



2016-18 BIENNIAL REPORT TO THE NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE

For more than 10 years, the Sixpence Early Learning Fund has helped Nebraska parents, early childhood professionals and communities better prepare our youngest children for lifelong learning and achievement.

Throughout that time, the Nebraska Legislature has played a critically important role in the ongoing success of Sixpence. A public-private effort since its inception, Sixpence’s progress owes much to the continued leadership, vision and practicality of our state’s policymakers.

The Sixpence Early Learning Fund Board of Trustees is proud to present the *2016-18 Sixpence Biennial Report to the Nebraska Legislature*. We hope you will find it an informative and useful resource for policy discussions affecting the early care and learning of Nebraska’s youngest children—and, by extension, the continued growth and development of our state and its citizens.

Sixpence is Nebraska’s signature early learning framework for the early development of our state’s infants and toddlers at risk.

Now in its second decade, Sixpence has changed the odds of lifelong success in favor of thousands of young Nebraskans and their families.

Sixpence is built upon the qualities that define the character and values of Nebraska and its people—resourcefulness, practicality, innovation and vision.

It brings together Nebraska’s public and private sectors under a common goal—ensure that more of our youngest children are well prepared to thrive, grow and build stronger families and communities in the decades ahead.

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Sixpence succeeds because it prioritizes the role of communities in designing their own solutions to local early learning challenges, based on what evidence tells us about how infants and toddlers learn, grow and thrive.



What is Sixpence?

Sixpence is a public-private framework designed to provide sustainable funding and dedicated professional guidance to build quality early learning programs for very young children and their parents. It is specifically targeted at infants and toddlers most likely to encounter challenges to their healthy cognitive, social-emotional and physical development during the critical first three years of life.

Guiding Principles

▶ **Starting early to close the achievement gap**

Developmental disparities in the first three years of life often become a widening gap in social, emotional and academic competency as children grow toward school age. If we are to set our youngest children on a trajectory that leads toward lifelong success, we must address the unique developmental needs of infants and toddlers whether they are being cared for—at home or in out-of-home environments.

▶ **Parents are the key factor in early development**

Stable, stimulating and nurturing parent-child relationships are critical to young children's prospects for lifelong success. Knowledgeable, confident and highly engaged parents are most likely to be responsive to their children's needs and make well-informed choices about their cognitive, social-emotional and physical development.

▶ **Community-driven early learning solutions**

Community-level partnerships are best positioned to evaluate their distinct early learning challenges, organize resources and design solutions that meet the specific needs of local parents and grow cohesive, resilient families.

▶ **Public-private collaborations get results**

We can achieve more for Nebraska's youngest children if the state's public and private sectors work together. Cross-sector collaborations widen our overall pool of available resources, encourage flexibility and innovation in funding and service systems and help deliver efficiency and accountability for the dollars we commit to early learning.

▶ **Strategic early learning investment**

All children need and deserve quality opportunities for early development. However, economic analysis shows that public and private early learning investments focused on the needs of young children at risk yield the strongest benefits on an individual, local and societal level.

The urgency of the first three years

The years between birth and age 8 are widely understood to be a coherent stage in children’s cognitive, social-emotional and physical development. However, the first three years of life stand apart as a unique moment in the rapid growth of brain architecture and early skill formation. Consistently dynamic and engaging early experiences during the infant and toddler years help optimize children’s brain circuitry for ongoing learning in school and beyond. Absent these early advantages, young children face greater risks of falling developmentally behind their peers as they approach and transition into the K-12 system.



Traditionally, Nebraska invests its early childhood education grant funds in school-based programs that prioritize services for children 3- to 5-years-old. While these programs are valuable to children’s trajectories in the K-12 system and beyond, they are more likely to produce strong outcomes if they build upon developmental gains achieved during children’s first three years of life.

