



Biennial Report to the Nebraska Legislature 2018-2020



Introduction

In 2006, Nebraska policymakers and the voting public chose to make the early care and education of infants and toddlers a priority by laying the legislative and constitutional groundwork for the Sixpence Early Learning Fund.

This effort was driven by a growing recognition of two key issues. First, the well-being of our families, communities and state is fundamentally rooted in the healthy development of our youngest children, even from the earliest days of life. Second, our state’s public and private sectors have a common interest, and therefore complementary roles to play in cultivating the up-and-coming generation of young Nebraskans.

In the 14 years since its inception, Sixpence has become nationally recognized as a model for bipartisan collaboration between policymakers, state agencies and a broad array of stakeholders at the state and local levels. In that time, Sixpence has empowered local early childhood partnerships to change the lives of thousands of children and hundreds of families in nearly three dozen communities throughout the state. As we enter a new decade facing a wide range of unexpected challenges, it is more important than ever that we remain committed to strengthening the infrastructure we need to create success and prosperity for our future citizens, as well as the families and communities in which they will grow up.

The Sixpence Board of Trustees thanks the Nebraska Legislature for playing a pivotal role in the success of this project. The continued practicality, foresight and commitment of our state’s lawmakers have been crucial in this work. Accordingly, we respectfully present the *2018-2020 Sixpence Biennial Report to the Nebraska Legislature* in hopes that it will continue to inform public policy conversations about the care and cultivation of our most important resource.

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“ Scientific research has confirmed and clarified what is known about the effects of prenatal health and early experiences on a child’s development and is informing policymaking in many state legislatures... The implications for school readiness and success later in life can be profound.

*National Conference
of State Legislatures*



What is Sixpence?

Sixpence is Nebraska’s signature, public-private framework for providing sustainable funding and dedicated professional guidance to high-quality early childhood programs throughout the state. It is specifically designed to promote services that help parents address the needs of children from the prenatal period to age 3 (PN-3), especially those most likely to encounter serious challenges to their healthy physical, social-emotional and cognitive development.

Guiding Principles

- **Address developmental challenges early**
Any number of factors can compromise the healthy development of children during their first three years. Left unaddressed, these often widen into increasingly serious gaps as children approach school age, proceed through the K-12 system and grow into adulthood. It is far more effective and cost-efficient to address those challenges early in life rather than mitigate poor academic performance, mental and physical health issues, and related problems further downstream.
- **Empower parents to guide their children’s development**
It is the role and responsibility of parents to prepare their children for lifelong success. But as families face mounting pressures on their time and resources, it is crucial that parents have access to information, services and supports that enable them to become confident and capable educators and caregivers for their infants and toddlers.
- **Empower communities to develop their own solutions**
There is no single program model that can realistically address the unique early childhood challenges of different communities throughout the state. Local partnerships and collaborations are best positioned to understand their unique needs, organize available resources and design solutions that make sense for their own communities.
- **Unite public and private sector resources**
Our state’s public and private sectors share a common interest in ensuring that more children grow up to become skilled, capable and contributing members of their communities. Cross-sector early childhood collaborations at the state and local levels widen the pool of available resources and encourage flexibility and innovation in the way services are designed and delivered.
- **Invest responsibly**
We have an obligation to expect results for the dollars and resources we commit to early childhood development in Nebraska. That means investing in programs that are held to rigorous standards for quality and accountability.

Why Focus on PN-3?

The importance of early brain development

Every stage in the development of young people—from the earliest days of life through later adolescence—has a direct bearing on their potential to become healthy, capable and contributing members of society. Even so, prenatal to age 3 (PN-3) is a unique and crucially important phase in this process.

In the first three years of life the human brain creates more than 1 million new synaptic connections per second. This process begins with simple circuitry governing basic functions such as sensory input. Very soon, however, these give way to increasingly complex circuits that support nonverbal and verbal communication, basic reasoning and other higher functions.

During this period, brain architecture is extremely sensitive to the kinds of experiences and environments children encounter—particularly their earliest relationships with parents and caregivers. Research shows that the more stimulating, supportive and nurturing these experiences are, the more efficient and robust early neural circuitry becomes. In turn, this lays the groundwork for communication and language acquisition, and a broad array of more complex social and behavioral skills that children will carry into adulthood.

