

Educare Lincoln
ANNUAL PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORT
2023–2024



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EDUCARE LINCOLN ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT 2023-2024 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educare Lincoln Families

Educare Lincoln is proud to serve one of the most linguistically, culturally, and educationally diverse populations in the Educare Learning Network. Educare Lincoln celebrates this diversity and considers the needs of different families in their programming.

Educare Lincoln families reported strong social supports, including 81% of families who said that Educare has been helpful in raising their children. Most families reported food (75%) and housing security (87%). Most Educare Lincoln families engaged in learning activities with their children at least once a week, including playing with toys/games (99%), telling stories (97%), talking about their experience at Educare (97%), and reading books (89%).

Educare Lincoln is focused on intensive family engagement, providing resources through community partnerships, supporting families' sense of belonging, and engaging families in children's development. Educare Lincoln families reported high levels of closeness with their children.



Children's Language Development

Children's language development was within typical range relative to their same-age peers, and their scores were on upward trajectories.

In the spring, 82% of returning children showed typical language development compared to 62% of new children. Spanish bilingual children's language was developing at a promising level and with a similar trajectory to that of English monolingual children, a notable finding given their negotiation with use of more than one language.

In kindergarten, Educare graduates and non-Educare (matched) students showed similar patterns in early literacy grades/scores. Additionally, Educare graduates demonstrated a greater ability to respond positively to educational experiences.



EDUCARE LINCOLN ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT 2023-2024 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Children's Social Emotional Development

Educare Lincoln children's social emotional development showed gains across the school year. By the spring, 100% of infants, 96% of toddlers, and 92% of preschoolers were in the typical or advanced range.

K-bound children were also rated as being in the typical range of social emotional development and showed higher scores than non-K-bound children.

Educare Lincoln Classroom Quality

Classroom quality was assessed using two observation measures. Possible scores ranged from 1 to 7, with scores above 5 indicating high quality.

Infant and toddler classrooms showed *good* to *excellent* quality across all observed domains, with particularly high scores in teacher sensitivity (7) for infants and emotional and behavioral support (6.4) for toddlers.

Compared to 2022-2023, PreK classrooms showed improvement in all dimensions (emotional support, classroom organization, instructional support), with scores ranging from 3.4 to 6.4. This increase in scores may indicate the effort of the program to focus more on the quality of teacher-child interactions.



Next Steps

Support families in building social capital and creating support systems in the community.

Identify children who need immediate support and provide targeted support for learning and development.

Develop a clear structure and framework for guiding lesson plans to reflect the Educare Lincoln philosophy.

Build a clear connection between professional development and classroom practices.



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INTRODUCTION

In 2023, Educare Lincoln celebrated its tenth year in operation. Opened in March 2013, the program is a collaboration between the Buffett Early Childhood Fund (BECF), Lincoln Public Schools (LPS), and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). Educare Lincoln is part of a national network of 25 Educare centers in the U.S. which builds on Head Start and Early Head Start guidelines and practices.

Educare is designed to give children living in poverty an improved chance for success in school and life by advocating for and providing the highest quality care and education from birth to age five. Children and families from low-income homes often face unique barriers in developing foundations for academic success. Educare's program model is designed to support children and their families in overcoming such barriers. Educare's mission is to ensure that these children receive the services they need to arrive at kindergarten ready to engage on par with their more economically advantaged peers.

The Educare Model's core features (see Figure 1) include data utilization, embedded professional development, high-quality teaching practices, and intensive family engagement. Through the coordinated implementation of these core features, Educare promotes high-quality early childhood programs that encourage strong family-school partnerships and parental support for children's learning, helping to ensure that children grow up safe, healthy, and eager to learn. In turn, children are better prepared for kindergarten, increasing their chances for long-term academic and life success.