How Sixpence Works

A basis for sustainable funding

Sixpence is the public identity for the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund, created in 2006 through LB1256. At the time of its creation, the Endowment represented a \$20 million commitment from private donors, matched by a \$40 million investment from Nebraska Educational Lands and Funds. The public portion of the original corpus was made possible through an amendment to the Nebraska Constitution following the passage of LB1256.

These public and private funds are invested separately and the combined earnings placed into a common cash fund held by the Nebraska Department of Education. A governor-appointed Board of Trustees oversees a competitive grant process to fund community partnerships focused on high-quality early learning services for infants and toddlers at risk. The grants are awarded through local school districts, which act as the fiscal agents for their community partnerships. Each grantee is required to provide a 100% match to its award through local funds and resources.

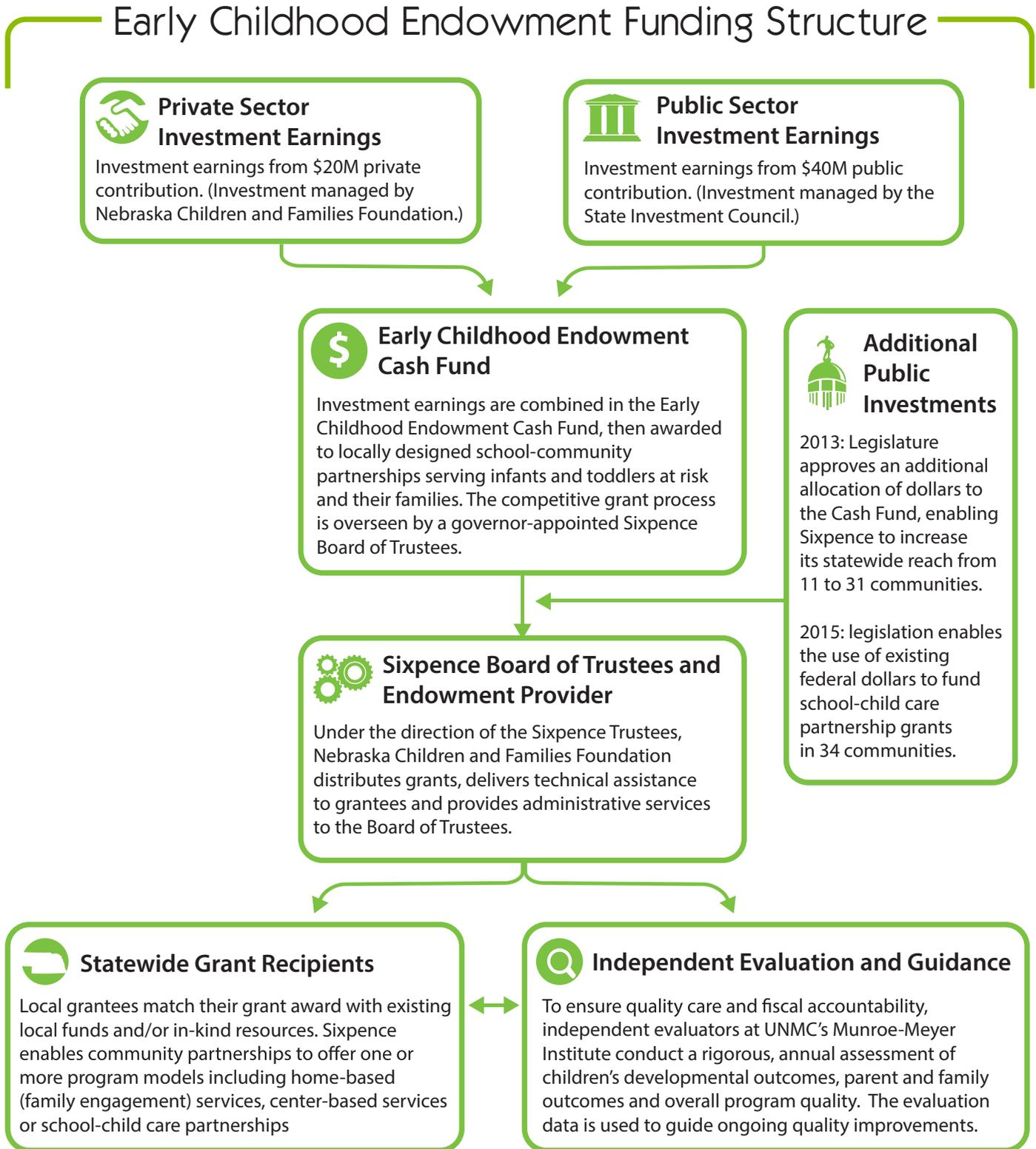
Since the creation of the Endowment, Nebraska lawmakers have twice approved legislation providing additional funding streams enabling Sixpence to reach more infants and toddlers at risk statewide.

