DULUTH PRESCHOOL HEAD START

DULUTH PRESCHOOL
START STRONG • STAY STRONG

Annual Report 23-24

The Annual Report to the Public is shared with the Duluth School Board Committee of the Whole in October or November each year.

These meetings are open to the public and are recorded and uploaded to the district's YouTube Channel.

It is also brought to our Parent Policy Council, Planning Team and a hard copy is made available for staff. Finally,

Finally, a digital copy is placed on our website.

75%
average monthly enrollment in September 2023

→

89%
average monthly enrollment after Change of Scope in November 2023

→

181
total children & families served in the 2023-24 school year.

Average monthly enrollment for the 2023-24 school year started at approximately 75% of our total enrollment. A change of scope was submitted to reduce our total enrollment from 224 to 190 to help address this under enrollment, which went into effect in November of 2023. This changed that percentage to roughly 89% per month. We have been able to maintain full enrollment for the year with this new total number.

2138
total number of three and four year old's in Duluth.

→

367
qualify for Head Start

→

50%
were served in our program
181 total

There are approximately 2,134 three and four year old children living in Duluth. With a poverty rate of 17%, 367 of these children would qualify for Head Start. Serving 181 children last year meant that we served roughly half of the eligible three and four year olds.

MISSION

We offered preschool services in seven of Duluth's elementary schools, but have added Congdon Park as a site for the current year! Our state funded Head Start program offers home visiting services to families- including families experiencing homelessness. This includes 17 spots reserved for children from birth through age three. Many preschool age children whose families are experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act are bussed to their home schools while their families are without housing.

FUNDING

FEDERAL HEAD START BUDGET
$2,805,246

This number includes our base grant and additional COLA and QI funds that were awarded. This money funds personnel ($2,336,804).

The remainder is spent on things that support staff to work district wide to support families- cell phones, taxi services for families, mileage reimbursement, and classroom supplies. Indirect costs to the district also come out of this budget. From this budget $28,958 is earmarked for training and technical assistance for both staff and families. This money funds us to serve 190 children. Last year our numbers hovered around 180 because we had many classroom teams struggling with challenging behavior. Increasing staff capacity to manage difficult behaviors has to be balanced with maintaining safety in classrooms.

PATHWAYS II EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP AWARD
$191,040

This money supports the classroom with additional paraprofessional assistance to reduce the class size and assist in serving food in the classrooms. We serve breakfast, lunch, and snacks in our full day classrooms. In our half day classrooms we serve either breakfast and lunch or lunch and snack. Serving meals in our rooms allows us the opportunity to both provide nutritious meals and nutrition education, support self-help skills, and language skills by engaging in discussions at the table.

STATE HEAD START BUDGET
$559,085.92

These funds provide our program the opportunity to offer several unique ways to support families.

Families in Transition staff are supporting 18 children whose families are experiencing homelessness. Homelessness of families with very young children is on the rise in Duluth. We have 12 slots for Early Head Start (pregnant mothers to age 3) and 5 preschool slots. Many preschool aged children whose families are experiencing homelessness, are bussed to preschool classrooms that parents have identified as the schools they plan on attending for kindergarten under the McKinney Vento Act,

State funding also supports our Home Base option for 10 families who, for many reasons, cannot access our classrooms across the city. $445,841 is dedicated to staff wages and fringe benefits, while the remainder is spent on things to support staff such as cell phones, taxi services, socializations, doctor appointments, classroom supplies, and mileage reimbursements.

AUDIT

The audit that was done for the 2021-2022 school year shows there were no audit findings for Head Start. A copy of the audit is available through our office. Follow the contact information at the end of this report. Each department is audited in a bi-annual basis, we expect Head Start to be audited during this years audit.

FEDERAL REVIEW

Our program underwent a Federal Review in May 2024.
Seven strong practices were identified, along with one area of non-compliance: 13 out of 166 children did not have an oral health determination (8%). We were unclear about what this actually was, but have since learned and created a procedure to better document who is not up to date on their dental check ups and actions taken to support becoming up to date.

STRONG PRACTICES IDENTIFIED

- Formalized systems that remove barriers for parents to participate in Policy Council
- Use ongoing program data to innovate in the classroom based needs of individual or subgroups of children
- Regularly offers families information or activities designed to support families' mental health and wellness
- Solicits and uses inputs from families to improve programming
- Provides economic mobility support to help families with pathways out of poverty
- Continuously evaluates the success of recruitment strategies and adjusts as appropriate
- Provides targeted support for children and families who are at risk of low attendance, including addressing individualized needs and community wide issues

CELEBRATING ALL FAMILIES

Duluth Preschool believes that ALL children should have strong bodies, strong minds, and strong families.