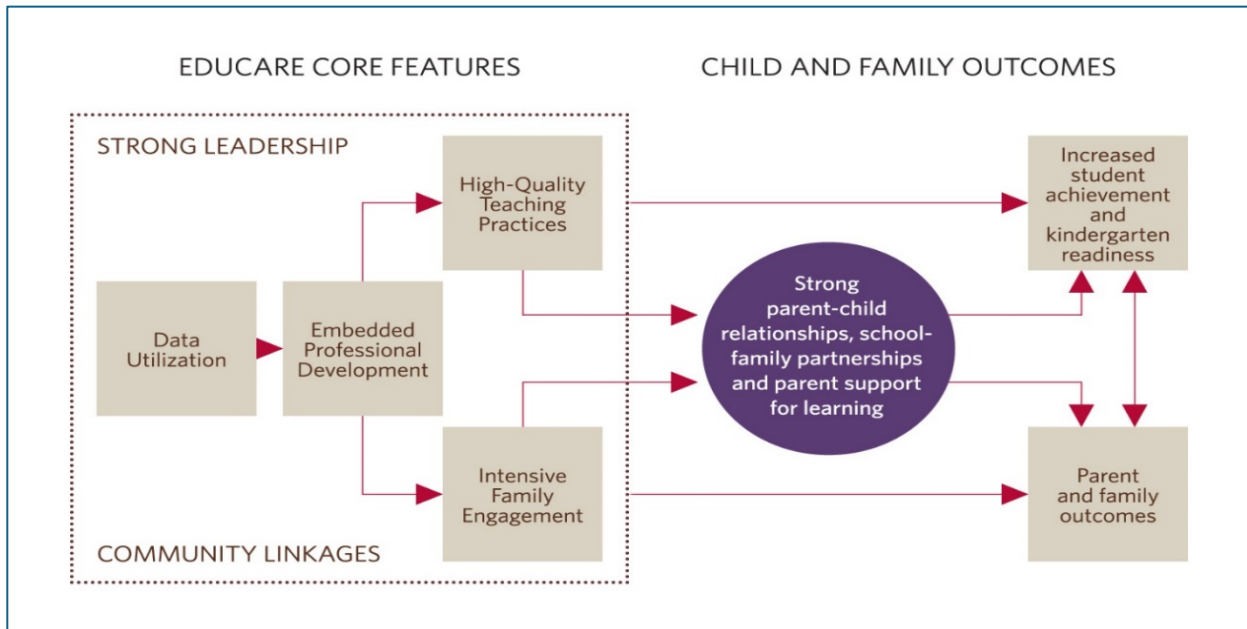


Figure 1. Core Features of Educare (see www.educareschools.org)

Program Evaluation

Data and evaluation play a special role in the Educare model. Each Educare has a Local Evaluation Partner (LEP), and common data are collected across all sites and aggregated by the National

Evaluation Partner (NEP). LEPs collect some unique local data to help the program understand matters of local interest. The Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is the LEP for Educare Lincoln. There are two purposes of the evaluation:

1. Internal: To use data in a timely fashion to inform the program about its own practices and progress, and to inform the ELN about program impacts and design and,
2. External: To present aggregate reports and scholarly articles that can inform the early childhood education field.

Evaluation activities focus on the first goal by providing timely data reports to leadership, mentor teachers, classroom teachers, and staff; conducting debriefing sessions following classroom observations; and delivering in-service sessions to discuss the data, implications, and planning. Reports, posters, presentations, and other dissemination materials are developed to share the evaluation findings with Educare Lincoln stakeholders and a wider audience. The NEP also hosts monthly LEP community of practice meetings and produces internal data briefs to help disseminate lessons learned. For the second goal, data are shared with the NEP for ELN cross-site reports. Presentations and publications also contribute to the second goal in 2023–2024. Data from the NEP have been used to support Educare Lincoln’s grant application activities and provide support for strategic planning.

This evaluation report focuses on the overall effectiveness of the program in providing early care and education services, parenting education, and family support services. The purpose is to help the program improve and develop strategies while concurrently examining the overall conditions and effectiveness as part of an ongoing evaluation. We also identify next steps and describe ways in which the data have informed programming and planning.

