trend Data

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 B-5 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 2019-20 school year, pre-k enrollment showed a decrease. Since then, pre-k enrollment has stayed fairly steady with a slight increase between 2022-23 and 2023-24.



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 11% of the total state funds supporting prekindergarten programs. According to the 2023 State of Preschool Report, Nebraska ranks 44th for state funding spent on these programs (Friedman-Krauss, et al. 2023).

Most grant funds are utilized within districts to pay for the salary and benefits of certified teachers. A total of \$2,893,280 was budgeted for salaries and benefits of staff members which accounts for almost 88% of the total allocation. The next largest allocation of grant funds was 9% for the purchase of equipment, supplies, and materials for prekindergarten classrooms, both indoors and outdoors.

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 four-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. Grant applications are reviewed by stakeholders from across the state that have knowledge of Rule 11 to ensure multiple perspectives. A rubric is utilized to score applications on planning, partnerships, program description and the budget. The Nebraska Department of Education prioritizes applications for programs serving at-risk children that are eligible to attend kindergarten in the following year, as well as ensures funds are distributed in both rural and urban areas as described in Nebraska legislation.

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 2023-2024 school year, 42 districts received state grant funds while 187 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

“The Early Childhood grant funds we received played a pivotal role in establishing a high-quality preschool program for our students from the very beginning. These funds allowed us to improve student-to-teacher ratios, enhance our learning spaces, and provide comprehensive training for our staff. They were instrumental in ensuring a successful launch and fostering continuous growth for our preschool program.”

– *Superintendent,
Logan View Public 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 B-5 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 B-5 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. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System® for Pre-K (CLASS) is used to evaluate ages Three to Five classrooms while the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® for Toddlers (CLASS) is used to assess classrooms with toddlers 18 to 36 months.

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 seven-point scale with seven 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 three to five years of age. The program standard of quality is a rating of five across all six subscales and is based on a seven-point scale with seven being excellent. ECERS-3 rates six areas: Space and Furnishing, Personal Care Routines, Language and Literacy, Learning Activities, Interactions, and Program Structure.

CLASS PreK 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 PreK encompasses ten dimensions that are divided into three broad domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Each domain is scored on a seven-point scale with seven being excellent.

CLASS Toddler is an observation tool designed to measure the interactions of teachers and children between the ages of 18 and 36 months. CLASS Toddler has eight dimensions that are divided into two broad domains: Emotional and Behavioral Support and Engaged Support for Learning.

Districts were selected for observation based on the District Support Plan level assigned. Additional information regarding the level of support can be found in the Support Plan section of this report. For the 2023-2024 school year, 78 observations were completed including 42 ECERS-3, three ITERS-3, and 32 Pre-k CLASS and one Toddler CLASS observations. A Toddler CLASS observation is not included in this report due to privacy considerations. The three ITERS-3 observations were in non-Sixpence classrooms.

Program Assessment Data

ITERS-3

ITERS-3 observations were completed in three 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 Space and Furnishings. 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. Space and Furnishings consider the space and the furnishings used in the classroom.

The lowest ratings were in the Activities and Program Structure subscales. The Activities subscale evaluates fine motor skills, and how nature/science, math/numbers, art and blocks are supported throughout the program. Program Structure looks at the schedule, transitions, free play, and group activities.