We are fortunate to serve a diverse population of children and families. Demographic makeup of our students for the 2023-24 school year was:

1% Asian
3% Hispanic/ Latino
12% American Indian
15% Black
40% White
28% Mixed Race

Our program also had 10 Dual Language Learners.

STRONG BODIES

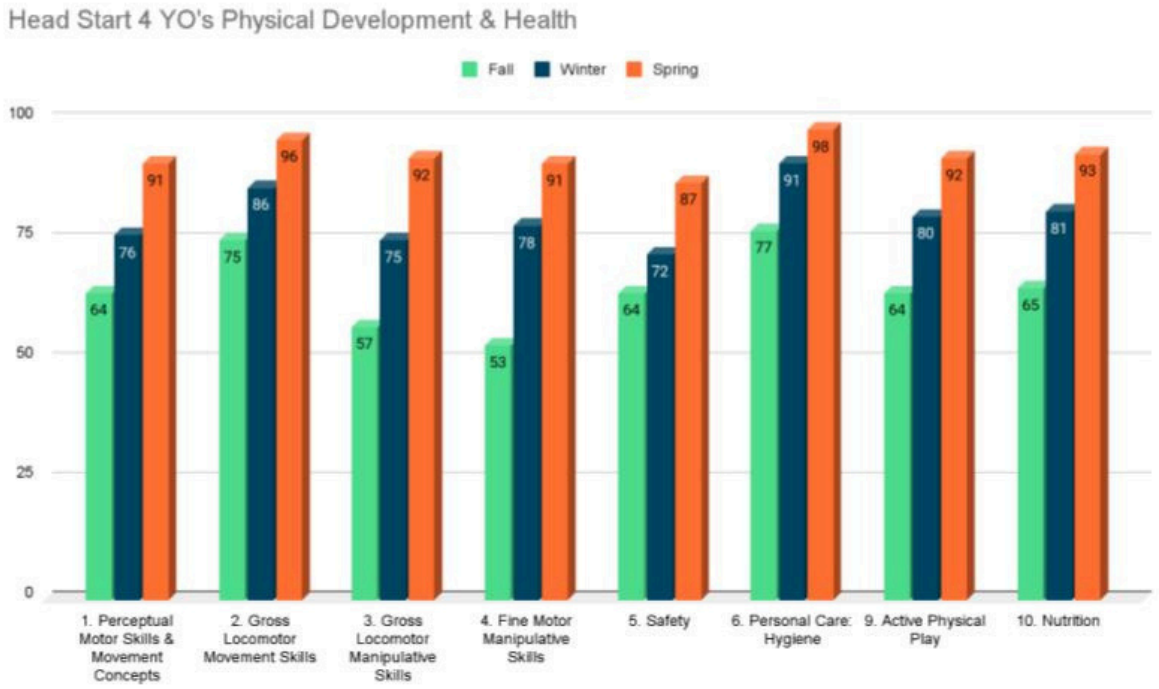
Addressing Health Needs

Part of the comprehensive service provided by Head Start is to assist families with their health needs.

By the end of the year...	Percent of Children
Health Insurance	97%
Medical Home	94%
Received Presentative Dental Care	80%

Health Statistics	Begininning of the year	End of the Year
Up to date on Annual Physicals	10%	69%
Up to date on Immunizations	87%	97%

CHILDREN'S GROWTH IN THE AREA OF PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH



NUTRITION SERVICES

A licensed nutritionist works with families to support access to healthy foods, including students with special dietary needs.

COLLABORATION WITH THE YMCA

With our YMCA collaboration, 72 preschool children went to a six-week anti-drowning program at the Y called, "Safety Around Water." 286 day passes were distributed to families.