This evaluation report presents findings for the following questions:

- Families: Who are the families and children served by Educare Lincoln? How are families contributing to their children’s development? How have families been impacted by their participation in Educare Lincoln?
- Children: How are children developing towards positive outcomes in language and social-emotional development?
- Classrooms: What is the level of classroom quality?



FAMILIES

Who are the families and children served by Educare Lincoln?

In the 2023–2024 school year, Educare Lincoln served 131 children aged six weeks to five years old. Family surveys were completed by 110 families in Fall 2023 (72% response rate). In 2023–2024, Educare Lincoln families were from 17 different countries, including Sudan, Mexico, Ukraine, Guatemala, Iraq, and Cameroon (Figure 2). In addition, the families spoke 19 distinct languages, including Vietnamese, Pashto, Burmese, and Urdu (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Countries Where Caregivers Were Born

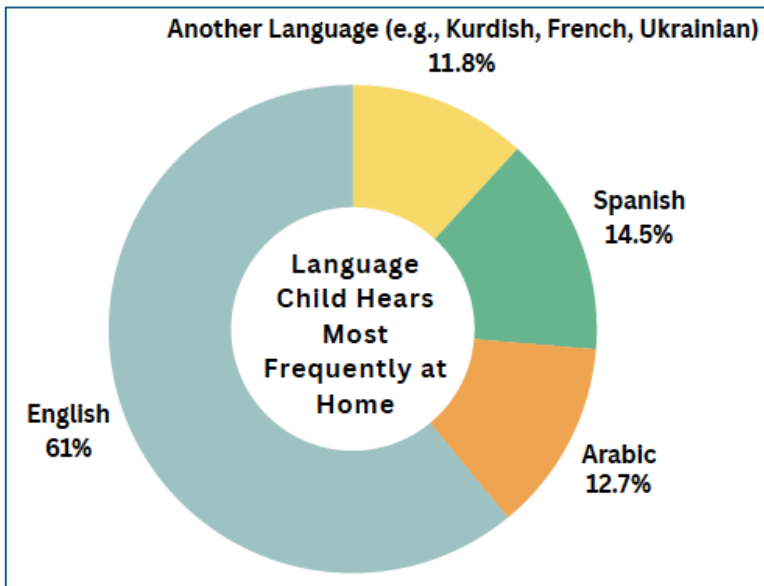


Figure 3. Languages Spoken at Home

Educare Lincoln families are similar to the families of the overall ELN in regard to primary caregivers' education level, employment and training status, and family structure (Table 1). However, a greater percentage of Educare Lincoln families speak a language other than English at home (45%) than those in the ELN (34%), which indicates greater diversity.

Table 1. Primary Caregiver and Family Characteristics

	Educare Lincoln (n = 110)	Educare Network (n = 1427)
Primary Caregiver Education Level		
Some high school or less	15%	13%
High school or GED/high school plus technical training	31%	39%
Some college	26%	24%
AA, AS, two-year degree	4%	9%
BA or higher education	19%	12%
Primary Caregiver Employment Status		
Full-time	56%	53%
Part-time	26%	23%
Currently enrolled in a degree or training program	22%	19%
Family Structure		
Two parent	50%	49%
Single parent	43%	49%
Child(ren) hear a language at home other than English	45%	34%

Most Educare Lincoln families did not worry about being homeless (87%), had balanced meals (79%), and experienced food security (75%). However, small percentages of families (3% to 5%) experienced at least one of those hardships.

