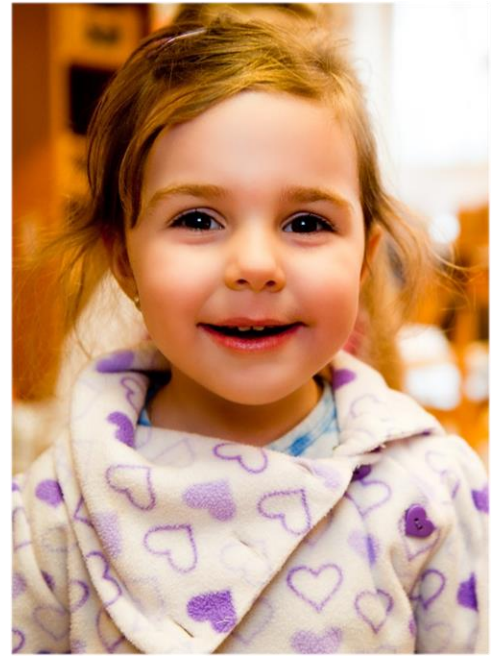


Invest Early Early Childhood Initiative

Year 13 Implementation and Outcomes Evaluation

Prepared for Itasca Area Schools Collaborative by:
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Key findings

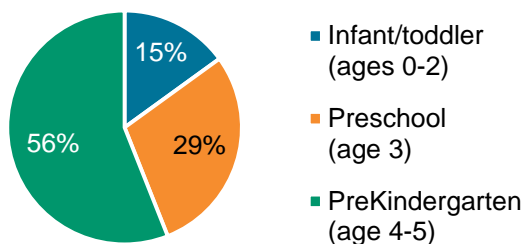
Invest Early is a comprehensive early childhood collaborative in Itasca County, Minnesota, that serves young children and their families with risk factors that may impede school success.

In the 2017-18 school year (year 13), 517 children age 5 and younger and 445 families participated in Invest Early, a 12% increase from years 11 and 12 due to the addition of three classrooms. Key findings highlight impacts on children and families who were served in year 13 of the program (2017-18 school year), as well as how previous Invest Early students in older grades are doing academically relative to other Itasca County children who have not been served by the program.

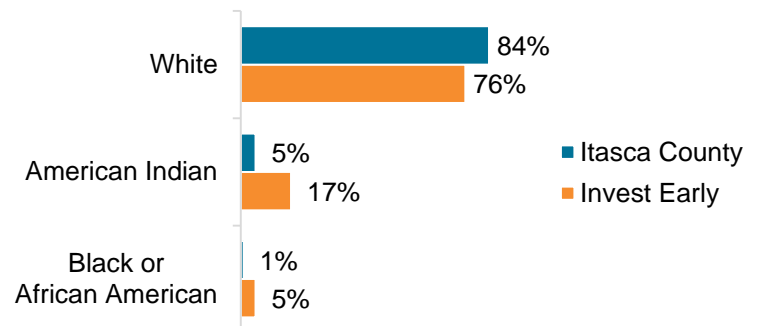
Invest Early serves higher-risk children and families.

A large majority (85%) of children are preschool/prekindergarten age. Invest Early students represent a more racially and ethnically diverse group of children than the county population. In addition to low-income, Invest Early children have an average of three other risk factors.