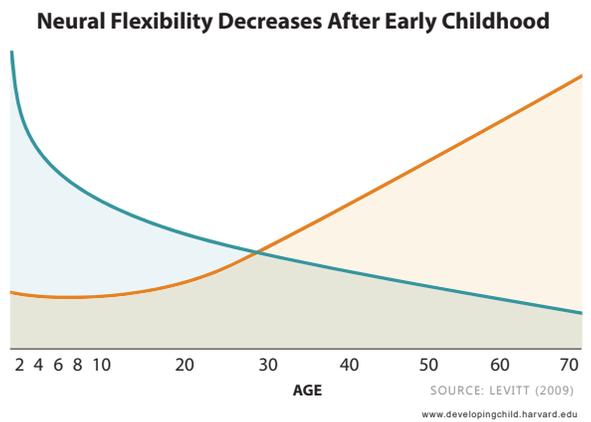
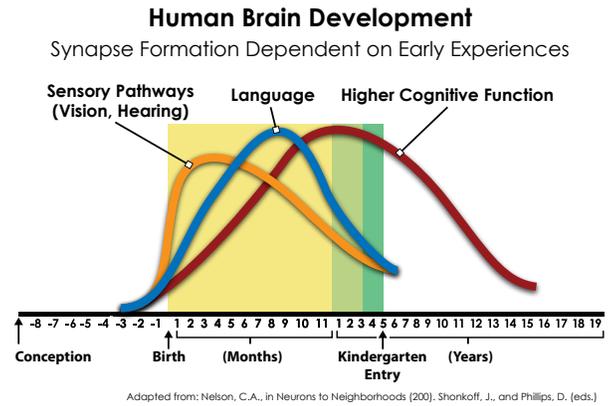
As children approach school age (4 to 5 years), new synaptic connections form more slowly and become less malleable over time.

Hazards to PN-3 development

Any number of factors can inhibit the healthy development of children during the PN-3 period including an absence of prenatal health services, parents with mental health problems, family financial insecurity, inadequate nutrition and substandard child care environments. Experiences that cause high levels of stress or anxiety in very young children can actually degrade neural architecture at a time when it should be optimized for lifelong learning and achievement.

As a result, children who begin their lives with substandard or adverse early developmental experiences are more likely to arrive at school developmentally behind their peers, struggle to develop positive social behaviors and relationships, and even encounter chronic mental and physiological health problems later in life including hypertension, diabetes, anxiety disorders and depression.

Some problems resulting from developmental obstacles can be mitigated through special education, mental and behavioral health services and other efforts. But the best evidence indicates that it is more effective—and less costly—to set children on the right path during their earliest years.



Currently in Nebraska, there are an estimated 57,000 children age under five years old who face serious obstacles to their early development that can widen into serious gaps even before they reach school age.

Addressing those obstacles beginning with prenatal development can have a significant impact on what our state spends later on remedial services to mitigate their long-term effects.



Sixpence's technical assistance staff plays a critical role in helping grantees build local early childhood partnerships, maximize existing community resources and enable programs to strive for high levels of quality.

Technical assistance is key to ensuring accountability for the public and private dollars we invest in Sixpence programs.

How Sixpence Works

Endowment Structure

Sixpence is the public identity for the Nebraska Early Childhood Educational Endowment Fund. At the time of its creation in 2006, this Endowment represented a combined public and private contributions and commitments amounting to \$60 million. The public portion of the original corpus was sourced from the Nebraska Educational Lands and Funds, and made possible through an amendment to the Nebraska Constitution following the passage of LB1256.

The public and private funds are invested separately and the combined earnings placed in a common cash fund held by the Nebraska Department of Education. A governor-appointed Board of Trustees oversees a competitive grant process which funds community partnerships focused on high-quality early care and learning programs 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 that added funding streams enabling Sixpence to reach more infants and toddlers at risk throughout the state.