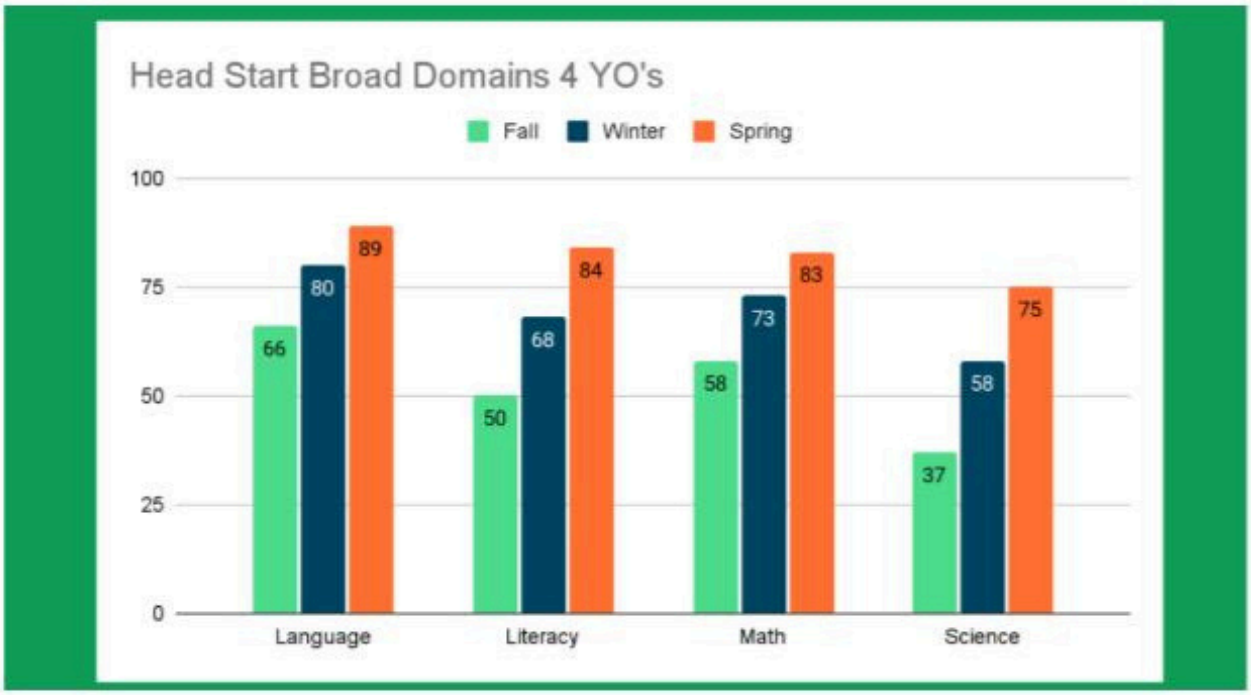
GETTING CHILDREN SAFELY TO PRESCHOOL

119 children rode safely to school following the implementation of Safe Delivery of Preschool Children training for parents and bus drivers.

STRONG MINDS

Preparing Children for Kindergarten

Our assessment tool is the Desired Results Developmental Profile. It measures all domains of learning. Data is collected three times per year. The following graph shows how Head Start 4 year olds performed in the broad domains of Language, Literacy, Math, and Science



27%

of our children started the year receiving Special Education Services

44%

of children in our program received services from Special Education by the end of the year

Number of Head Start Students Receiving Special Education in our Program over the last two years

Beginning of the year 22/23	End of year 22-23	Beginning of the year 23/24	End of the Year 23/24
12%	27%	27%	44%