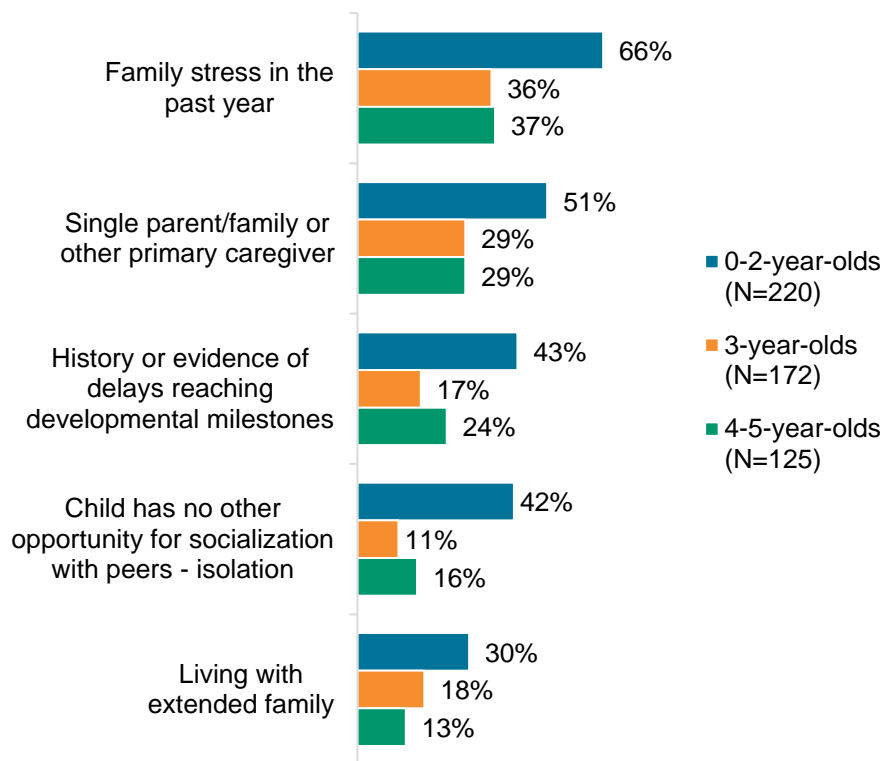
Age of Invest Early students



Race of Invest Early students



Top 5 Risk Factors (at Program Entry)



Invest Early kindergarteners face more risk factors than their peers, yet are equally prepared.



This year, over half (56%) of Itasca County kindergarteners demonstrated kindergarten readiness – that is they scored 75% or higher using Minnesota Work Sampling System Kindergarten Entry Developmental Checklist, an observational assessment conducted by kindergarten teachers. There were not differences between kindergarteners who had been in Invest Early, other low-income children (who receive free or reduced lunch), and higher-income children (who do not receive free or reduced lunch. Though Invest Early students are not outperforming their low-income peers, they face more risks that can impede their development. As noted in the chart below, Invest Early students have more risk factors overall. In addition, they are slightly younger, and more likely to have an IEP or ILLP and very low incomes. Their parents are less likely to have bachelor's degrees and read to them, and more likely to have experienced stress in the past year.

Entering kindergarten students by group, fall 2018

	Invest Early N=103	Receives F/R lunch, no Invest Early N=101	Does not receive F/R lunch N=111
Kindergarten readiness	59%	60%	54%
Risk factors:			
Average age (in months)	66.6	67.2	68.1
Two or more risk factors	30%	14%	23%
Student has IEP or ILLP	25%	8%	14%
Very low income (less than \$35,000 per year)	29%	16%	20%
Responding parent has bachelor's or higher	20%	35%	37%
Experienced family stress in past year	27%	13%	23%
Parent reads to/encourages child to read	80%	90%	89%

We know from past years that students with more risk factors are less likely to be proficient on school readiness items. *These results indicate the Invest Early program mitigates the multiple and compounding challenges faced by Invest Early students.*

Families gain social support and improve home learning.

Parents and staff are asked to assess families in several areas at both the beginning and end of the program year. Parents self-report the extent to which they have a support system they can rely on to help them with parenting. Staff rate parents' involvement in their child's education and observed stress. Finally, Invest Early staff members visit participating children's homes and talk with parents about the benefits of providing an educational learning environment at home.

While little change was observed from beginning to end of the year, in the spring, 89% of parents report strong social support networks, and staff observed 73% of parents being involved in their child's education. Improvements were seen in the following three areas:

- Parents reported an increase in having someone to share parenting duties with.
- Staff observed parents more frequently having conversations dropping off or picking up her/his child.
- Staff observed parents more frequently volunteering in classroom or for special activities.

Staff observed 90% of families having quality home learning environments, with 7 of 15 items improving from start to end of the year:

- Child has age/developmentally appropriate **books, music, toys, and art supplies** (4 items).
- Child **gets out of house** to play and explore.
- Parent encourages **alphabet** and reading a few words, and learning **numbers** (2 items).

Itasca County 5th-graders outperform peers statewide.

This year, low-income fifth-graders who participated in Invest Early in 2011-12 and the low-income comparison group had statistically similar test scores, and a larger proportion of higher-income students were meeting or exceeding standards than either low-income group. The performance gap by income is about 11-15 percentage points. Despite this performance gap, both low-income groups performed above low-income students statewide by about 15 percentage points, indicating potential county-wide impacts of Invest Early.