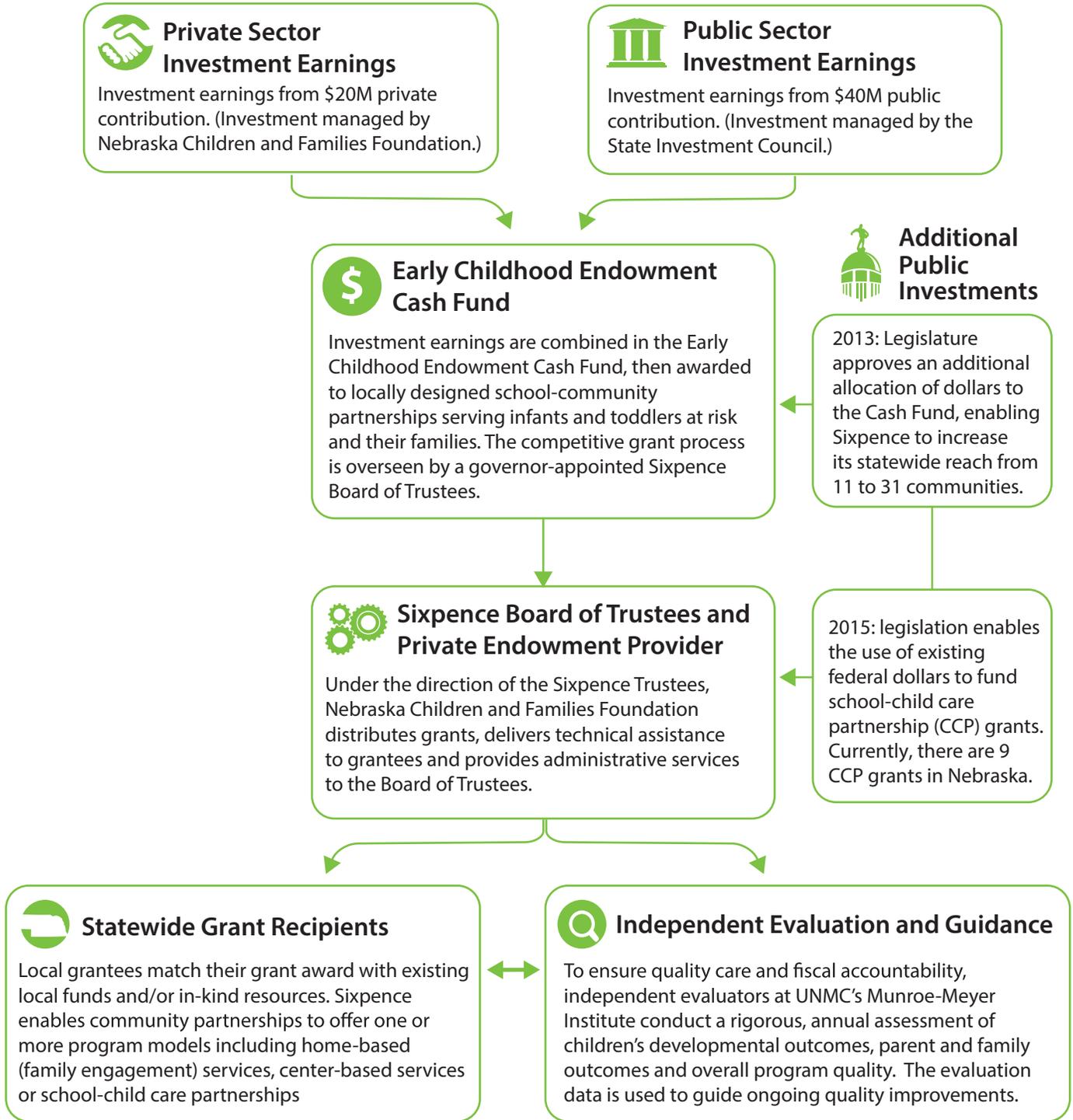
Oversight, Guidance and Evaluation

Pursuant to LB1256, the Nebraska Department of Education is required to designate an Endowment Provider to administer Sixpence grants under the authority of the public-private Board of Trustees. This role has been carried out by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation since the creation of the Endowment in 2006.

In addition to its grant administration responsibilities, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation provides dedicated technical assistance to community partnerships and programs funded through Sixpence. This is delivered through a team of experienced professionals who work with grantees to help them 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. Since 2008, these evaluations have been conducted by the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. The annual evaluations measure children's developmental gains, improvements in parenting practice and families cohesion, and overall program quality.

Funding and Grant Making Structure



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SIXPENCE EARLY LEARNING FUND

Who does Sixpence Serve?

Sixpence supports programs that address the developmental needs of infants and toddlers most likely to arrive at their first day of kindergarten developmentally behind their peers. These early disadvantages are the products of broader liabilities affecting stability, security and cohesion in families and communities.

As part of its yearly evaluation of Sixpence programs, the Munroe-Meyer Institute gathers demographic and other information about the children and families who participate in funded services. This data offers an important insight into the risk factors that affect children’s developmental outcomes, as well as those that determine overall eligibility to participate in Sixpence programs. **However, with the arrival of COVID-19 earlier this spring, many center-based providers closed temporarily, while most home visiting programs moved to virtual rather than in-person services. As a result, the following overview of children and families served during the 2019-2020 evaluation year represents an incomplete picture of the typical reach and impact of Sixpence programs.**

Qualifying Factors

Families are considered eligible to participate in Sixpence home- and center-based programs if they are subject to at least one of five principal risk factors identified in statute by the Nebraska Department of Education. Data reflects children served through Sixpence home-based/family engagement and center-based programs.