Public-private collaboration is the backbone of Sixpence—from the source of the funding to the delivery of programs and services at the local level. That drives a culture of efficiency, accountability and quality for our investments in infants and toddlers at risk.

SIXPENCE EARLY LEARNING FUND

Partnership at Multiple Levels

Early Childhood Endowment Funding Structure



Program guidance and evaluation

State statute requires the Nebraska Department of Education to identify a private Endowment Provider to administer Sixpence grants under the authority of the Board of Trustees. This function has been carried out by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation since the creation of the Endowment in 2006.

In addition to its grant management role, Nebraska Children coordinates a team of experienced professionals who offer expert guidance to funded community partnerships. This team delivers intensive, individualized support to grantees, enabling them to achieve and maintain high standards in teaching practice and program management.

All programs funded through Sixpence are required to participate in a rigorous annual evaluation conducted by an independent research team. These evaluations measure children's developmental gains, improvements in parenting practice and family cohesion, and overall program quality.

Nebraska Children's Sixpence team delivers ongoing technical guidance on a community-by-community basis. This strengthens program quality and ensures the responsible use of our public and private investment.

What kinds of programs does Sixpence support?



Family engagement/parent coaching programs

Often referred to as home visiting services, these voluntary programs match families with skilled professionals who coach parents in building positive relationships and interactions with infants and toddlers. The goal is to help parents grow as confident, capable and responsive caregivers for their youngest children. As of the 2017-18 evaluation year, the majority of children (70%) involved in Sixpence are served through family engagement/parent coaching programs.



Center-based early care and learning programs

Sixpence funds center-based programs operating in close partnership with local school systems. These centers follow proven curricula, emphasize parent involvement and adhere to the professional staff requirements endorsed by the Nebraska Department of Education. These child development centers offer part- and full-day care throughout the academic year and participate in *Step Up to Quality*, Nebraska's child care quality rating and improvement system.



Community child care partnerships

Nebraska communities depend greatly on local networks of home- and center-based child care providers to meet the needs of families with infants and toddlers. Sixpence funds community partnerships between local school districts and independent providers to widen the reach and impact of available resources that support curriculum design, program management, coaching, professional development and other aspects of quality early care and learning. These partnerships also engage providers in *Step Up to Quality* to help them strive for continuous improvement in the services they deliver to parents and families.

SIXPENCE EARLY LEARNING FUND

Children Served

Evaluation Year	
2016-17	2017-18
1,110	1,083

Families Served

Evaluation Year	
2016-17	2017-18
956	948

Mothers Receiving Prenatal Services

Evaluation Year	
2016-17	2017-18
71	78

Percentage of Children with Three or More Risk Factors

Evaluation Year	
2016-17	2017-18
64%	63%

Percentage of Children with Experience of Serious Trauma

Evaluation Year	
2016-17	2017-18
45%	43%

Percentage of Children with Multiple Traumatic Experiences

Evaluation Year	
2016-17	2017-18
18%	14%

Who Sixpence Served¹

Qualifying factors

To qualify for Sixpence-funded services, children and families must be subject to at least one of these risks identified in statute by the Nebraska Department of Education. In order of prevalence, these factors are:²