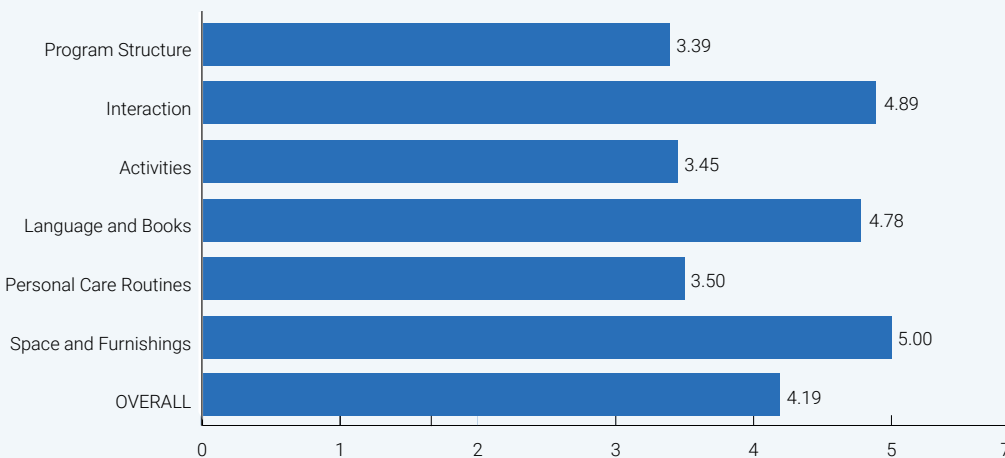


Stories from the State

“I’ve witnessed firsthand the critical role early care and education play in a child’s development. Infant and toddler classrooms provide nurturing environments where young children build foundational skills for lifelong learning. In our district, the demand for quality child care has grown as families seek supportive and enriching options close to home. By advocating for these programs, we aim to give every child the best possible start, strengthening both families and the community.”

– *Elementary Principal,
Dundy County Stratton Schools*

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



ECERS-3

ECERS-3 observations were completed in 42 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.

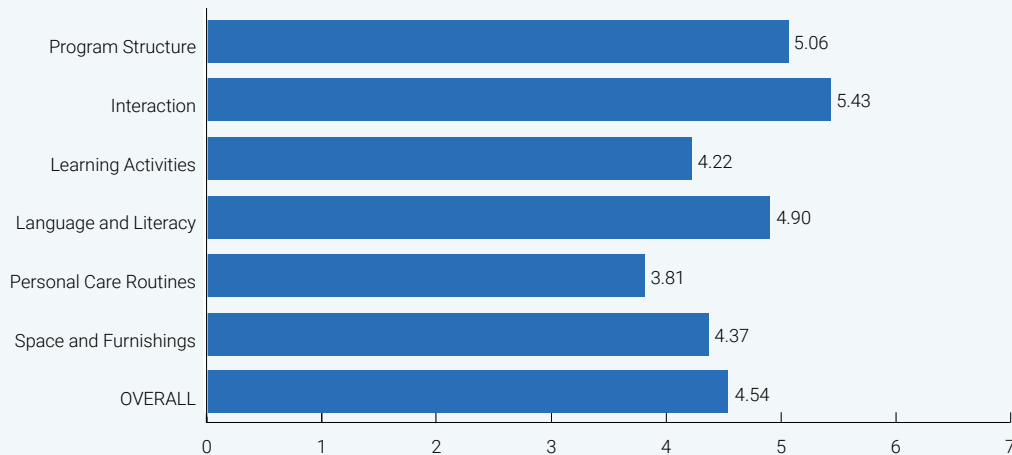


Stories from the State

“The ECERS observation provided us with an opportunity to celebrate the many successes in our program and to set goals for areas we’d like to improve.”

– PreK Teacher,
Holdrege Public Schools

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



CLASS Pre-K

Thirty-two CLASS Pre-K observations were completed. CLASS Pre-K has three domains:

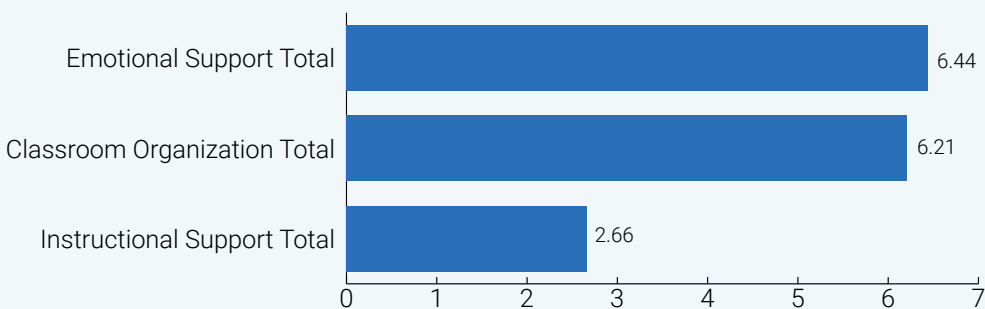
- Instructional Support
- Classroom Organization
- Emotional Support