Risk Factor	2018-19	2019-20*
Low household income [\leq 185% federal poverty level]	96%	96%
Parents with limited educational attainment [lack of HS diploma or equivalent]	38%	46%
English Language Learner [ELL] households	36%	34%
Teen Parent	27%	25%
Premature birth or low birth weight	13%	13%

Other Developmental Hazards*

Children and families served by Sixpence-funded programs tend to be subject to a much wider range of risk factors beyond those that determine program eligibility. These include one or more factors commonly associated with serious trauma. Data reflects children served through Sixpence home-based/family engagement and center-based programs.

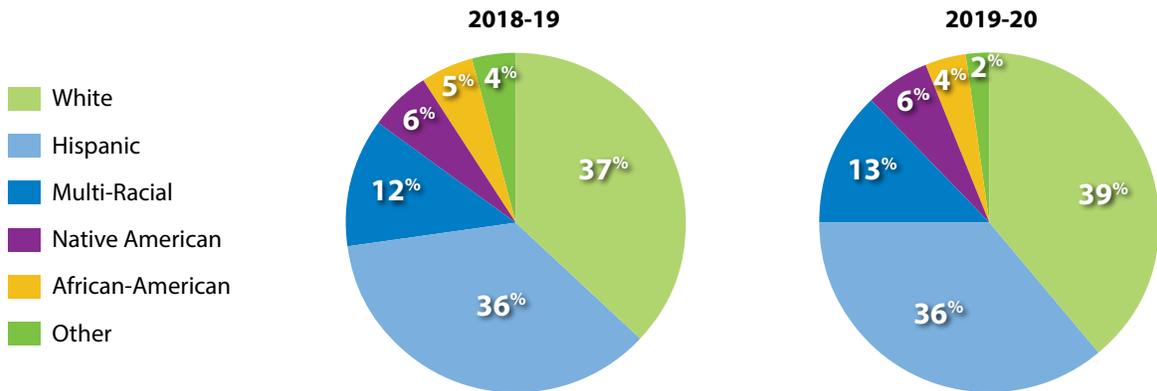
Risk Factor	2018-19	2019-20*
Parents with mental health issues	37%	41%
Substance abuse by parents	15%	18%
Incarcerated parent(s)	11%	12%
Domestic or community violence witnessed by child	9%	12%
Parent absent due to deceased mother/father, military deployment, etc.	13%	11%

Children and Families Served

The following data represents children and families served by center-based and home-based (family engagement) programs. Children served through Sixpence child care partnerships are listed separately below.

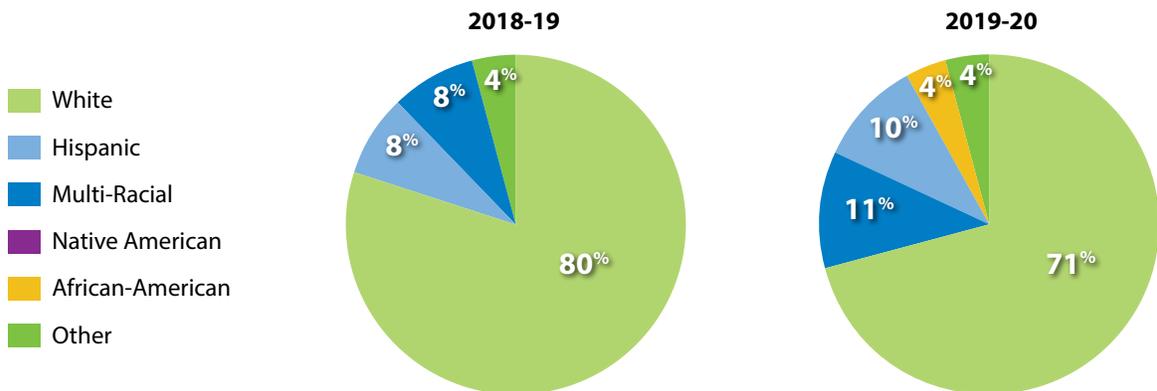
Demographics

	2018-19	2019-20*
Children served	1,131	1,038
Families served	969	886
Expectant mothers receiving prenatal services	71	69
Percentage of children with experience of serious trauma	44%	37%
Percentage of children with multiple (3+) traumatic experiences	18%	19%