- ▶ **Low household income (94% of participants)** as defined by eligibility for participation in the federal free and reduced cost lunch program.
- ▶ **Parents with limited educational attainment (40% of participants)** as defined by the lack of a high school diploma or equivalent.
- ▶ **English language learner (ELL) households (37% of participants)** in which English is not the primary language spoken at home.
- ▶ **Parents under 20 years old (29% of participants)**
- ▶ **Premature birth or low birth weight (13% of participants)**

Other developmental hazards

Children and families served by Sixpence-funded programs are generally subject to a much wider range of risk factors beyond those that define program eligibility. These include incidence of one or more factors associated with serious child trauma.²

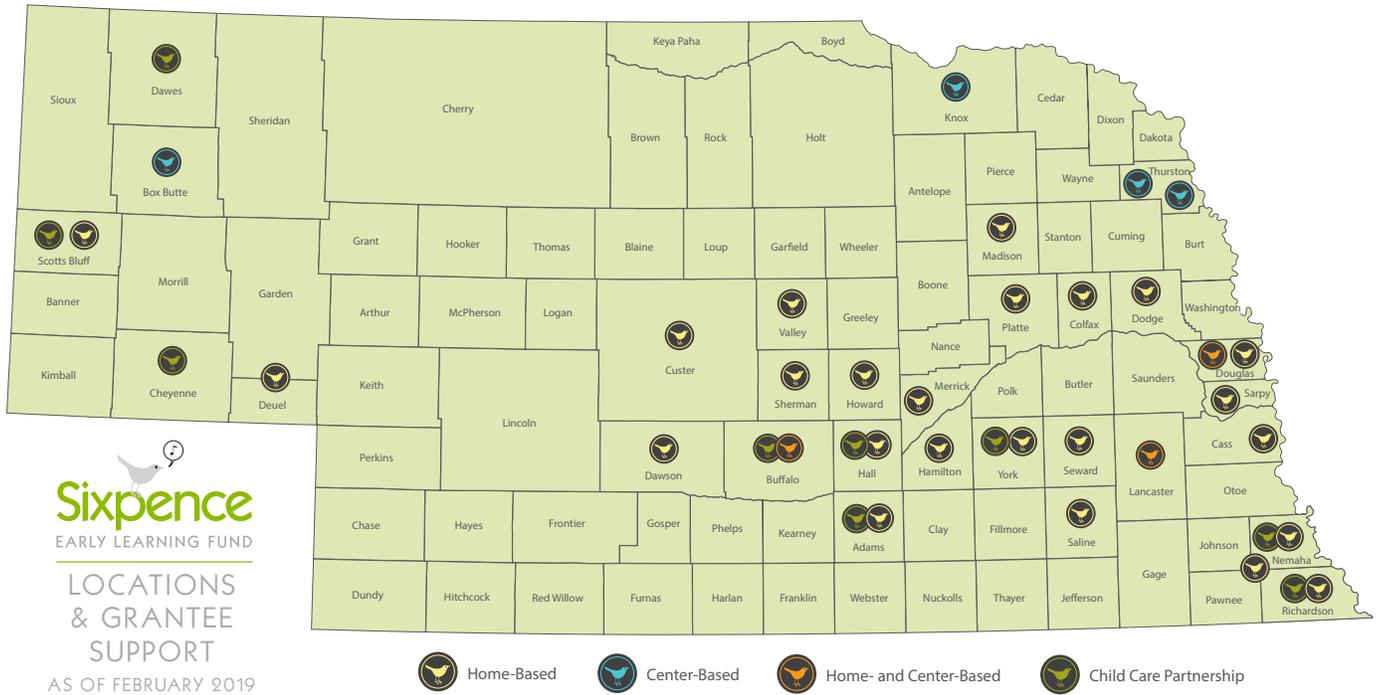
- ▶ **Parent mental health issues (31% of participants)**
- ▶ **Parent substance abuse (17% of participants)**
- ▶ **Parent absent (14% of participants)**
- ▶ **Parent incarcerated (11% of participants)**
- ▶ **Child witnessed violence (7% of participants)**
- ▶ **CPS involved with family (5% of participants)**

Multiple, concurrent risk factors—especially in certain combinations—represent a significant hazard to the growth of healthy brain architecture, skill formation and lifelong well-being.