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 Preschool classrooms 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 Preschool. 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

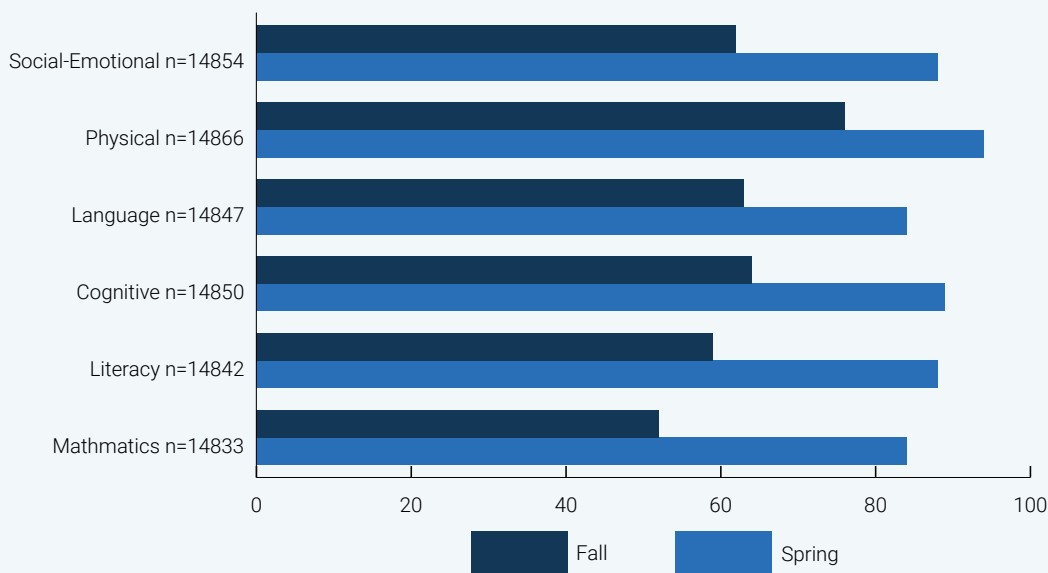
Over the course of the 2023-2024 school year, 20,562 children B-5 were assessed utilizing GOLD across various settings. For this report, fall and spring checkpoint data were analyzed to monitor children’s progress toward achieving widely held expectations for children ages three to five. Additional child 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 2023-2024 school year, an average of 14,849 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 2024, most 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.



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, 148 districts reported utilizing a kindergarten transition agreement with Head Start programs within the community and 150 districts reported utilizing a kindergarten transition agreement with child care programs.

More information on Head Start partnerships with school districts can be found in the Partnerships section on page 18.

Stories from the State

“As our students prepare to transition to kindergarten, we have several measures in place to support this important step. One key component is collaborating with the teams from all seven public elementary schools in our district. We streamline the GOLD report into a concise document, making it easier for kindergarten teachers to access developmental insights about their incoming students. This process equips them to better address individual student needs while also recognizing and valuing the expertise and dedication of our Little Panthers Preschool teachers.”