Itasca County 5th graders meeting or exceeding standards on MCAs, spring 2018, compared to state averages

Domain	Low income, Invest Early N=100	Low income, no ECE N=117	Higher income N=191	Statewide	Statewide, low income
Reading	64%	68%	79%*	68%	49%
Math	50%	54%	65%*	55%	35%

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Implementation of Invest Early	2
Invest Early serves higher-risk children and families.....	2
Invest Early has high quality classrooms.....	8
Impacts on families	9
Families gain social support and improve home learning.	9
Outcomes for children.....	10
Most Invest Early children are meeting developmental milestones in the spring.	10
Invest Early kindergarteners face more risk factors than their peers, yet are equally prepared.....	11
Appendix: Evaluation methods and redesign	16

Figures

1. Characteristics of children served in year 13	3
2. Parents' education and employment in year 13.....	4
3. Percentage of children experiencing risk factors at entry into the program by type	4
4. Changeable risk factors at program entry by age at entrance to Invest Early, year 13	5
5. Ameliorable risk factors at program entry by age at entrance to Invest Early, year 13	6
6. Number of days attended, by age, year 13	7
7. Percentage of scheduled days students attend, year 13	7
8. Average ratings on CLASS indicators, 2017-18, spring	8
9. Percentage of Invest Early participants on target in spring 2018.....	11
10. Characteristics of entering kindergarten students by group, fall 2018.....	12
11. Kindergarten readiness, fall 2018.....	12
12. Invest Early participants' third grade test scores compared with low-income peers without Invest Early participation and rest of classmates, 2017-18.....	14
13. Invest Early participants' fifth grade test scores compared with low-income peers without Invest Early participation and rest of classmates, 2017-18.....	15

Introduction

With support from the Blandin Foundation, Invest Early is a comprehensive early childhood collaborative in Itasca County, Minnesota, that serves young children and their families with risk factors that may impede school success. Children qualify for Invest Early educational and family support services based on a combination of risk factors and income. The core services consist of early childhood education, parent education, health services, and extended-day child care, delivered five days a week, 12 hours per day, year round in 26 classrooms at 10 sites across eight towns and four school districts (Deer River, Grand Rapids, Greenway, and Nashwauk-Keewatin). Parents may also access a variety of support services based on their need or interest, including family development, home visits, mental health support, and transportation.

The collaborative, seamless nature of the project promotes service integration across agencies and school districts throughout the county and professional development to all Invest Early staff and others interested in early childhood care and education (parents, grandparents, and child care providers). A county-wide staff development and training plan has been implemented in partnership with Itasca Community College and Mayville State University to enable all those interested in working in early childhood to pursue a career ladder of training resulting in early childhood teacher licensure.

This report describes the children and families who were reached in year 13 of the program, which includes the summer of 2017 and the 2017-18 school year, as well as impacts on the children and families served relative to other Itasca County children who have not been served by the program.

Implementation of Invest Early

The implementation of Invest Early comprehensive services is being monitored by the Invest Early Leadership Team as described in their annual program report. This section provides a profile of Invest Early service quality and service participants, including demographic characteristics, risk factors, and types and amount of participation. It also presents results of a feedback survey with parents regarding their own and their child's experiences with Invest Early staff and services.

Invest Early serves higher-risk children and families.

In year 13, 517 children age 5 and younger and 445 families participated in Invest Early, compared with about 460 children in years 11 and 12. This increase is due to the addition of one infant/toddler classroom and two 3-year-old classrooms, as well as slight increases in class sizes at the preschool level.

Characteristics of children

Fifteen% of participating children were age 2 or younger, 26% were age 3, and 56% were age 4 or older on September 1, 2017. In terms of gender, 52% of Invest Early children are boys, and 48% are girls (Figure 1). Four racial and ethnic groups are represented among the participants: white (76%), American Indian (17%), black or African American (5%), and Hispanic or Latino (2%). Of note is the increasing percentage of American Indian children being served, from 4% in year 2 to 17% this year, much higher than the proportion of American Indian children in the county (excluding county children who are multiracial). Invest Early children live in households with a median income of \$24,353 per year, less than half that of the county overall, and about a third (32%) live in single-parent households.

1. Characteristics of children served in year 13

Gender	Invest Early children (N=517)	Itasca County population under age 5
Male	52%	51%
Female	48%	49%
Race/ethnicity		
White	76%	84%
American Indian	17%	5%
Black or African American	5%	1%
Hispanic or Latino	2%	3%
Asian	0%	1%
Multiracial	0%	6%
Household income		Itasca County households with children
Mean	\$34,886	\$56,235 (median for households with children under 18); 20% of children under 6 live in poverty
Median	\$24,353	
Range	\$0 – \$265,000	
Household type		Households with children under age 6
Two parent	59%	64%
Single parent	32%	36%
Living with grandparents or foster care	10%	NA

Notes. Race and gender estimates are from U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 Population Estimates. Household income and type estimates are from U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-16 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

Characteristics of parents

Figure 2 shows the current educational levels and employment status of Invest Early parents. About 95% of parents have at least a high school diploma. Two-thirds of mothers and 80% of fathers are working, with fathers more likely than mothers to be working more than 25 hours per week (75% vs. 56%).

