



Why are Sixpence investments fiscally prudent?

Sixpence is built on the understanding that targeted, not universal, investments in the development of our youngest and most vulnerable children deliver the most substantial returns on each dollar we commit.

Sixpence brings fiscal resources and expertise of Nebraska's public and private sectors together to deliver high-quality, efficient and effective early learning opportunities that narrow the achievement gap well before children reach kindergarten.

Quality & Accountability

Investing strategically and responsibly in young children

Investing in children's earliest developmental experiences can change their long-term prospects for academic success, healthy social behaviors, marketable skills and self-sufficiency. Not all early childhood investments, however, are alike in their ability to close the achievement gap before children begin school and steer them toward a productive, successful adulthood. Ten years ago, Nebraska's policymakers, business and private sector leaders, educators and citizens created Sixpence to advance high-quality, fiscally accountable, strategically targeted public-private commitment to Nebraska's most vulnerable infants and toddlers. In that time, Sixpence has grown to reach children and families in more than 30 communities statewide, delivering the returns we ought to expect for the dollars we invest in the early development of the students, families, communities and workers our state needs to thrive in the decades ahead.

Quality and the achievement gap

The first three years of life are a critical moment in the neural development of the human brain. Scientific evidence confirms that our earliest interactions, relationships and environments directly affect the formation of strong synaptic connections and core communication, analytical and behavioral skills. Unless these early experiences are cognitively stimulating, emotionally supportive and physically safe, infants and toddlers—especially those most at risk—will fall behind their more advantaged peers well before they enter kindergarten. This developmental gap widens rapidly thereafter, and is likely to persist throughout a child's academic career and beyond.

We should expect more for our early childhood dollars

Every year, Nebraskans commit large sums in federal, state and their own household dollars to provide early care and education services for infants and toddlers. The state's child care subsidy, for example, represents a \$90 million annual public investment in personnel and facilities to provide child care services to low-income parents, some of whom work multiple jobs to meet their families' basic needs.

However, relatively few of these public and private expenditures have ever been expected to meet the basic level of quality known to promote strong neural development in infants and toddlers, and narrow the achievement gap. As a result, Nebraskans pay at least twice—first for substandard or even developmentally harmful programs and services, and again for the costly remedial education and behavioral health services these children will need after they begin school.

How Sixpence ensures quality and accountability for our early childhood dollars

- **Targeted—not universal—investments:** All children need and deserve affectionate, secure and engaging relationships with their parents and caregivers, and safe and healthy environments in which to learn and explore. But given a limited pool of fiscal resources, it is imperative that we focus our dollars on children who are most likely to struggle in the classroom and beyond, undercutting taxpayer's investments in our K-12 system and even inflating criminal justice expenses later on. Sixpence prioritizes the early care and education of infants and toddlers most at risk, offering the largest potential return in terms of our education budget, corrections expenditures and public assistance programs across children's lifespans.
- **Investing strategically before preschool:** Consistent, high-quality developmental opportunities throughout the first eight years of life are important to children's lifelong trajectory and potential for success. Limiting our investment to a single year of high-quality preschool for 4-year-olds misses a critical window of early brain development, and cannot realistically offset the effects of negative or even mediocre developmental experiences during the first three years of life.
- **Public-private investment and governance:** Nebraskans share a common interest in cultivating the next generation of students, workers and citizens. Sixpence is built upon an endowment structure that blends the earnings of substantial private and public investments to advance locally designed community partnerships to deliver high-quality early childhood services throughout the state. These funds are managed by a Governor appointed Board of Trustees including private sector investors, state agency leaders and professional educators. Private sector governance enables Sixpence to work flexibly and efficiently with community grantees, while public sector interests enable community partnerships to work cooperatively with local school districts and pursue high standards of educational excellence.
- **Evaluation and guidance:** Every Sixpence grantee is evaluated annually by a team of independent analysts at the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. These evaluators measure program structure and performance, parent engagement and children's developmental outcomes in language, behavior, social-emotional competency and health. The Sixpence Board of Trustees and staff use these findings to support program staff meeting Sixpence's high quality expectations to qualify for continued funding.