– *PreK Principal*
Norfolk Public Schools



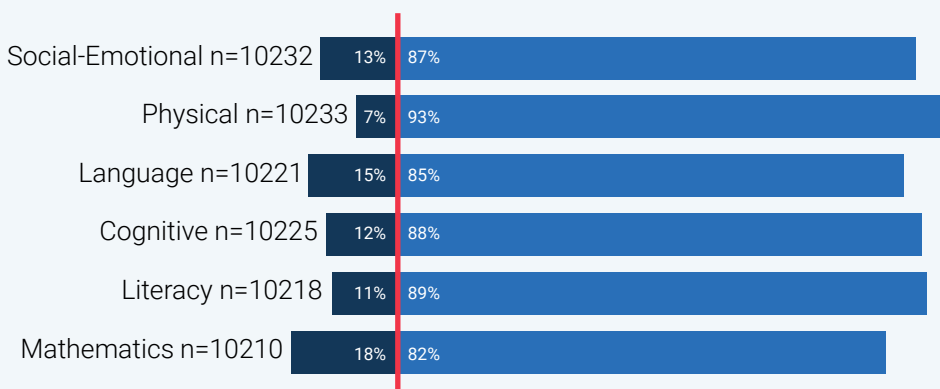
Outcomes for Children Entering Kindergarten in 2024-2025

To evaluate the growth and learning of children eligible to enter kindergarten in 2024-2025, data was gathered during the spring of 2024 for children who participated in district, ESU, and/or Head Start Preschool and would be eligible for kindergarten in the fall of 2024. The data for more than 10,200 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. All areas of development stayed level when compared to scores from 2022-2023. All areas had more than 80% of children meeting widely held expectations.



Widely Held Expectations for Children Entering Kindergarten 2024-25

◀ Below Widely Held Expectations | Meets or Exceeds Widely Held Expectations ▶



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. Details about some of these partnerships, along with links for further information, can be found in the sections below.

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 three) and preschoolers with disabilities (IDEA Part B, ages three to five). 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 three. Sixpence serves children and families through center-based and home-based programs. Forty-two 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: singasonofsixpence.org/resources/resource-library.html



Head Start Programs

There are 19 individual Early Head Start/Head Start Preschool grant recipients across the state of Nebraska: 15 regional recipients, three American Indian Tribal recipients, and one Migrant/Seasonal grant recipient. These federal Head Start grant recipients 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 B-5. 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 2023-2024 school year, 148 district Pre-K programs reported kindergarten transition agreements with Head Start Preschool programs and 65 district Pre-K programs reported shared funding through Head Start Preschool. 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 eight 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:

- Instructional Support Cadre with group coaching focused on the Instructional Support Domain of CLASS
- New teacher cadre meetings with individualized and group coaching focused on CLASS/Creative Curriculum/GOLD for new district teachers
- 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 each classroom per year with feedback/resources
- Additional support with Creative Curriculum/GOLD when needed
- 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 is currently available at eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov. Starting in 2025, this information will be accessible at [HeadStart.gov](https://www.headstart.gov).

Additional information regarding Nebraska programs and services can be found here:

- Nebraska Head Start Programs: education.ne.gov/hssco-head-start-state-collaboration-office/nebraska-head-start-programs/
- 2024 Nebraska Fact Sheet: nhsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Nebraska.pdf



Stories from the State

“Our Head Start Program has wonderful partnerships with our District Service Providers in Chadron, Alliance, Gordon, and Valentine. Each provider brings a unique quality of instruction to the children they serve, fostering a positive learning environment in our classrooms.

We consistently see their positive impact on our students. Their approach to learning is tailored to each child’s unique needs, showcasing their exceptional teaching skills. They possess a holistic understanding of each student’s educational journey, encompassing academics, behaviors, cognitive development, and social skills.”