Child Care Partnerships

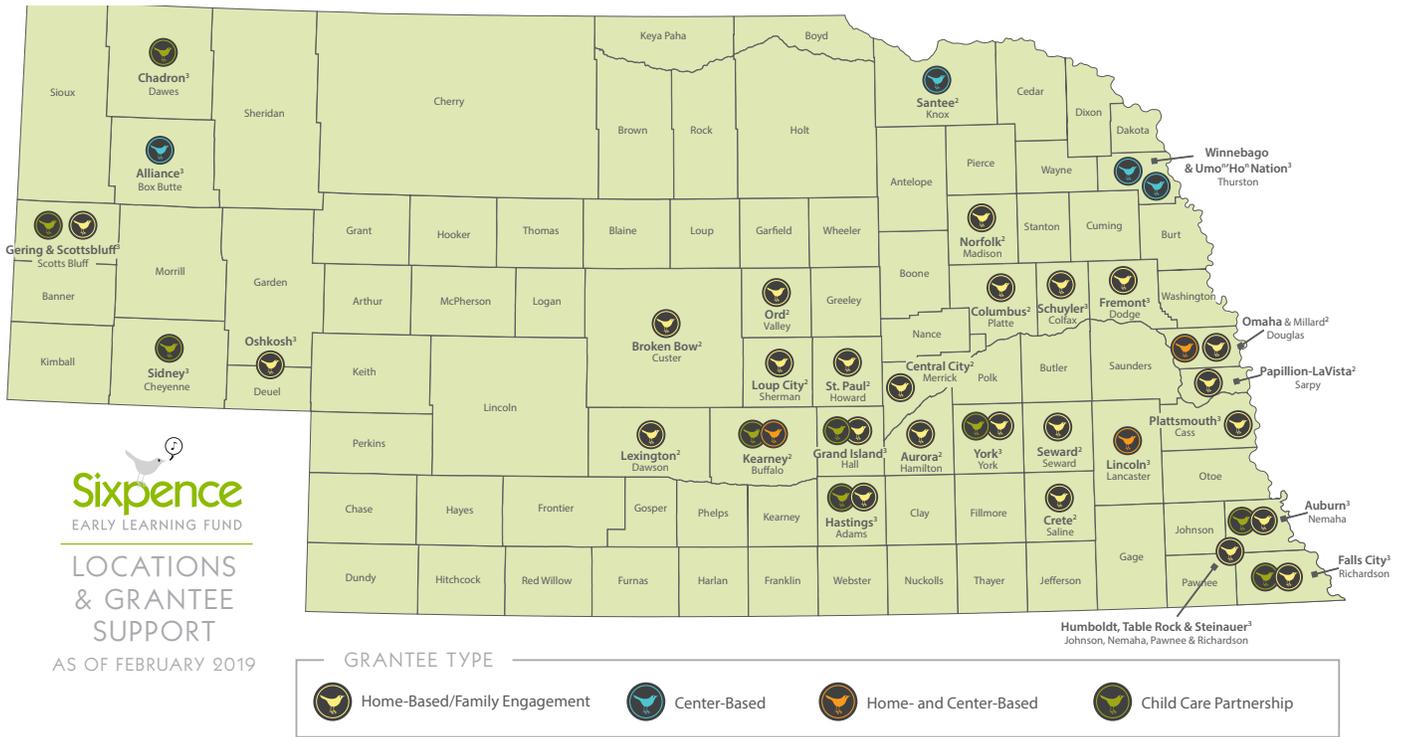
	2018-19	2019-20*
Children enrolled in Sixpence child care partnership programs	739	860



*Shaded data represents information collected from programs during COVID-19.

SIXPENCE EARLY LEARNING FUND

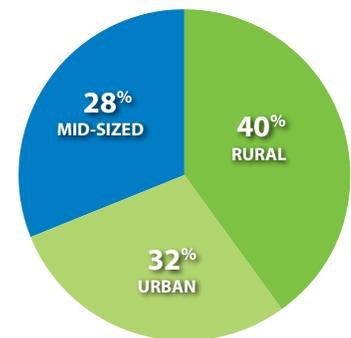
Types and Distribution of Sixpence Programs



Center- and Home-Based Sixpence Grants

Center-based child care services	4
Home-based (family engagement) services	24
Mixed center- and home-based services	3
Total number of center- and home-based grants	31

Grantees by Community Type



Sixpence Child Care Partnerships (CCPs)

Family home child care programs participating in CCPs*	27
Center-based child care programs participating in CCPs*	28
Total number of active child care programs in CCPs	55

*Reflects number of active programs during the 2019-2020 evaluation year

Program Models and Evaluation Outcomes*

Center-Based Programs

Center-based Sixpence programs operate in close partnership with their local school systems, follow curricula proven to advance early learning, emphasize parent involvement and adhere to the professional standards for staff required by the Nebraska Department of Education. They offer part- and full-day care throughout the academic year and participate in *Step Up to Quality* to ensure continuous improvement in the caliber of services they deliver.

Center-based Sixpence programs are situated in facilities that act as service hubs for their communities. Two of these locations (Lincoln, Winnebago) represent local partnerships with **Educare**, a national network of high-quality child development centers designed to model and advance best practices in early care and learning.