2. Parents' education and employment in year 13

Education	Mothers N=385	Fathers N=278
Less than a high school diploma	6%	8%
High school or GED	26%	31%
Trade school or some college	29%	29%
Associate degree	22%	17%
Bachelor's degree	14%	10%
Graduate or professional degree	3%	5%
Employment		
Not working	31%	20%
Working 25 hours or less per week	13%	5%
Working more than 25 hours per week	56%	75%

Notes. Includes parents who live in the child's household and those who do not live with the child. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding. Data are missing on mothers for 15% of children and on fathers for 38% of children.

Risk factors faced by Invest Early families

In addition to low income, 78% of Invest Early children are experiencing at least one risk factors. On average, children are experiencing four risk factors (low-income, plus three other risk factors).

3. Percentage of children experiencing risk factors

Percent with at least one additional risk factor	78%
Range number of additional risk factors	0 – 15
Mean number of additional risk factors	3.3
Median number of additional risk factors	3.0

Staff tracked two types of risk factors each family faced when they entered the program that impact child development:

1) **changeable** risk factors that can theoretically be resolved by an appropriate health, social service, or relationship-based intervention. In addition to low income, 62% of Invest Early children have experienced another changeable risk factor, most commonly a developmental delay, isolation, or living with extended family (Figure 4).

2) **ameliorable** risk factors that staff can help families cope with but cannot be completely resolved. Two-thirds (68%) are living with chronic, but ameliorable risk factors. Notably, almost half (49%) have experienced family stress in the past year. Other common ameliorable risk factors include being single parent families and high-risk pregnancy or birth (Figure 5).

4. Changeable risk factors at program entry by age at entrance to Invest Early, year 13

Type of risk factor	Percent of families with risk factor			
	0-2-year-olds (N=220)	3-year-olds (N=172)	4-5-year-olds (N=125)	All (N=517)
History or evidence of delays reaching developmental milestones	43%	17%	24%	30%
Child has no other opportunity for socialization with peers - isolation	42%	11%	16%	25%
Living with extended family	30%	18%	13%	22%
Perception of child by family as being a problem child/behavior concerns	21%	13%	12%	16%
Changed residence 2 or more times in past year	26%	8%	9%	16%
Eligible for social assistance, not getting or refusing it or sanctioned	21%	12%	2%	14%
Attachment concerns, severe separation anxiety	19%	9%	8%	13%
Homeless or in foster care	18%	3%	10%	11%
Primary caregiver without GED/HS diploma	11%	6%	3%	8%
Referred but not qualified/or refused assessment, assessment in process	10%	4%	<1%	6%

Note. Does not include low-income risk factor.

5. Ameliorable risk factors at program entry by age at entrance to Invest Early, year 13

Type of risk factor	Percent of families with risk factor			
	0-2-year-olds (N=220)	3-year-olds (N=172)	4-5-year-olds (N=125)	All (N=517)
Family stress in the past year (death, divorce, unemployment, incarceration)	66%	36%	37%	49%
Single parent/family or other primary caregiver	51%	29%	29%	38%
History of high-risk pregnancy or birth (multiple)	31%	16%	7%	20%
Medical concerns: premature birth, low birth weight, birth defects, fetal alcohol syndrome/effect, allergies	32%	13%	6%	19%
History of chemical abuse in family, sexual or psychological abuse/neglect	27%	6%	10%	16%
Chronic illness or disability in family	21%	4%	6%	12%
Pregnant with first child or parent was a teenager when 1st child was born	18%	5%	4%	10%
Teen parent at birth	7%	2%	<1%	4%
Chronic illness of child	4%	<1%	<1%	2%
English is not primary language	0%	0%	0%	0%

Children's classroom attendance

During the 2017-18 program year, 517 children received early care and education services from Invest Early. A quarter (23%) received a mix of formal instruction and extended-day child care on either the same or different day than they attended the regular days. On average, children attended 102 days of programming (Figure 6).

6. Number of days attended, by age, year 13

Total number of days	0-2-year-olds (N=79)	3-year-olds (N=134)	4-5-year-olds (N=304)	All (N=517)
1-22	4%	5%	8%	6%
23-44	6%	5%	15%	11%
45-66	9%	20%	3%	8%
67-88	5%	5%	9%	7%
89-110	9%	13%	12%	12%
111-132	19%	27%	39%	33%
133 or more	48%	25%	15%	22%
Mean	119	104	96	102
Median	130	113	114	115
Range	5 – 192	3 – 189	3 – 195	3 – 195

Note. Each month contains approximately 22 workdays, which means that each row corresponds roughly with a month of attending 5 days per week. Summer was from 6-5-2017 to 8-11-2017, and school year was 9-11-17 to 5-31-2018.