– *Northwest Community Action Partnership in Chadron*

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

Standard Support Plan

- Access to NDE publications and resources
- Access to NDE sponsored professional development
- A percentage of classrooms will be chosen for a spring observation using the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

Focused Support Plan

- Access to NDE publications and resources
- Access to NDE sponsored professional development
- Invitation to join the Early Childhood Educator Network meetings via Zoom
- Choice between ERS observation-either ECERS-3 or ITERS-3 or CLASS observation
- At least two technical assistance (TA) visits from OEC Education Specialists

Advanced Support Plan

- Access to NDE publications and resources
- Access to NDE sponsored professional development
- Invitation to join the Early Childhood Educator Network meetings via Zoom
- Quarterly TA visits from OEC Education Specialists
- One fall and one spring ERS observation, either ECERS-3 or ITERS-3

For the 2023-2024 school year, 198 districts were in the Standard Support Plan. Of those districts, 21 received an observation in the spring.

Twenty-four school districts were in the Focused Support Plan. The districts in the focused support plan received a total of 15 ERS observations and 12 CLASS observations for the 2023-2024 school year.

Seven school districts were in the Advanced Support Plan. There were 12 fall and 13 spring ERS observations that occurred for the advanced school districts.

The results from the districts selected for observation are included in the Program Outcomes section of this report.

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 2023-2024 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 (ESSER) 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. Applicants selected the topics of professional learning based on the needs of the region. Topic areas included: Appropriate Teaching Practices, Curricular Support, PreK Assessments, Pyramid Model, PreK-K Transitions, and Family Engagement.

Applications were approved for five ESUs for the 2022-2023 school year and a sixth ESU in the 2023-2024 school year, serving seven of Nebraska's 17 ESUs. Throughout the two years, the ESU staff worked with their respective districts to provide professional learning to early childhood educators within school districts and partnership programs. Collectively, the ESUs provided 442 trainings, met with 344 leadership teams, and led 906 coaching sessions with educators and administrators to support PreK-2nd grade subject matter. Educators and administrators from more than 75% of districts within the awarded ESUs took advantage of professional development and coaching. More than 40% of the touchpoints with educators and administrators focused on Appropriate Teaching Practices within Early Childhood Classrooms and more than 25% of the touchpoints involved specific training on the Pyramid Model.

100% of the grantees were able to secure funding to sustain these positions beyond the two-year grants as ESUs continue to serve as a valuable resource in supporting district-operated prekindergarten programs.



Stories from the State

“We are deeply grateful to the NDE Office of Early Childhood for their leadership in establishing these grants and proud of the accomplishments of our ESU #3 Early Childhood Professional Development Specialist over the past two years. This project has significantly benefited curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional learning practices in our district.

The grant supported services like adopting and training on developmentally appropriate curriculum, coaching on high-quality instructional environments, leveraging GOLD data to drive instruction, and implementing evidence-based strategies and social-emotional learning practices. It also enhanced awareness of quality early childhood programs and strengthened the capacity of teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators, fostering long-term improvements.”

– Executive Director of Student Services, ESU #3

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
2. Instruction and Interactions
3. Develop and Foster Partnerships with Families and Communities
4. Embrace and Enact a Pre-K-3rd Grade Vision
5. Ensure Equitable Opportunities
6. Share Leadership and Build Professional Capacity
7. Promote a Culture of Continuous Improvement

Since its inception, the NDE has offered a total of three cohorts funded through the Preschool Development Grant and one cohort funded through the ESSER fund. Nearly 80 participants have graduated from across the state including Head Start leaders, Superintendents, Principals, Special Education and Curriculum Directors, and Teachers. The impact of the Leadership Academy has been felt by more than 23,500 PreK-third grade students across the state. Of those students, 45% qualified for free or reduced lunches.

Evaluation results from the fourth 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. Participants rated the support and feedback received from the Nebraska advisor, the networking with other leaders and the capstone project as integral experiences to help build them as Pre-K-3 leaders in their building, program, and/or community.



Stories from the State

"The NAESP Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy has opened my eyes to the needs of our youngest students and their families, providing me with tools to address them. Our district is now more intentional about how the experiences of our young students shape their educational journeys and is working to ensure those experiences are positive."

– *Pre-K-12 Principal,
Eustis-Farnam Public Schools*

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