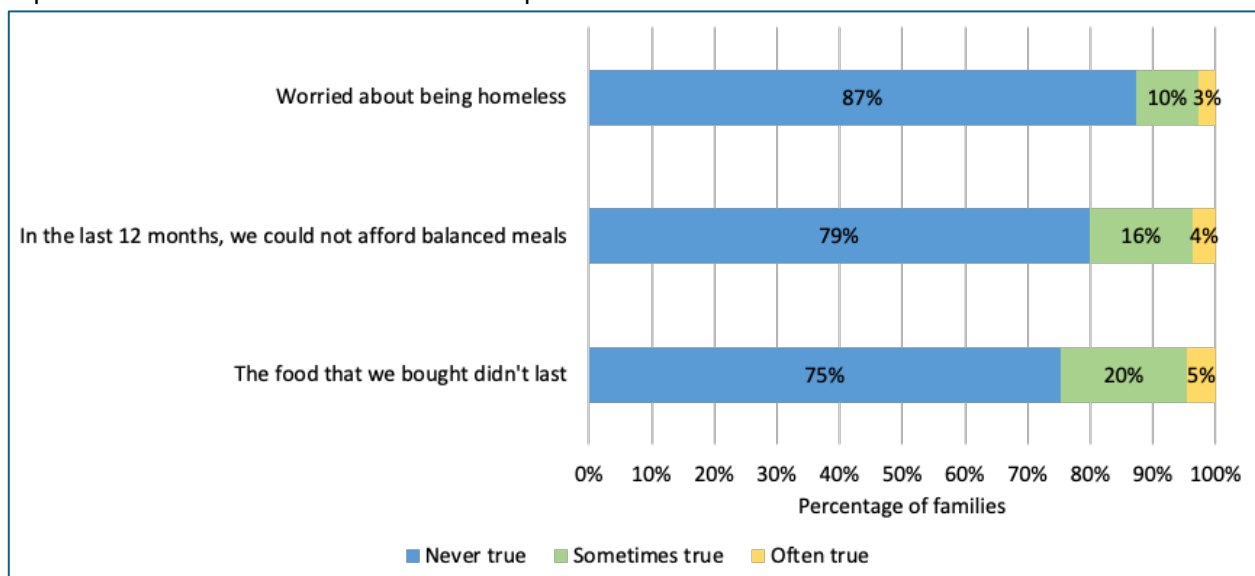


Figure 4. Family Hardships (Total = 110 Families)

How are families contributing to their children’s development?

Educare Lincoln families were engaged in activities with their children to support their development and learning. Most families played with toys and games (99%), played counting games (94%), and sang songs (95%) with their children at least once or twice a week. Most families either read (87%) or told a story (89%) to their children at least once or twice a week.

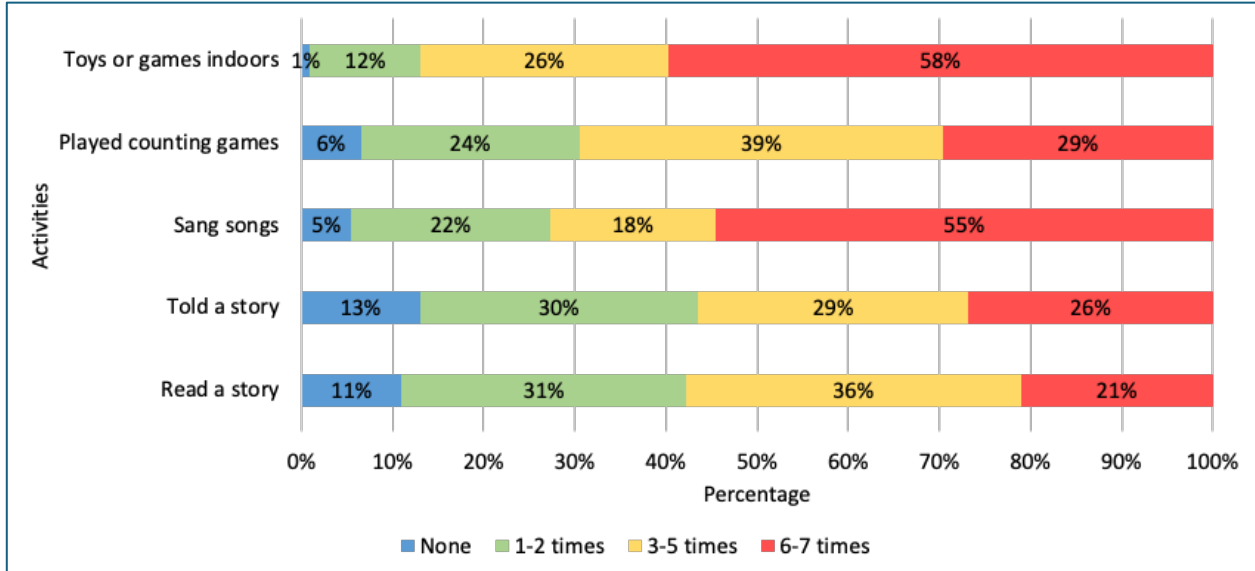


Figure 5. Activities at Home with Children in a Week (Total = 110 Families)

Educare Lincoln families engaged their children in conversations about their experiences, such as TV shows or videos (83%), children’s everyday experiences (95%), and their experience at Educare Lincoln (97%), at least once or twice a week.