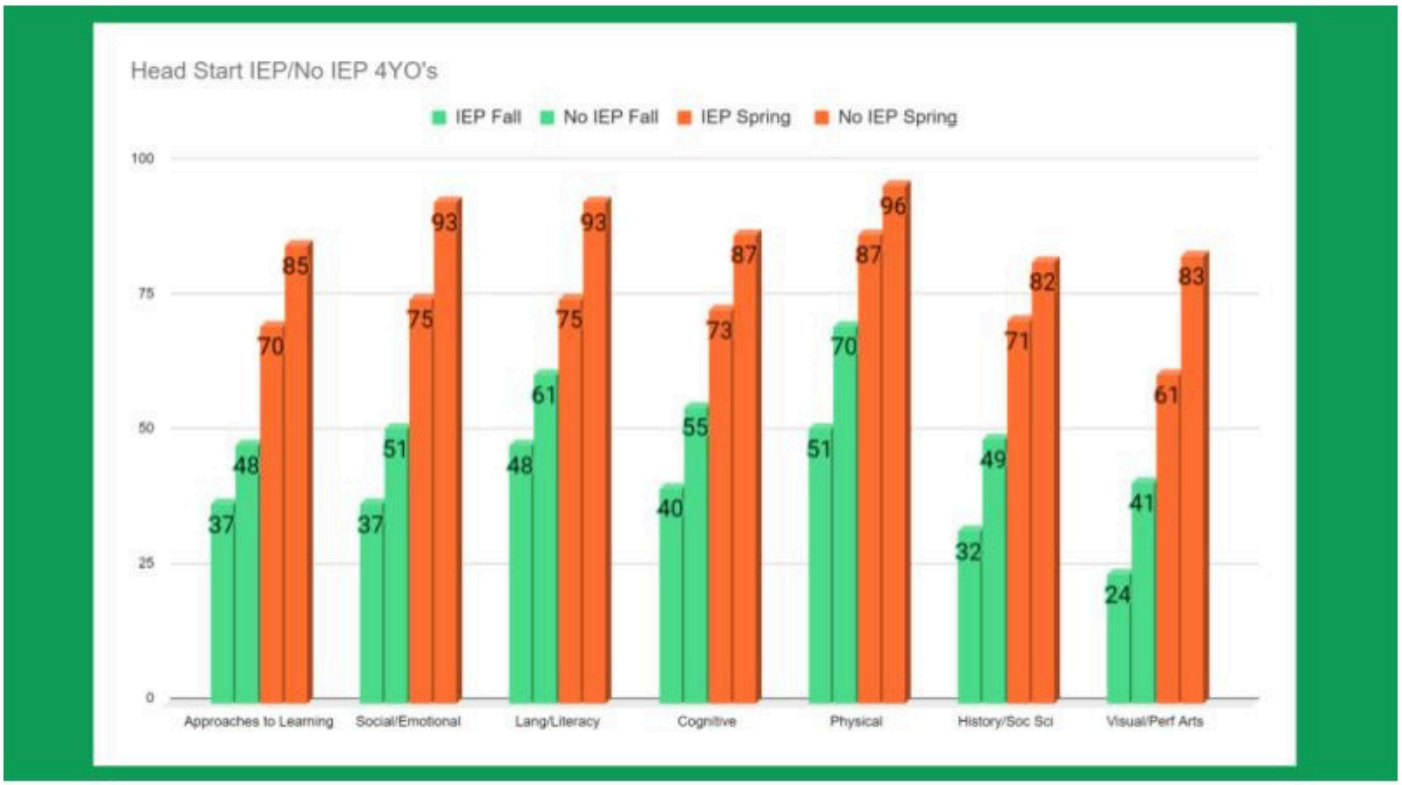
What Type of Delay?

Speech/ Language	25%
Non-categorical Developmental Delay	73%
Emotional Disturbance	1%
Other Health Impairment	1%

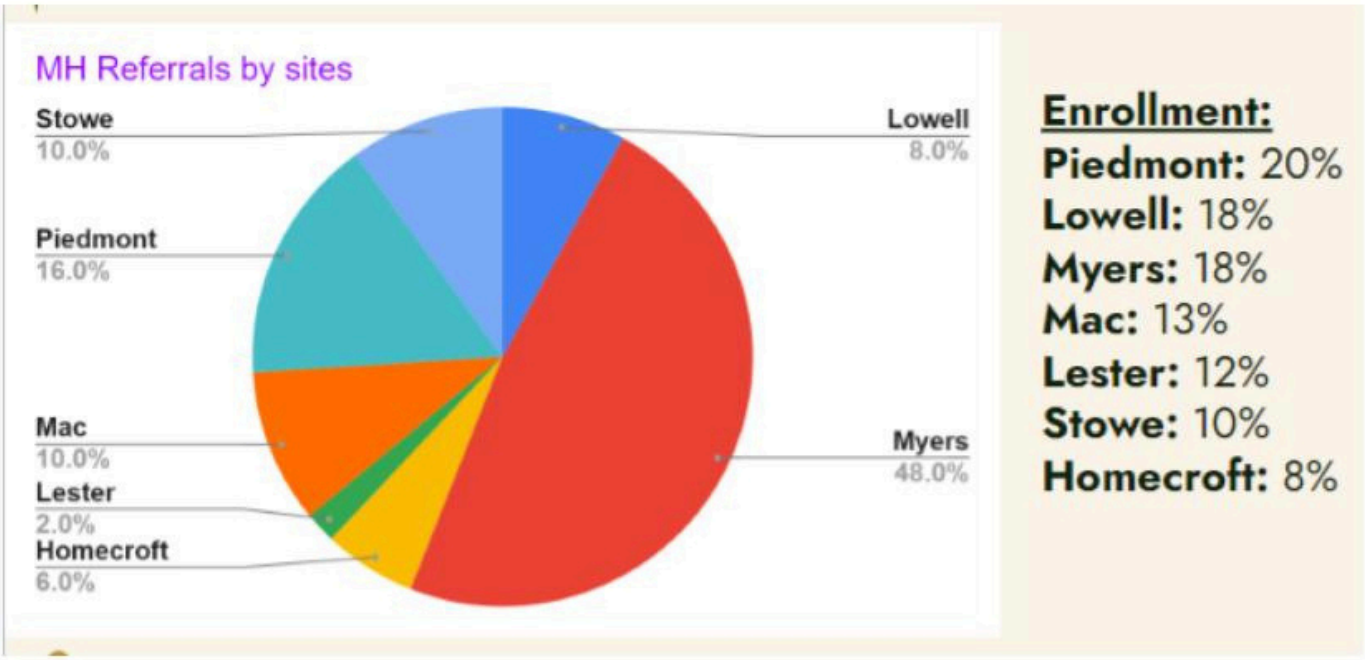
As a fully inclusive program, we pay close attention to the achievement of students on IEPs, making sure their rate of growth is similar to all other student groups. The following graph illustrates student growth for Head Start 4 year olds with IEPs.