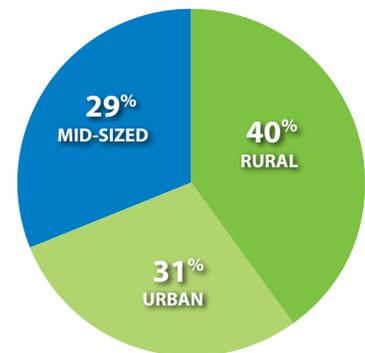
¹ Applies only to Sixpence-funded family engagement (home visiting) or center-based services. Excludes children served through Community Child Care Partnerships.

² Risk factor data reflecting the 2017-18 evaluation year.

Type and Distribution of Sixpence-Funded Services



Grantees by Community Type



Total Number of School District Grantees 31

Center-Based Child Care Services 4

Family Engagement (Home-Based) Services 24

Combination of Center- and Home-Based Services 3

Total Number of Programs in Child Care Partnerships 35

Center-Based Child Care Providers 17

Family Child Care Home Providers 18

During the 2017-18 evaluation year, 714 children were served through Sixpence Child Care Partnerships.

Evaluation Highlights¹

2017-18 Evaluation Year

Center-based programs

67%
met overall
quality
benchmarks

Center-based Sixpence programs are evaluated annually on the quality of the service and early learning environment they provide to children and families. These measurements include:

- ▶ Adult-to-child and child-to-child interactions
- ▶ Quality of the physical learning environment
- ▶ Learning activities
- ▶ Overall program structure

All center-based programs excelled at providing emotional/behavioral supports and responsive caregiving: 42% of the programs met evaluation goals for engaging children in discovery, critical thinking and language development.

Family engagement (home-based) programs

92%
met overall
quality
benchmarks

Family engagement and parent coaching services involve establishing a meaningful and productive relationship between program staff and participating families. Evaluators measure program quality by the staff's ability to:

- ▶ Collaborate effectively and respectfully with parents
- ▶ Model techniques to promote early learning
- ▶ Facilitate strong parent-child interactions

Family engagement and parent coaching programs are among the most widely recognized and effective strategies for supporting the development of young children. This program model offers significant opportunities for Sixpence to reach a greater number of infants and toddlers at risk statewide.

Child developmental outcomes

up to
95%
are on track
across multiple
areas of early
development

The large majority (range 89 to 95%) of children participating in Sixpence-funded programs are meeting widely held expectations across multiple areas of development. Annual evaluations measure outcomes in children's physical, cognitive, social-emotional and linguistic development, among others.

Sixpence sets a high standard for children's linguistic goals, placing the target benchmark for language acquisition skills at the mid-point of average or higher. Just over half (51%) met the goal for Receptive and Expressive language, while just under half (48%) met the goal for vocabulary. Among Spanish-speaking children, 51% met the Language Comprehension goal.

¹ Selected outcomes from the Sixpence Early Learning Fund 2017-18 Evaluation Report produced by Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Full report available at singasongofsixpence.org/resources/resource-library.html.

Program Highlights

Selected Milestones from Sixpence Programs: 2016-18

Building parent-child attachment through Circle of Security

Strong, highly supportive emotional attachments with parents and caregivers are crucially important to young children's developmental outcomes. Many Sixpence programs use Circle of Security, an evidence-based curriculum designed to help parents become more responsive to their children's needs and grow family cohesion.