Of the 517 children served during the year, 462 were served during the school year (September through May). Most (70%) of these children had a high level of overall attendance, attending at least 85% of their scheduled program days (Figure 7). During the summer of 2017, 156 children attended Invest Early, with 49% having high attendance in the summer. Overall, the attendance rate was lower in the summer, with children attending 79% of their scheduled days (on average), compared with 86% of their scheduled days (on average) during the school year.

7. Percentage of scheduled days students attend, year 13

	Summer (N=156)	School year (N=462)
Low attendance (<70% of scheduled days)	26%	9%
Medium attendance (70-84% of scheduled days)	26%	21%
High attendance (85% or more of scheduled days)	49%	70%
Average attendance rate	79%	86%

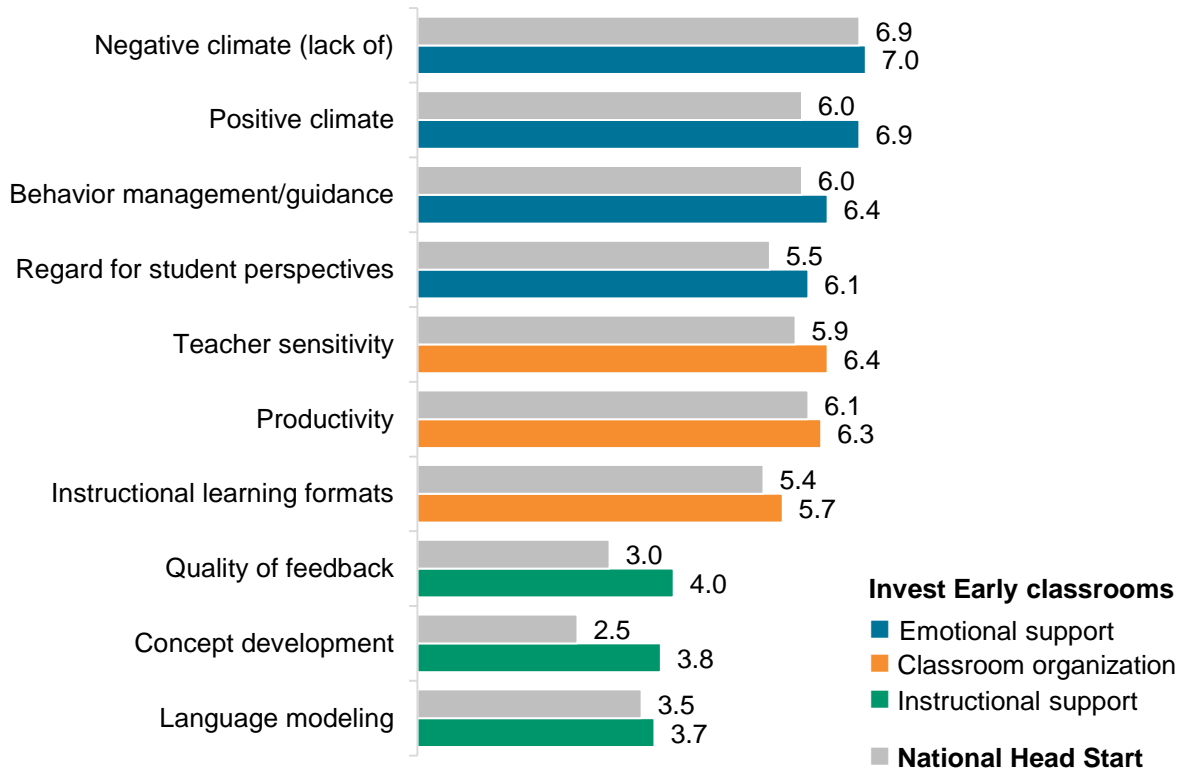
Note. Summer was from 6-5-2017 to 8-11-2017, and school year was 9-11-17 to 5-31-2018.

Invest Early has high quality classrooms.

In 2017-18, Invest Early administered the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) in 22 classrooms in the fall and the spring. The CLASS includes 10 indicators that measure emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support within the classroom environment. Indicators are rated on a 7-point scale, with scores of six and seven being considered high range, three through five as midrange, and one and two as low range.¹

Emotional support is a definite strength of Invest Early classrooms. Of note, all classrooms rated highly on climate. Classroom organization items were also generally rated high quality. While instructional support items rated lowest, they were still rated moderate quality (3.8, on average). Invest Early classrooms, including KOOTASCA Head Start, averaged higher ratings on all items than Head Start classrooms nationally.²

8. Average ratings on CLASS indicators, 2017-18, spring



¹ The CLASS assessment has one item that is rated in reverse, with a score of one equal to highest quality. These ratings were converted to fit on the same scale as other items for easier reporting.

² Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. (2018). *A National Overview of Grantee CLASS® Scores in 2017*. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services website: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/data-ongoing-monitoring/article/national-overview-grantee-classr-scores-2017>

Impacts on families

Families gain social support and improve home learning.

Parents and staff are asked to assess families in several areas at both the beginning and end of the program years. Parents self-report the extent to which they have a support system they can rely on to help them with parenting. Staff rate parents' involvement in their child's education, and observed stress. Finally, Invest Early staff members visit participating children's homes and talk with parents about the benefits of providing an educational learning environment at home.

At both time periods, 89% of parents report large and fairly strong social support networks and staff observed 73% of parents being involved in their child's education. This lack of change may be in part because some families have been participating for multiple years. The following items, however, did show change:

- Parents reported an increase in the frequency of having someone to share parenting duties with.
- Staff observed an increase in parents having conversations dropping off or picking up her/his child.
- Staff observed an increase in parents volunteering in classroom or for special activities.

In addition, staff observed 90% of families having quality home learning environments, with 7 of 15 items improving from start to end of the year:

- Child has age/developmentally appropriate books, music, toys, art supplies (4 items).
- Child gets out of house to play and explore.
- Parent encourages alphabet and reading a few words, and learning numbers (2 items).

At the end of the year, however, staff did observe 18% of parents struggling with personal or family worries, and 24% seemed overwhelmed or stressed.

Outcomes for children

Most Invest Early children are meeting developmental milestones in the spring.

Infants/toddlers

At the end of year 13, 88% of the children under age 3 were in the normal range of development on five of the GOLD domains (Figure 9). All were on target in cognitive and physical skills.

Preschoolers

Three-quarters of 3-year-old preschoolers (76%) were within the normal range on all developmental domains at the end of year 13 (Figure 9). All preschoolers demonstrated age-appropriate physical readiness, and a high proportion (86-89%) were also demonstrating age-appropriate skills in the other domains.

Prekindergartners

A majority of students age 4 and 5 were on target in the GOLD domains, with 76% or more demonstrating age-appropriate skills in each domain and 71% demonstrating age-appropriate skills on all domains (Figure 9). Across all prekindergarten classrooms, math was the weakest area, with three-quarters of students demonstrating age-expectations. Literacy was mixed, with 97% demonstrating age-expectations on the GOLD; however, just 37% were within the normal range on the Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI).

9. Percentage of Invest Early participants on target in spring 2018

GOLD Domains^a	Infants/toddlers (Under age 3)	Preschoolers (Age 3)	Prekindergartners (Age 4-5)
Literacy	89%	89%	97%
Social-Emotional	98%	89%	86%
Language	97%	89%	87%
Cognitive	100%	87%	86%
Math	98%	86%	76%
Physical	100%	100%	99%
On target in all 6 domains	88%	76%	71%
Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI)^b			N=226
Letter sounds	—	—	49%
Letter naming	—	—	64%
Language	—	—	67%
On target on all three	—	—	37%

^a Age groups for GOLD are based on the age indicated in the file; age groups for the IGDI are based on child's age on September 1, 2017 when they started the year.

^b Prekindergartners' literacy and math skills are also assessed using the IGDI.

Invest Early kindergarteners face more risk factors than their peers, yet are equally prepared.

Itasca County 2018-19 kindergarten class

Kindergarten readiness scores are available for 448 students starting kindergarten in the 2017-18 school year, including 103 who were in Invest Early, 101 students in a comparison group who are low income (as indicated by free and reduced lunch status), and 110 higher-income students who were not in public preschool.

Both the low-income comparison group and the higher-income students face fewer risk factors (Figure 10). Of note, students who did not participate in Invest Early are more likely to be older, have less than two risk factors, and higher-educated parents, compared to Invest Early students who are more likely to have IEPs, experienced family stress in the last year and have very low incomes.

10. Characteristics of entering kindergarten students by group, fall 2018

	Invest Early N=103	Low income, no Invest Early N=101	Higher income N=111
Kindergarten readiness (75% of total points)	59%	60%	54%
Average age (in months)	66.6	67.2	68.1
Two or more risk factors	30%	14%	23%
Responding parent has bachelor's or higher	20%	35%	37%
Student has IEP or ILLP	25%	8%	14%
Experienced family stress in past year	27%	13%	23%
Very low income (less than \$35,000 per year)	29%	16%	20%
Parent reads to/encourages child to read	80%	90%	89%