2023-2024 End of Year Data

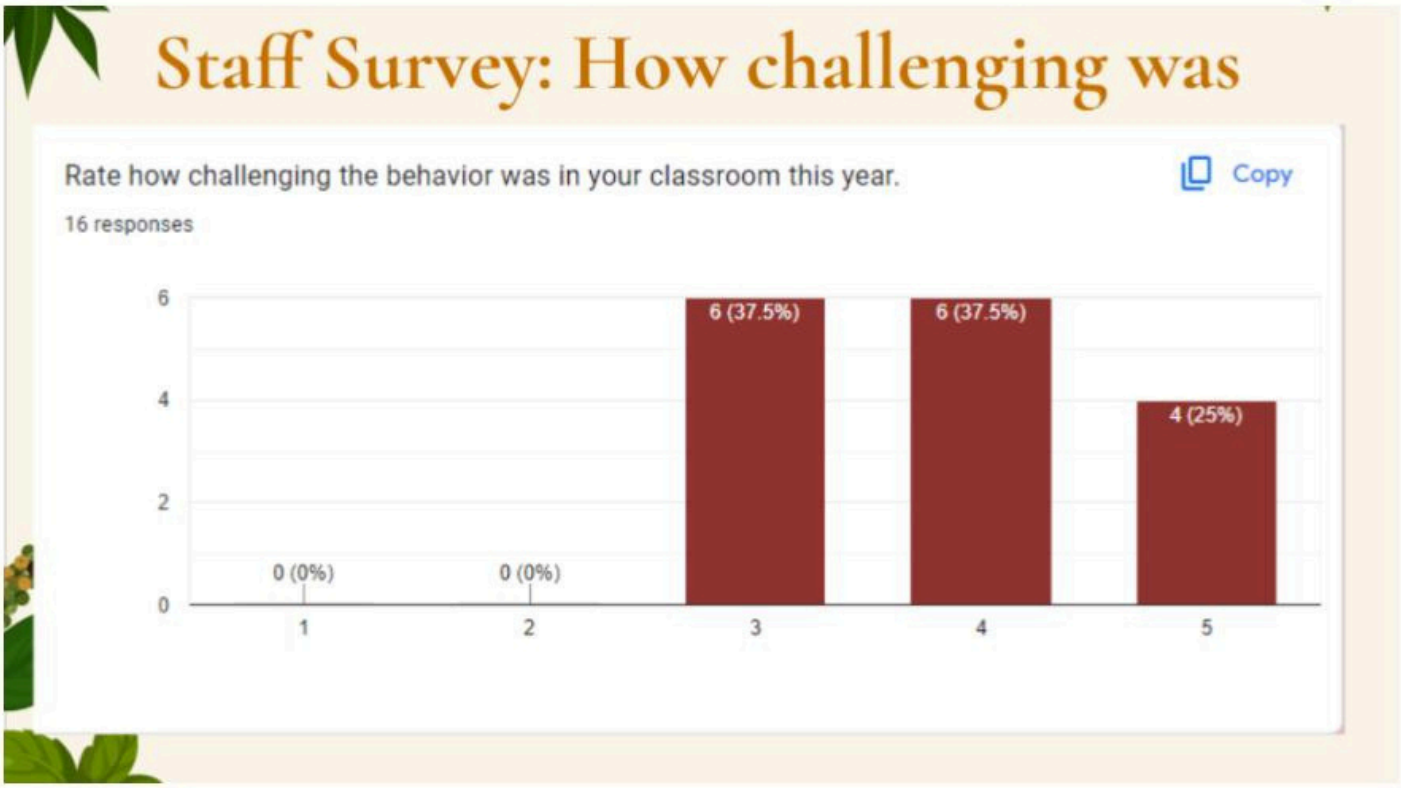
We monitor the rate of growth for this population hoping to see similar rates of growth among all students



Program Wide we continue to see high numbers of Mental Health referrals.