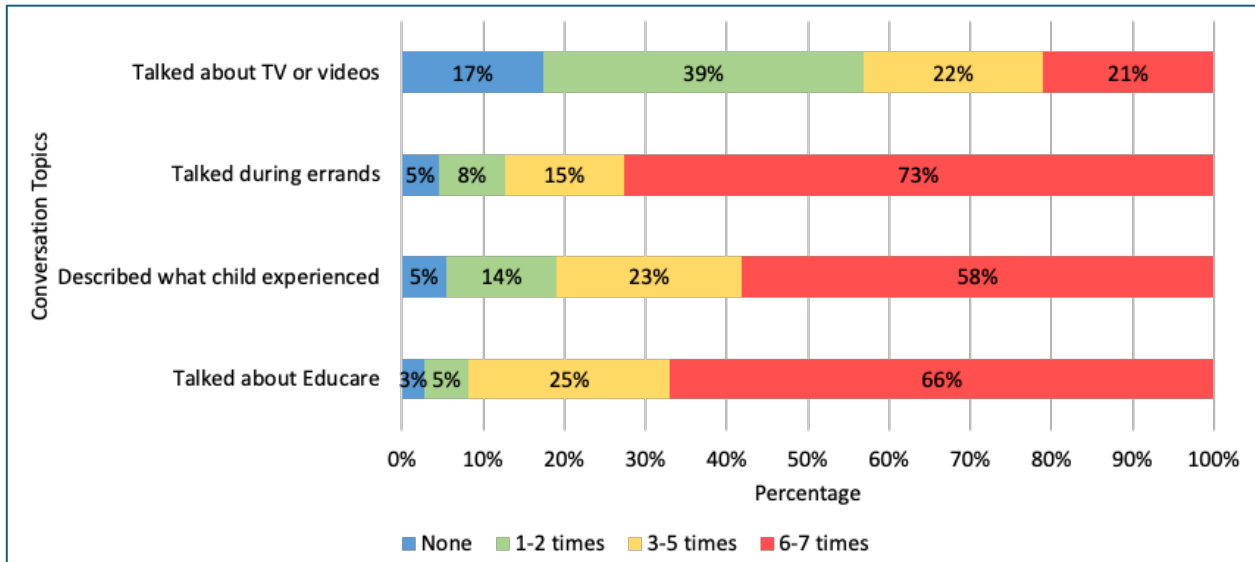


Figure 6. Conversation Topics with Children in a Week (Total = 110 Families)

How have families been impacted by their participation in Educare Lincoln?

Educare Lincoln has been an important support system for families in raising their children (81%). Compared to 2022–2023, more Educare Lincoln families reported receiving support from church members (81%).