Selected Evaluation Results

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 teacher-to-child and child-to-child interactions, program structure, access to books and language development resources, and quality of the overall physical environment.



100% Met the quality benchmark for positive teacher-child relationships

86% Met the quality benchmark for program structure

67% Met the quality benchmark for supporting language development

Quality in center-based Sixpence services is measured through live observations and video recordings of classroom environments, activities, interactions and resources.

*Selected outcomes from the Sixpence Early Learning Fund 2018-19 Evaluation Report produced by Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Full report available at singasonofsixpence.org/resources/resource-library.html.

Family engagement/home visiting programs widely recognized as highly effective and cost efficient ways to ensure stronger early developmental environments for young children.

Family engagement programs implemented throughout the nation have been shown to support maternal and child health, encourage family cohesion and even promote financial self-sufficiency.



Home-Based (Family Engagement) Programs

These voluntary programs match families with experienced professionals who are trained to help parents prepare for, and guide the early development of their children. In particular, program personnel model and coach parents in techniques to help them develop supportive and healthy relationships with their infants and toddlers, and monitor their physical wellness. Frequently, family engagement staff will also help families connect to resources and navigate wider networks of support in their communities.

Although commonly known as *home visiting* programs, these services can be delivered in a wide variety of settings such as community centers, schools or other venues. Given risks associated with COVID-19, many programs have adapted creatively to the public health crisis by leveraging social media networks and video calls to remain connected to the families they serve.

Selected Evaluation Results

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 encourage early learning and promote stronger parent-child relationships.

86% Met the quality benchmark for high-quality home visiting practices

98% Of participating parents demonstrated high levels of engagement with coaching and other services offered during visits with program staff

“ Quality home visiting programs support families' efforts to help their children develop the characteristics today's business leaders say they are seeking.

At the same time, home vistration reduces the incidence of expensive business problems, particularly costs associated with poor health among workers and new hires needing remedial training.

The Business Case for Home Visiting
The Pew Center on the States

Child Care Partnerships

Child Care Partnerships (CCPs) represent one of the most significant developments in the recent history of Sixpence. As Nebraska struggles to meet a rapidly growing demand for reliable, developmentally appropriate child care options, Child Care Partnerships offer an innovative way to maximize the reach of Sixpence to a growing network of providers. Through collaborations with local school districts, providers receive frequent trainings, on-site coaching, peer learning opportunities and guidance on *Step Up to Quality*, Nebraska's child care quality rating and improvement system.

Selected Evaluation Results

Since the first round of Child Care Partnership (CCP) grant awards in 2016, Sixpence has seen encouraging results. Evaluation data indicates overall quality improvement in participating programs corresponds directly to the number of years they participate in their local partnerships.

The majority of providers had highly favorable impressions of their involvement in Sixpence CCPs. According to a survey administered during the 2018-19 evaluation year, 80% of providers strongly agreed that they believe they improved professionally as a result of CCP participation. Similarly 80% indicated that they would encourage other early childhood professionals to become involved in a CCP if it were made available to them.

57% Of all CCP programs achieved a Step 3 rating or higher in Step Up to Quality by the end of the 2018-19 evaluation year

97% Of programs that participated in CCPs for 3 years reached their Step 3 quality rating by the spring of 2019



To participate in Sixpence child care partnership, infants and toddlers at risk are expected to represent at least 50% of a provider's enrollment. Providers are also expected to achieve a Step 3 rating or higher in Step Up to Quality within three years.

“ Being a part of a partnership like CCP is one of the best things I've done for my child care. They help you make improvements, find solutions and provide training and support... I would never have gotten to Step 4 (in *Step Up to Quality*) as quickly as I have without networking time with my coach.

*Penny Gerking | Owner/Operator
Little Gerkins Child Care, Auburn NE*

Children's Outcomes*

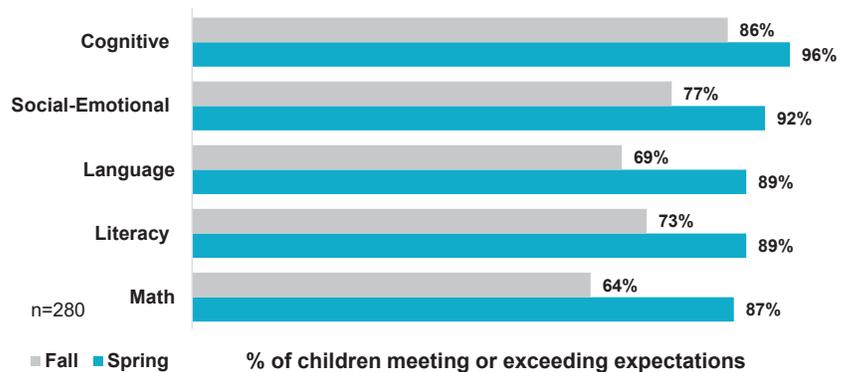
When assessing the success of Sixpence-supported programs, it is crucial to remember that the majority (between 64% and 78%) of children served over the 2018-20 biennium faced 3 or more risk factors known to inhibit early learning and development.