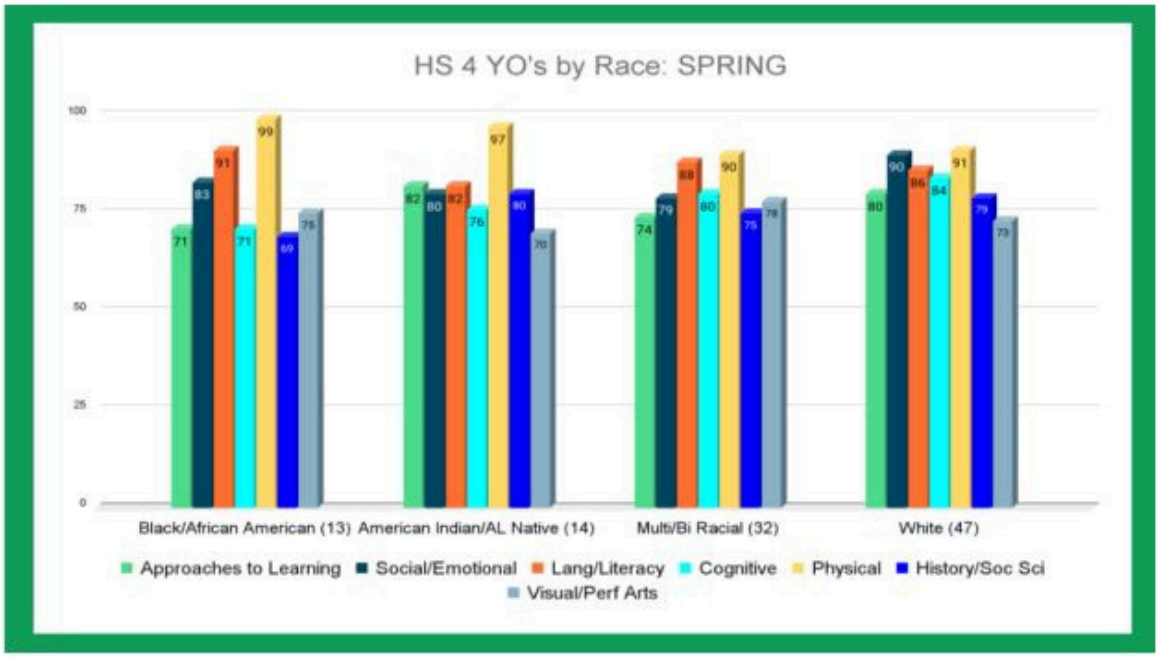


We hosted a Focus Group with community partners to express our concerns over the limited capacity of our entire community to meet the needs we are seeing. We are looking for ways to find solutions for children and families who are clearly struggling.



Two teachers retired, one teacher transferred to another grade, and one teacher took a leave of absence last year. Challenging behavior contributed to some of these decisions.

We monitor all subgroups of children.



HOMELESSNESS

We served 27 children in our classrooms that were experiencing homelessness and 34 families (44 children) in our State Funded Families in Transition Program.

FOSTER CARE

We served 19 children in our classrooms who were in Foster Care.

ATTENDANCE

60% of Head Start students had high rates of absenteeism last year. Illness and transportation were some of the main reasons. This is double from last year. There were a number of significant viral infections last year that hit this age group hard including RSV and Influenza A.