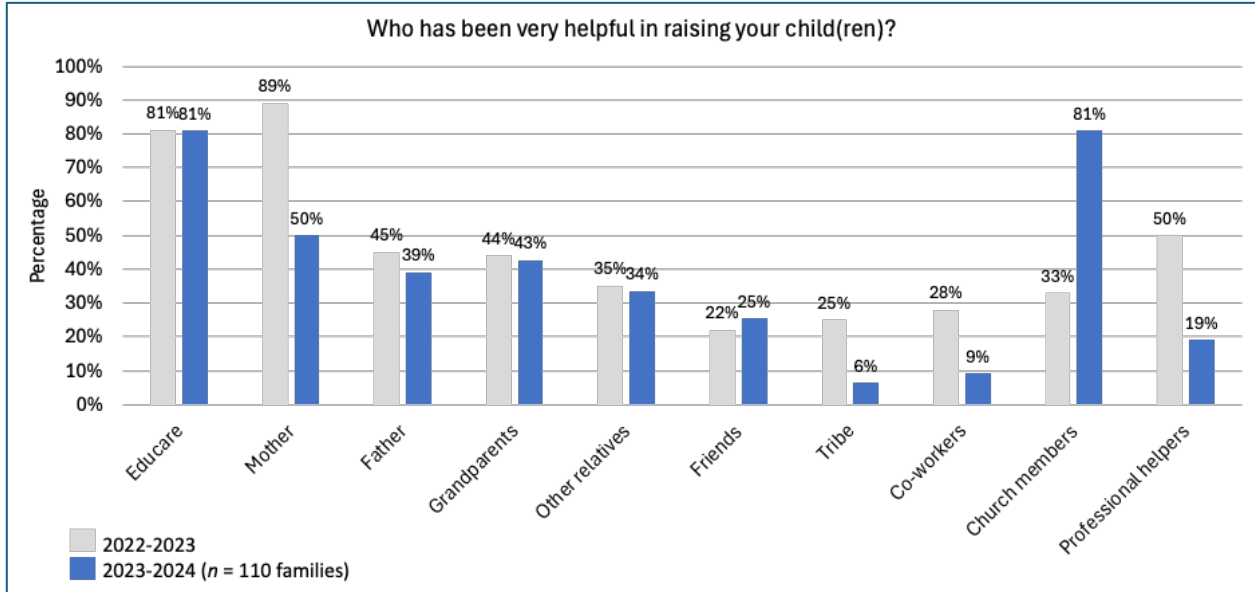


Figure 7. Families’ Sources of Support (2022–2023 vs. 2023–2024; Total = 110 Families)

In 2023–2024, greater percentages of Educare Lincoln families received support from others including friends or family and indicated that they had someone to talk to for advice and to watch their child compared to 2022–2023.

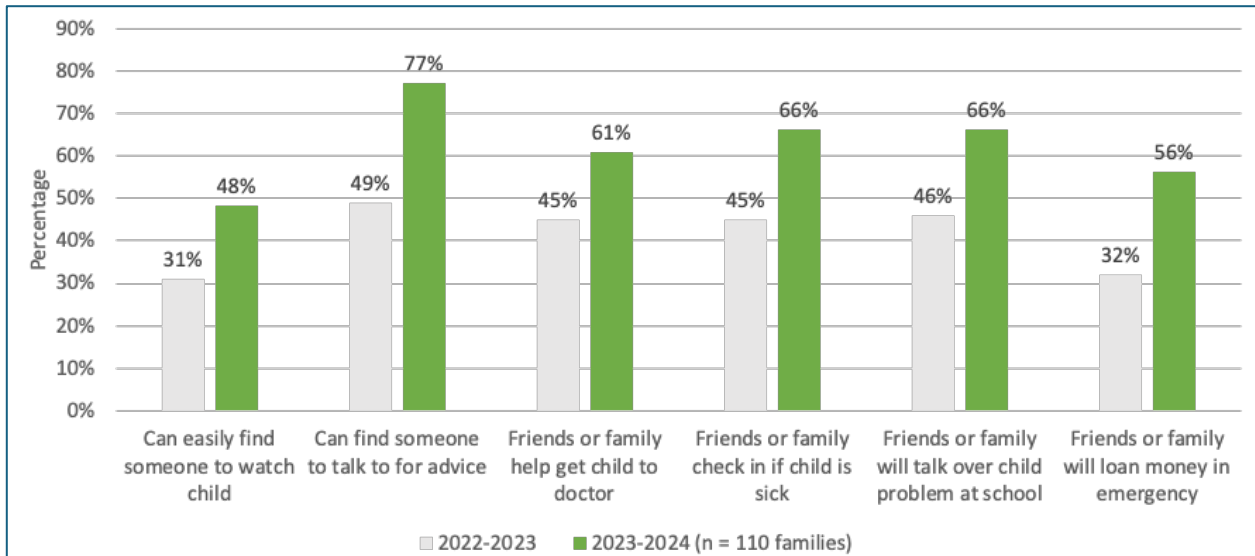


Figure 8. Types of Support Families Received (2022–2023 vs. 2023–2024; Total = 100 Families)

CHILDREN

How are children developing towards positive developmental and learning outcomes?

