

Evaluation Report: Executive Summary

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March 2025



Evaluation Description

The Nebraska Growing Readers (NGR) pilot program aimed to improve reading behaviors and literacy development by distributing 886,063 books to 37,872 children ages three to five across the state. A 2024 evaluation of the pilot program examined the association between the NGR book distribution and early childhood literacy outcomes.

Results

- Access to books increased significantly within participating early childcare centers ($p=0.012$).
- Daily reading time with children increased significantly among participating families and in early childcare settings after the NGR book distribution ($p < 0.001$).
- The number of books was significantly correlated with frequency of reading within early childcare settings ($\rho = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) and among families participating in Sixpence Home Visitation ($\rho = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$).
- Among Sixpence Home Visitation Families, children with more books at home were also significantly more likely to meet benchmarks for early language and literacy skills ($p < 0.05$).
- Within a small sample of Kindergarteners, there were no statistically significant changes observed across children's protective factors or behavioral concerns.

Methods

The evaluation sample included three participant groups: 1) Early Childcare Providers, 2) Sixpence Home Visitation Families, and 3) Entering Kindergartners in Lincoln, Omaha, Hastings, and Schuyler. In total, 260 early childcare providers, 155 caregivers, and 132 children from across the state participated in the evaluation. Retrospective surveys were administered to all participating families and providers. Assessments were administered to measure children's early language/literacy development, protective factors, and behavioral concerns.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the NGR program was associated with improvements in book access, reading behaviors, and selected language and literacy skills. Although researchers noted some limitations due to small sample sizes, they concluded that the program may have encouraged more consistent daily reading practices and has the potential to positively impact early childhood literacy development.