The fact that most children in Sixpence programs nevertheless are keeping pace developmentally with their more advantaged peers.

While it is important to measure indicators of program quality such as teaching practice, parent coaching techniques and physical environments, the key benchmark for success revolves around evidence that these interventions are supporting children's developmental outcomes, as well as family cohesion and resiliency.

Selected Evaluation Results

Every year, researchers from the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center assess the progress of children served by Sixpence programs against widely held developmental expectations for the first three years. These developmental domains relate directly to their cognitive, emotional and behavioral preparedness to learn and thrive when they enter the K-12 system. Assessments are conducted in the fall and spring of every evaluation year to measure progress in each developmental domain.



Because physical health plays a role in children's academic, social-emotional and lifelong outcomes, evaluators also measure multiple indicators of child wellness. During the 2018-19 evaluation year, nearly all children served by Sixpence programs met and exceeded every indicator in this category of outcomes.

- 98%** Of Sixpence children had a medical home, allowing for coordinated supports for physical wellness
- 93%** Of Sixpence children had a up-to date immunizations
- 92%** Of Sixpence children received regular well-child check-ups

Sixpence as a Community Asset

Stronger Families, Stronger Communities

Successful communities are made up of capable, productive individuals who, in turn, are the product of nurturing, resilient families. While Sixpence's primary function is to close the developmental gaps that put young children at an early disadvantage, the collateral benefits of Sixpence programs are reflected on a much broader scale. Many of these benefits accrue from the supports that enable Sixpence parents receive to help them better guide their children's early development, provide for their families and become assets to their communities.

Empowering Nebraska's Indigenous Populations

There are approximately 16,000 Native Americans in Nebraska, 43.2% of whom live at or below the poverty line. This indicator in turn reflects a wide range of challenges to community and family cohesion in parts of the state with significant tribal populations. These include inadequate mental and behavioral health services, disproportionately high levels of child maltreatment and foster care placement, among other factors.

Sixpence programs in Winnebago, Macy and Alliance offer services and supports are proven to help offset some of the most serious obstacles facing tribal families with young children.

The high poverty rate in Alliance (55.6%) affects many of our community's young families, including Native American parents. Over the past several years, we have worked extensively with a particular family whose four children had been involved in our Sixpence program over several years. When we began building a relationship with this family, one of the major challenges we faced was engaging with the children's father, who had been in the corrections system and struggled with substance abuse.

Over time, however, things have turned around—not just for his relationship with his children, but his role in the community. Through his participation in Sixpence, he is now actively engaged in his children's early learning. He has become an enthusiastic supporter and community ambassador with local families for our Sixpence program, Circle of Security and related initiatives. He has also become involved in developing local athletics programs and now serves as a widely respected member of our local school board.

—Alliance, Box Butte County

Sixpence has had a major impact on our community (Macy, NE) through the Shi'ga Zhi'ga Child Development Center. Our program primarily serves teenage parents in the Umo'ho' tribe. We offer child care services, daily parent coaching sessions and a wide array of other supports such as books and supplies they need to help their children develop while continuing their own education. In my three years of teaching here, I have been privileged to see five of our young parents complete their high school education—something that would not have been possible without the support and encouragement they received through Sixpence.

—Macy, Thurston County

92%

of parents said Sixpence programs helped them better understand their children's development.

87%

of parents were strongly confident that Sixpence providers enabled them find vital services, such as medical care, for their families.

SIXPENCE EARLY LEARNING FUND



Promoting Family Self-Sufficiency

Even before the onset of COVID-19, many Nebraska families faced increasingly serious threats to their ability to maintain stable and viable households in which to raise their youngest children. Family engagement professionals in Sixpence-supported programs routinely advise parents on how to set and meet their goals—not only as children’s most important caregivers and educators, but also as members of the local workforce.

I have been working with a family that has struggled to set achievable goals so they could better provide for themselves and their young daughter. Mom was thinking about pursuing her GED while dad was having trouble finding steady employment. They were living low-income housing with few prospects for improving that situation.

I began helping the father to find leads on employment opportunities, and offered to help him prepare for job interviews. I also began working with them on creating a plan to move out of public housing and into a better household environment for their daughter. I advised them on how to set a budget, create a savings plan and scout for an affordable rental house.