Three outcome measures were used to assess children’s progress across the areas of *language and social-emotional development* (Table 2).

Table 2. Overview of Child Assessment Measures

Measure	Area assessed	Collected by	Collected with	Time period(s)
Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007)	English receptive vocabulary	LEP team	Random 50% of PreK children; All K-bound children	Spring
Preschool Language Scales (PLS-5; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2012)	English and Spanish auditory comprehension and beginning literacy skills	LEP team	Random 50% of PreK children; All K-bound children 2- & 3- year-olds	Fall & Spring for PreK children At 2- and 3-year birthday
Electronic Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (eDECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1999)	Social-emotional, protective factors	Teaching staff	All children	Fall & Spring

Measures of Language Development: PPVT-4 and PLS-5

The standard scores collected from the PPVT-4 and PLS-5 allow for comparisons across assessments, age groups, and growth. A standard score on a test helps to compare a child’s development relative to their typically developing, same-age peers. Both PPVT-4 and PLS-5 have a mean standard score of 100. Scores that fall between 85 and 115 suggest that the child is within typical range relative to their same-age peers (i.e., about 68% of all children’s standard scores tend to fall between 85 and 115). Scores within the typical range are generally associated with positive academic outcomes in later years.

PPVT-4 Results (English Receptive Vocabulary)

The PPVT-4 was administered with a sample of 87 children. The overall mean standard score of 91.95 falls within the typical range of development. Children across all races/ethnicities scored within the typical range except for the Hispanic/Latino group ($n = 6$). The PPVT-4 assessment relies solely on children’s English language skills rather than overall language abilities, which likely explains the lower scores of the Hispanic/Latino group whose home language may not be English. It is worth noting that the ELN has removed the PPVT-4 from its testing battery beginning in the 2024–2025 school because of inequities of the assessment for multilingual learners.