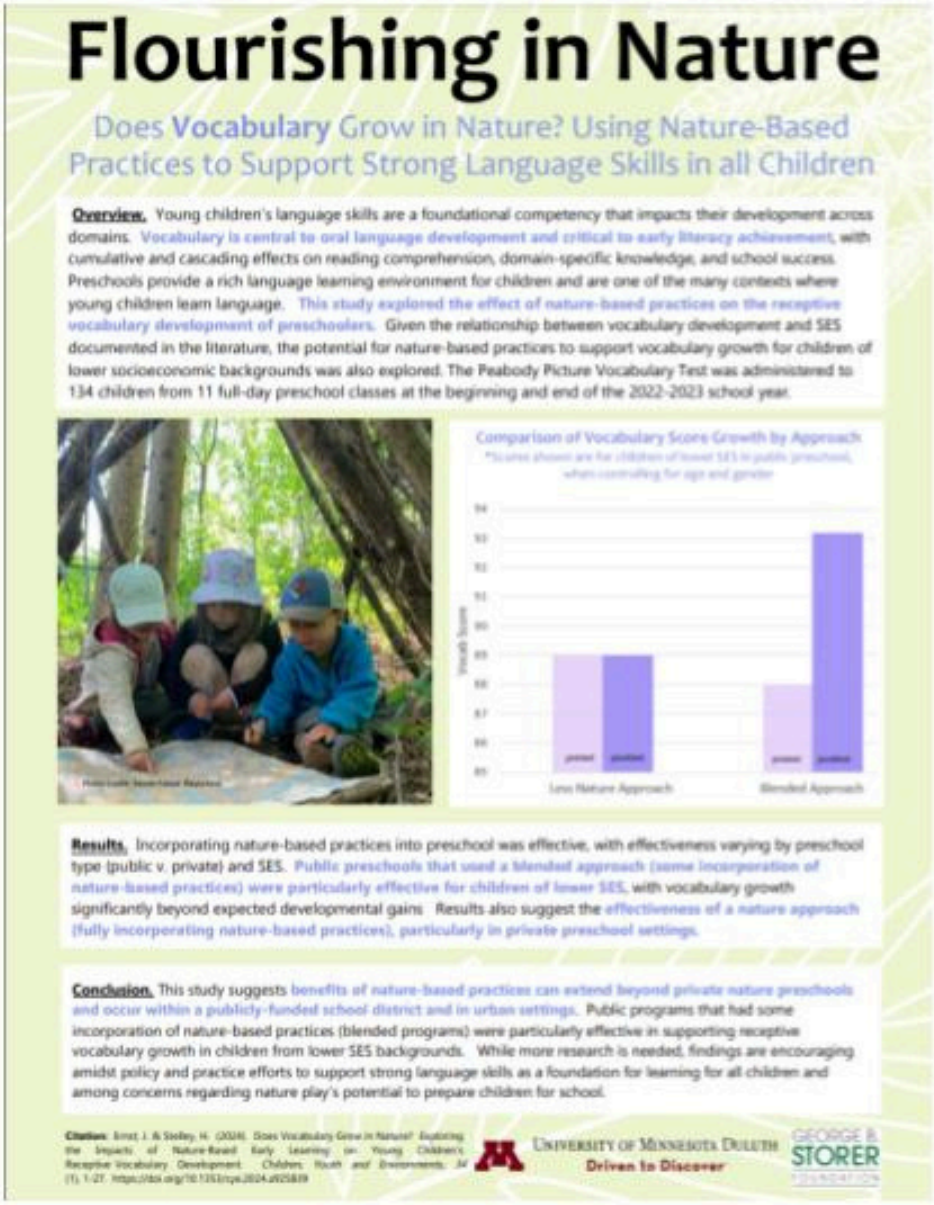
BUSES

119 preschoolers rode the bus to and/or home from school.

FLOURISHING IN NATURE

UMD STUDY

Last year the Storer Foundation funded a study done by UMD to study the impact of nature based learning on receptive and expressive vocabulary to be done with our program. This is one of four studies UMD has conducted in our classrooms.



Flourishing in Nature

Does Vocabulary Grow in Nature? Using Nature-Based Practices to Support Strong Language Skills in all Children

Overview. Young children's language skills are a foundational competency that impacts their development across domains. Vocabulary is central to oral language development and critical to early literacy achievement, with cumulative and cascading effects on reading comprehension, domain-specific knowledge, and school success. Preschools provide a rich language learning environment for children and are one of the many contexts where young children learn language. This study explored the effect of nature-based practices on the receptive vocabulary development of preschoolers. Given the relationship between vocabulary development and SES documented in the literature, the potential for nature-based practices to support vocabulary growth for children of lower socioeconomic backgrounds was also explored. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was administered to 134 children from 11 full-day preschool classes at the beginning and end of the 2022-2023 school year.

Comparison of Vocabulary Score Growth by Approach

*Scores shown are for children of lower SES in public preschool, when controlling for age and gender

Vocab Score

Less Nature Approach

Blended Approach

Results. Incorporating nature-based practices into preschool was effective, with effectiveness varying by preschool type (public v. private) and SES. Public preschools that used a blended approach (some incorporation of nature-based practices) were particularly effective for children of lower SES, with vocabulary growth significantly beyond expected developmental gains. Results also suggest the effectiveness of a nature approach (fully incorporating nature-based practices), particularly in private preschool settings.

Conclusion. This study suggests benefits of nature-based practices can extend beyond private nature preschools and occur within a publicly-funded school district and in urban settings. Public programs that had some incorporation of nature-based practices (blended programs) were particularly effective in supporting receptive vocabulary growth in children from lower SES backgrounds. While more research is needed, findings are encouraging amidst policy and practice efforts to support strong language skills as a foundation for learning for all children and among concerns regarding nature play's potential to prepare children for school.