Kindergarten readiness results

This year, over half (56%) of Itasca County kindergarteners demonstrated kindergarten readiness – that is they scored 75% or higher using Minnesota Work Sampling System Kindergarten Entry Developmental Checklist, an observational assessment conducted by kindergarten teachers. Though there was no difference between Invest Early and other students when looking at the 75% standard, there was a 7 percentage point difference in who averaged a “proficient” score (2.5 or higher), with Invest Early students slightly more likely to be proficient (Figure 11). We know from past years that students with more risk factors are less likely to be proficient on work sampling items, and two-thirds of Invest Early students face risk factors that cannot be supported, but not changed. ***These results indicate the Invest Early program appears to mitigate the multiple and compounding challenges faced by Invest Early students.***

11. Kindergarten readiness, fall 2018

Personal and social development	Low income (receive F/R lunch)		Higher income (do not receive F/R lunch)	
	Invest Early N=103	No Invest Early N=101	Invest Early N=97	No Invest Early N=110
Not yet	5%	3%	3%	3%
In process	42%	45%	44%	51%
Proficient	53%	52%	53%	46%

Note. May not equal 100% due to rounding. The 75% score was tested for accuracy by Dr. Arthur Reynolds for the Minnesota Early Learning Council.

11. Kindergarten readiness, fall 2018 (continued)

	Low income		Higher income	
	Invest Early N=103	No Invest Early N=101	Invest Early N=97	No Invest Early N=110
Language and literacy				
Not yet	5%	2%	9%	5%
In process	44%	45%	36%	44%
Proficient	51%	53%	55%	52%
Mathematical thinking				
Not yet	6%	7%	4%	5%
In process	47%	48%	45%	48%
Proficient	48%	46%	51%	47%
The arts				
Not yet	2%	1%	4%	2%
In process	38%	38%	25%	38%
Proficient	60%	61%	71%	60%
Physical development and health				
Not yet	4%	1%	2%	1%
In process	27%	31%	27%	33%
Proficient	69%	68%	71%	66%
Combined domains (mean scores)				
Not yet (1.0-1.5)	3%	1%	3%	1%
Inconsistent (above 1.5 to 2.0)	17%	15%	14%	15%
Nearly proficient (above 2.0-2.5)	16%	26%	18%	27%
Proficient (above 2.5)	65%	58%	65%	57%
75% of total score	59%	60%	61%	54%

Note. May not equal 100% due to rounding. The 75% score was tested for accuracy by Dr. Arthur Reynolds for the Minnesota Early Learning Council.

2017-18 third grade test scores (2014-15 kindergarten class)

Of the 526 children who entered kindergarten in the four Invest Early school districts in fall 2014, 401 (76%) took the MCA reading and math tests in one of the four districts in spring 2018 during third grade. Of those, 131 low-income children participated in Invest Early; 88 were part of a comparison group of children from low-income families with no Invest Early, Head Start, or School Readiness program experience; and 171 other classmates were from families with higher incomes, defined as not eligible for free or reduced lunch.

About 40% of the low-income Invest Early students were meeting or exceeding standards in reading or math (Figure 12). In comparison, 62% and 76% of higher-income students, respectively, were meeting or exceeding the MCA-III standards.

12. Invest Early participants' third grade test scores compared with low-income peers without Invest Early participation and rest of classmates, 2017-18

Domain	Low income, Invest Early N=131	Low income, no ECE N=88	Higher income N=171	Statewide	Statewide, low income
Reading					
Does not meet standards	46%*	26%	20%	28%	45%
Partially meets standards	14%	18%	17%	16%	18%
Meets standards	32%*	46%	45%	42%	32%
Exceeds standards	8%	9%	18%*	15%	5%
Summary – meeting or exceeding standards	40%*	55%	62%	57%	37%
Math					
Does not meet standards	21%	22%	6%*	16%	30%
Partially meets standards	32%*	14%	18%	17%	23%
Meets standards	34%	42%	53%*	39%	35%
Exceeds standards	13%	23%	23%	28%	12%
Summary – meeting or exceeding standards	43%*	65%	76%	67%	47%

Note. Higher income combines higher income with and without early childhood education.

* Statistically significant differences. May not equal 100% due to rounding.

2017-18 fifth grade test scores (2012-13 kindergarten class)

Of the 573 children who entered kindergarten in the four Invest Early school districts in 2012-13, 432 (75%) took the MCA reading and math tests in one of the four districts in 2017-18 during fifth grade. Of those, 100 low-income children participated in Invest Early; 117 were part of a comparison group of children from low-income families with no Invest Early, Head Start, or School Readiness program experience; and 191 other classmates were from families with higher incomes, defined as not eligible for free or reduced lunch.

This year, low-income fifth-graders who participated in Invest Early and the low-income comparison group had statistically similar test scores, and a larger proportion of higher-income students were meeting or exceeding standards than either low-income group. The performance gap by income is about 11-15 percentage points. Despite this income gap, both low-income groups performed similarly to students statewide, and above low-income students statewide by about 15 percentage points, indicating potential county-wide impacts of Invest Early (Figure 13).