The family was doubtful at first, but became highly motivated to improve their situation. Dad was able to find reliable, gainful employment as a shift worker at a local plant and within six months the family succeeded in their goal to move into a nice rental house. This is what makes Sixpence remarkable. We work with the whole family. We make connections. We help them get on their feet and create better lives for themselves and their children.

—Falls City, Richardson County

Our home visiting program began working with a teen couple when they discovered they were pregnant. Our process is to encourage all teen parents to think about their longer-term educational and career goals. Both parents had aspirations to go to college, so we worked with them to develop a plan that would help make that goal a reality. After their daughter was born, they both found employment that allowed them take general education classes at Central Community College, while saving money to finish their education at a four-year college. Their goal was also made possible through scholarships that Hastings Public School Foundation offers to Sixpence participants. Over time, the father realized that his passion was to pursue a career as a barber, while the mother continued with her plans to attend UNL.

Eighteen months ago, they family is on track and living independently in Lincoln. Their daughter is thriving in a quality child care center. Dad is pursuing his new career as a barber while mom is a paraprofessional with Lincoln Public Schools while continuing her education at the university.

—Hastings, Adams County

Sixpence: A Legislative History

1990s-2005: Growing Interest by Policymakers

Throughout the 1990s, information about the academic, social and economic benefits of early childhood education began to find its way more frequently into public policy conversations. In Nebraska, these conversations began to focus on gaps in support for early childhood development in the first three years of life. Because this issue exceeded the capacity of the public sector to address on its own, interest began to grow in discovering a public-private solution.

2006: Landmark Legislation and a Constitutional Amendment

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

The public match for the Endowment would be provided by Nebraska’s Educational Lands and Funds. However a constitutional amendment was required to secure these resources, which had been earmarked solely for the state’s K-12 public education system. In November of that year, the ballot initiative to amend the state constitution passed on a vote of 55% to 45%.

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

2007-8: Branding and Initial Grants

In its role as the private Endowment Provider for the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation created the Sixpence brand for fundraising and grant-making operations. In 2008, the first round of grants were awarded to 13 community early learning partnerships throughout the state. Per the founding legislation, grantees were required to match their awards through locally sourced funds or other resources. The initial grant awards amounted to \$1.7 million.

2013: Sixpence Extends Its Reach

Encouraged by Sixpence’s effectiveness in improving children’s outcomes, as well as its commitment to fiscal accountability, Nebraska lawmakers voted to increase the state’s public investment. LB190 provides an additional \$11 million for grant awards over three years, enabling Sixpence to fund 31 program sites throughout the state.



Senator Ron Raikes

SIXPENCE EARLY LEARNING FUND

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NeMTSS Regional Facilitator
Educational Service Unit 3

Cara Small

Early Learning Connections Coordinator
Educational Service Unit 6

2015: Child Care Partnerships Introduced

Despite growing public and private support for Sixpence, Nebraska communities still lacked the facilities, resources and professional staff to deliver PN-3 programs urgently needed throughout the state. Once again, Nebraska's policymakers responded by passing two innovative pieces of legislation.

LB489 enabled Sixpence to create Child Care partnerships between school districts and independent child care providers, opening professional development and quality improvement resources to a wider array of programs. In effect, the bill was designed to better leverage existing child care resources across the state.

A companion bill, LB 547, made it possible to implement the new partnerships in a cost-neutral way by capturing federal CCDBG (Child Care Development Block Grant) dollars earmarked for improving the quality of child care programs. The following year, the Sixpence Board of Trustees authorized the first Child Care Partnership grants to five Nebraska Communities.

2017-19: Effects of Budgetary Shortfall

In 2017, a \$900 million budgetary shortfall prompted Governor Ricketts to call for a 4% across-the-board cut to state spending. This resulted in a \$200,000 decrease in Sixpence funding during the budgetary biennium. In 2019, however, the Legislature voted to restore these dollars to Sixpence.

2020: Bracing for the Economic Impact of COVID-19

The full economic fallout of the COVID-19 public health emergency has yet to become clear. In the coming 2021 session, Nebraska Legislators will face a challenge unlike any that we have felt before in crafting a balanced budget. It is certain that no area of public investment will remain unaffected. Even so, we encourage our state's policymakers to continue their proven record of foresight in allocating the resources available to us.

Now, more than ever, it is important to prioritize investments that are most likely to deliver significant, near- and long-term social and economic returns to our state. Promoting the healthy development of our youngest citizens is exactly this kind of investment.

2018-2020 BIENNIAL REPORT



Stephanni Renn

Sixpence Administrator and Vice President of Early Childhood Programs

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