Citation: Ernst, J. & Stolley, H. (2024). Does Vocabulary Grow in Nature? Exploring the Impacts of Nature-Based Early Learning on Young Children's Receptive Vocabulary Development. *Children, Youth and Environments, 34* (1), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.7332/cye.2024.a925809

University of Minnesota Duluth
Driven to Discover

George & Storer Foundation

STRONG FAMILIES

PARENT FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

POLICY COUNCIL

Our Parent Policy Council met in person for most months. Exceptions were made when winter weather was difficult or childcare staff were unavailable. For those meetings we were able to meet virtually.

Policy Council had 1 active father, along with 5 active mothers. We reached a quorum every month. We were able to send 3 Policy Council parents to the National Head Start Association's Conference in Portland, OR in April.

PARENT FAMILY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

96% of families completed Strength and Challenge Surveys.
82 families entered into a goal setting relationship with their family advocate.
Some of the goals families took steps toward were:

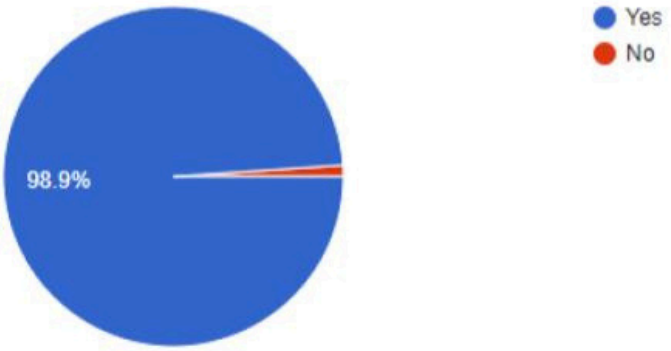
Adult Education	Managing Big Emotions	Addressing Grief
Self-Care	Establishing Routines	Employment
Getting Organized	Community Involvement	Stable Housing
Healthy Eating	Sibling Relationships	Co-Parenting

Families leave our program feeling cared for and understanding their children better.

Have you received meaningful information that helped you understand your child better?

Copy

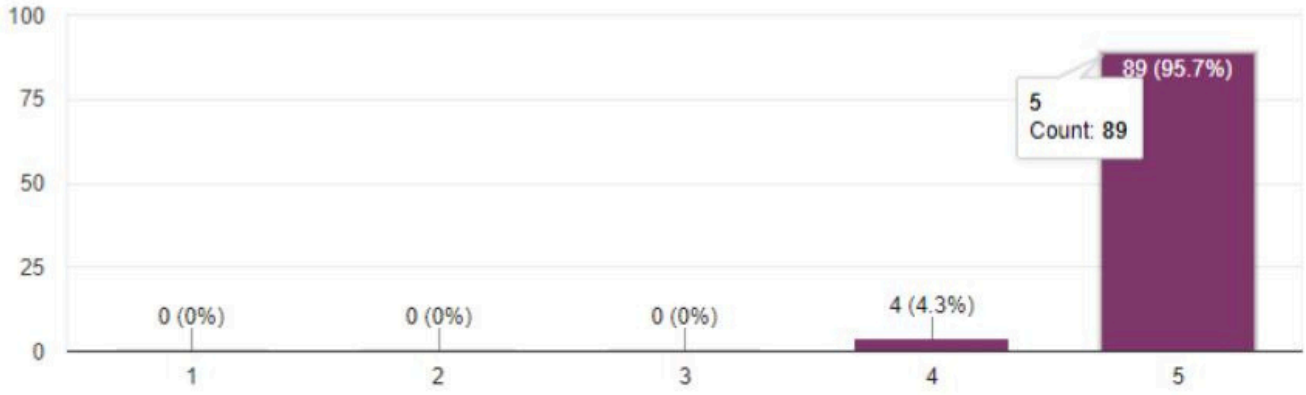
93 responses



Does it feel like the staff care about your child/family?

Copy

93 responses



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In the 2023-2024 school year, we partnered with the following organizations:
Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency
Children's Dental Service
CHUM: Steve O'Neil Apartments
City of Duluth: Washington Center
Divine Konnections
Duluth Children's Museum
Duluth Public Library: Every Child Ready Duluth
Duluth Zoo
East Side Neighborhood Development Company
Family Freedom Center
First Witness
Great Lakes Aquarium
Help Me Grow
ISD 709: Early Childhood Special Education, American Indian Education Department; Adult Education
Kid's Closet
Lifehouse
Lincoln Park Child and Families Collaborative
Minnesota Reading Corps
Safe Haven Shelter
Salvation Army
St. Luke's Pediatrics
Star of the North Maternity Home
Thrive
UM Extension Service
University of MN Duluth: College of Education and Human Service Professions
YMCA