- ▶ **Auburn:** Seven parents completed Circle of Security training in 2017-2018.
- ▶ **Fremont:** Eight families completed Circle of Security in 2017-18, and four more are currently enrolled for the 2018-19 grant year.
- ▶ **Columbus:** Four families are currently attending Circle of Security trainings.
- ▶ **Broken Bow:** Six families participated in Circle of Security in 2017-18. The Broken Bow program plans to offer two new classes in the current grant year.

Addressing parents' mental health needs

About one in five American adults lives with a mental health problem, including anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and other conditions. In families with very young children, this represents a particular developmental hazard that can affect parent-child relationships, development of stress management and coping skills and the mental well being of children themselves. In Sixpence families, parent mental health problems represent one of the most frequently occurring risk factors.

- ▶ **Auburn:** This program contracts with a mental health practitioner to host monthly workshops on trauma, ACES, resiliency, self-care, post-partum depression and managing challenging behaviors. The program also has a mental health practitioner on staff that provides services to families and staff at no cost.
- ▶ **Broken Bow:** Sixpence offers participating families three to five mental health counseling sessions at no cost.
- ▶ **Lincoln (CEDARS):** This Sixpence program has referred five participating mothers to mental health therapy services, as well as two referrals specifically for post-partum depression.
- ▶ **Schuyler:** Sixpence staff referred three participating families to mental health services in the past two program years.

Addressing families' material needs

Parents can expect to spend up to \$2,500 on diapers, formula and baby food in the first year of their child's life. This represents a serious burden to families at all points on the socio-economic spectrum.

- ▶ **Fremont:** Fremont's Sixpence program is heading a community-wide project called "52 Weeks of Diapers" with the goal of raising 1 million diapers to distribute to families within 30 miles of the community. The program uses the diaper project to educate families on how best to leverage local resources to meet their needs. Currently, all local businesses participate in the project as sponsors.

SIXPENCE EARLY LEARNING FUND

Addressing families' material needs, continued

▶ **Schuyler:** Schuyler's Sixpence program has created an innovative point system to encourage families to participate in home visits and attend their monthly parent-child group. These points can be redeemed for supplies and resources including cribs, car seats, strollers, diapers, wipes and educational toys.

Helping parents achieve educational goals

Parents are more likely to successfully support their children's early development if they are also able to obtain the skills they need for gainful employment. This is a particular challenge for young mothers, whose own educational trajectories have been interrupted by a teenage pregnancy. Sixpence programs often make it possible for participating parents to pursue their educational goals and become successful providers for their households.

- ▶ **Auburn:** One mother participating in Sixpence is currently enrolled at the College of St. Mary. The parent, who had her child at age 16, is now in her second year of coursework to become a middle school science teacher.
- ▶ **Fremont:** Eight participants in the local program who became mothers as teenagers have gone on to graduate college within the past three years. Five mothers are currently enrolled part- or full-time in college.
- ▶ **Lincoln (CEDARS):** Six participating mothers have taken post-secondary coursework. Two parents are currently pursuing a post-secondary degree.
- ▶ **Scottsbluff:** Two parents are currently enrolled in college, and three more are pursuing or planning to pursue their GED.
- ▶ **Schuyler:** 10 participating teen parents successfully completed high school. Two have gone on to college.

Creating peer learning opportunities for parents

Social isolation is one of the familial hazards that can affect children's developmental outcomes. However, this can be mitigated by helping to connect parents to networks of support within their own communities. Many Sixpence programs create opportunities for parents to connect with one another to encourage the exchange of information, ideas and support.

- ▶ **Auburn:** Auburn's Sixpence program has created a Community Cafe project as a way to bring parents together and strengthen family protective factors within the community. These kinds of projects are a widely recognized and highly effective way to build family resiliency by sharing parenting skills, concrete parental supports and improving social connectivity.
- ▶ **Fremont:** For more than five years, Fremont's Sixpence program has hosted parent-child engagement socials, attracting nearly 60 participants on average. These events have been held in 27 unique locations throughout the community to help the greatest number of families learn more about local resources available to them.
- ▶ **Broken Bow:** Broken Bow's Sixpence program is leveraging the local library system for their parent-child socialization activities. This not only creates valuable family-to-family connections, but does so in an environment that encourages early literacy development in young children. Families are encouraged to obtain a library card and plans are underway to make free books available to attending parents and children.