13. Invest Early participants' fifth grade test scores compared with low-income peers without Invest Early participation and rest of classmates, 2017-18

Domain	Low income, Invest Early N=100	Low income, no ECE N=117	Higher income N=191	Statewide	Statewide, low income
Reading					
Does not meet standards	13%	15%	7%	15%	27%
Partially meets standards	23%	18%	14%	17%	24%
Meets standards	50%	56%	61%	48%	41%
Exceeds standards	14%	11%	18%	20%	8%
Summary – meeting or exceeding standards	64%	68%	79%*	68%	49%
Math					
Does not meet standards	17%	22%	13%	21%	37%
Partially meets standards	33%*	24%	22%	23%	28%
Meets standards	36%	38%	48%	37%	28%
Exceeds standards	14%	16%	17%	18%	7%
Summary – meeting or exceeding standards	50%	54%	65%*	55%	35%

Note. Higher income combines higher income with and without early childhood education.

* Statistically significant differences. May not equal 100% due to rounding.

Appendix: Evaluation methods and redesign

Expected outcomes of Invest Early

Invest Early aims to show that investing in parents and in children's school readiness will ultimately yield economic returns to the community, including a more skilled workforce with higher earnings, as well as reduced spending for special education, out-of-home placements for children, juvenile delinquency, and substance abuse treatment.

In the short term, Invest Early aims to improve children's school readiness by improving the system of early childhood care and education, strengthening and empowering families, and promoting healthy child development.

The evaluation is measuring the following mutually reinforcing outcomes that Invest Early expects to achieve:

- Strong and empowered families, demonstrating self-sufficiency and positive parenting behaviors that support school readiness
- Healthy children, demonstrating optimal growth and development, with a special emphasis on improving the school readiness of children age 5 and younger with risk factors that may impede school success
- Improved efficiency and coordination of early learning and other services, quality of early childhood care and education, and access to family support resources for low-income and high-need families with young children

Evaluation methods

When Invest Early started, leaders partnered with Wilder Research to develop and implement a longitudinal evaluation plan that tracked a comparison group of students that entered Itasca County schools the year prior to Invest Early's inaugural year. Data were collected on both the comparison group and the Invest Early students at various intervals over time.

After 12 years of implementing the longitudinal design, Invest Early leaders determined they were interested in learning more about:

- The demographic, social, and economic trends in Itasca County since Invest Early's inception
- What makes Invest Early successful, and what improvements are needed
- The state of early childhood programming nationally

As such, the evaluation is in transition, as the Leadership Team and Evaluation Team explore new research methods. This year 13 report contains similar, though abbreviated data, as collected in past years. The year 14 report will contain new data focused on county-wide indicators, parent interviews, and national research findings.

Evaluation tools and responsibilities

The Invest Early evaluation tools include: the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Social Support for School Readiness Survey (developed by Invest Early), The HOME (positive parent-child interaction and home environment scales), Parent Involvement Survey (adapted by Wilder Research from Project Apple Seed Report Card), Staff Observation of Parent Involvement (developed by Wilder Research), child developmental assessments (Teaching Strategies GOLD, Individual Growth and Development Indicators, and KLST 2 – an oral language screen), the Minnesota Work Sampling System Kindergarten Entry Developmental Checklist, and a parent survey at kindergarten entry (Wilder Research).

Invest Early is responsible for conducting intake, tracking attendance and referrals, administering or coordinating collection of process and outcome data, and transferring data to TIES and Infinite Campus for storage or to Wilder Research for data processing. Wilder Research conducts the statistical analysis and prepares this report for internal use and a summary for public dissemination.

The kindergarten readiness assessment

When Invest Early began in 2005, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) had implemented a customized developmental assessment tool and method derived from the Work Sampling System to assess the school readiness of Minnesota children.

The Minnesota Work Sampling System Kindergarten Entry Developmental Checklist^{®2} assesses skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments in six domains: personal and social development, approaches to learning, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, creativity and the arts, and physical development. MDE, working with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, selected the indicators because they represent what children should know and be able to do at the end of the year before they enter kindergarten based on developmental expectations for 4-year-olds. These standards are documented in the 2005 MDE report, *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards*, which provides a framework for understanding and communicating the standards or a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for children age 3 through 5.

Starting in fall 2005, Invest Early adopted the MDE school readiness methods, and trains kindergarten teachers in the four school districts in Itasca County to use the checklist and complete one for each child in their classroom during the first six to eight weeks of the fall quarter. For each indicator, teachers rate the child’s performance as “not yet,” “in process,” or “proficient.”

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