Sixpence: A Legislative History

The role of Nebraska's policymakers in Sixpence's success

1990s-2005: A growing policy conversation

A growing amount of data fuels public policy conversations about the importance of children's early development to economic, health and public safety issues on a societal level. In Nebraska, this conversation begins to focus on the lack of substantial support for early learning in the first three years of life. However, it also becomes clear that the public sector cannot be responsible for addressing these needs alone. This sets the stage for discussions about how to involve both public and private sector interests in sustainable mechanisms for quality early learning targeted at children from birth to age 3.

2006: Landmark legislation and a constitutional amendment

Largely through the leadership of Senator Ron Raikes, the Nebraska Legislature passes LB1256, creating the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund. The fund is built on a \$20 million commitment from private investors, triggering a \$40 million match from public funds. The combined earnings of the fund would be put into a common cash fund held by the Nebraska Department of Education and granted out to community-based, high-quality early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers at risk.

The public match for the Endowment is to be secured through Nebraska's Educational Lands and Funds. However, this requires a constitutional amendment to make early learning an allowable use of these funds, which had previously been reserved for the K-12 public education system. The amendment passes as a ballot initiative later that year on a vote of 55% to 45%.

Governor Dave Heineman appoints a six-member Board of Trustees to oversee the grants. This Board includes the Commissioner of Education (or representative), the CEO of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (or representative), early childhood professionals representing rural and urban communities and two additional representatives of private sector investors.

2007-8: Branding and initial grants

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, designated as the Endowment Provider by the Nebraska Department of Education, creates the Sixpence brand for fundraising and grant-making activities. In 2008, the first round of grants are awarded to 13 local early learning partnerships in urban and rural communities throughout the state. Grantees are required to match the awards through locally sourced funds and/or in-kind resources. The initial grant awards amount to \$1.7 million.

2013: Sixpence extends its reach

Encouraged by Sixpence's documented progress in improving children's outcomes and commitment to fiscal accountability, lawmakers choose to increase Nebraska's public investment by passing LB190. The bill provides an additional \$11 million for grant awards over three years, enabling Sixpence to increase its reach to 31 program sites serving infants and toddlers at risk throughout the state. Currently, this funding continues at \$4 million per year on an ongoing basis.

SIXPENCE EARLY LEARNING FUND

2015: Sixpence introduces Child Care Partnerships

Despite ongoing legislative support, it becomes increasingly apparent that many communities simply lack the facilities, resources and professional staff to deliver locally controlled, high-quality programs most urgently needed by families with infants and toddlers. Once again, Nebraska policymakers respond to the challenge by passing two innovative pieces of legislation. LB489 enables Sixpence to create Child Care Partnerships between school districts and independent child care providers, opening professional development and quality improvement supports to them. In effect, the bill is designed to better leverage existing child care professionals and facilities already embedded in Nebraska communities. A companion bill, LB547, makes it possible to implement the new partnerships in a cost-neutral way by capturing federal CCDBG (Child Care Development Block Grant) dollars earmarked for quality improvement in early childhood programming. The following year, the Board of Trustees authorizes Child Care Partnership grants for five Nebraska communities.

2017: State budget shortfall impacts Sixpence funding

Lower-than-projected revenues lead to a \$900 million budgetary shortfall, prompting Governor Ricketts to call for 4% across-the-board cuts to state spending. This results in a \$200,000 decrease in Sixpence funding. As of the writing of this report, policymakers are addressing the possibility of restoring this funding so Sixpence can continue the important work of helping parents raise the next generation of successful, productive Nebraskans.

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