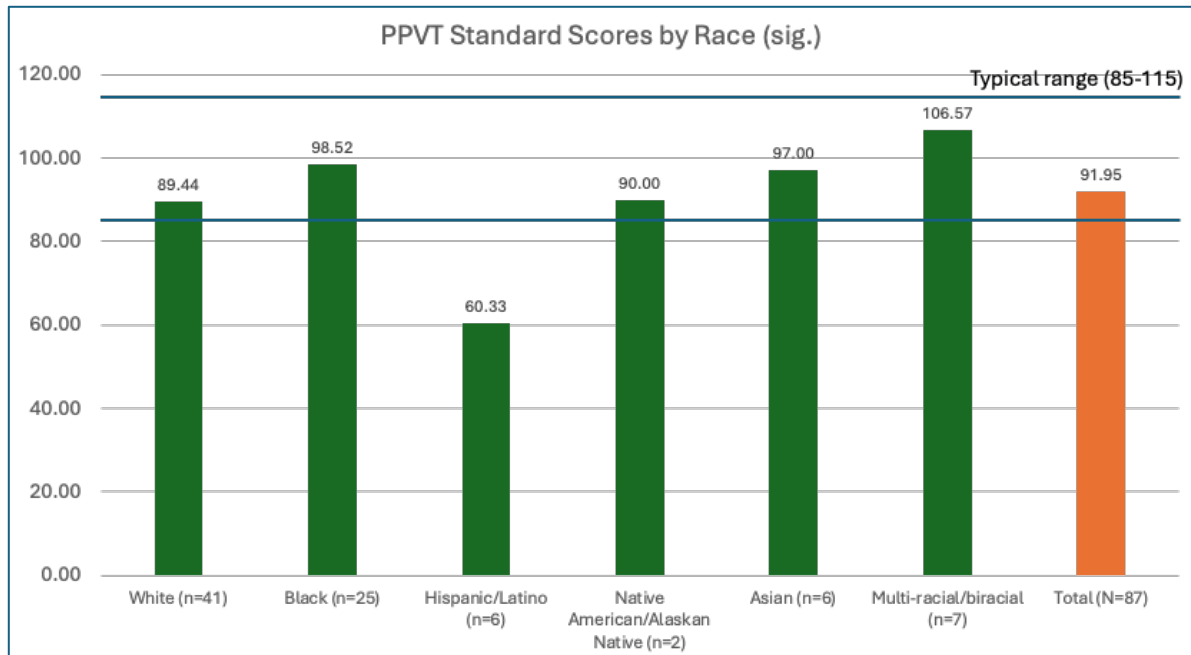


Figure 9. PPVT-4 Standard Scores for All Children and By Race/Ethnicity

The mean standard score of returning children was 95.49 (within the typical range) and 12.82 points higher than those of new children. Although statistically non-significant, it is notable that the average score of new children was slightly below the typical range.

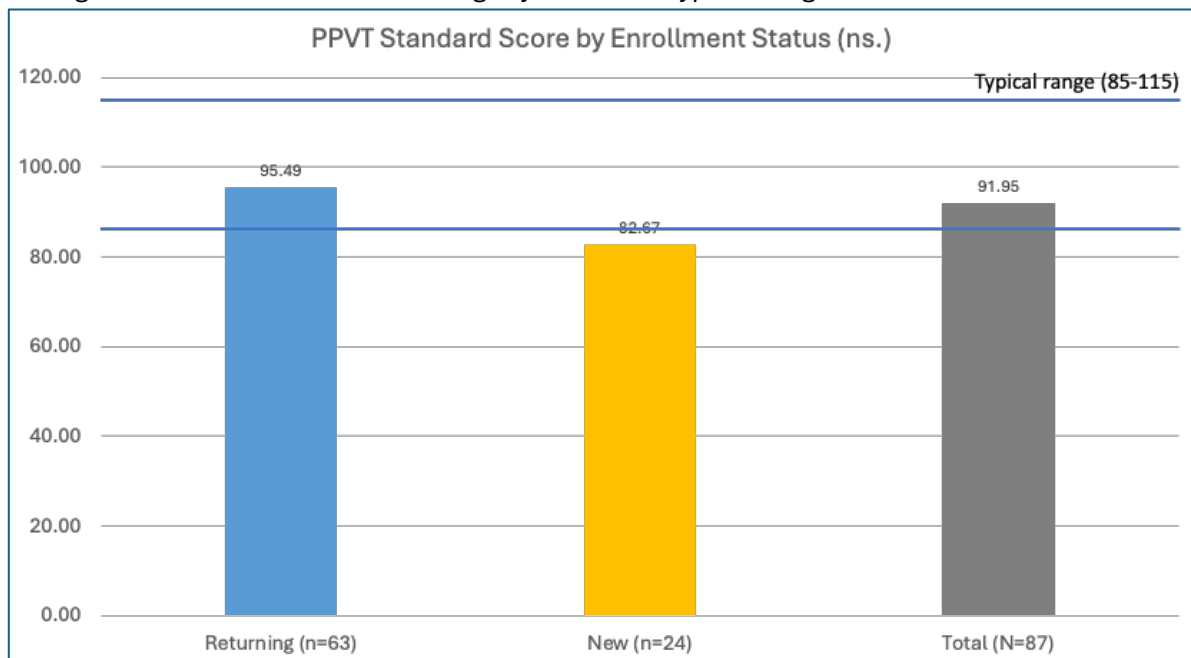


Figure 10. PPVT-4 Standard Scores by Enrollment Status

PLS-5 Results (Auditory Comprehension)

Children's auditory comprehension skills were assessed using PLS-5. In both fall and spring, children's PLS-5 scores were within the typical range of development, which means that Educare

Lincoln children made optimal progress over the year. Note: Spanish PLS scores are conceptual scores that represent combined language skills in Spanish and English.

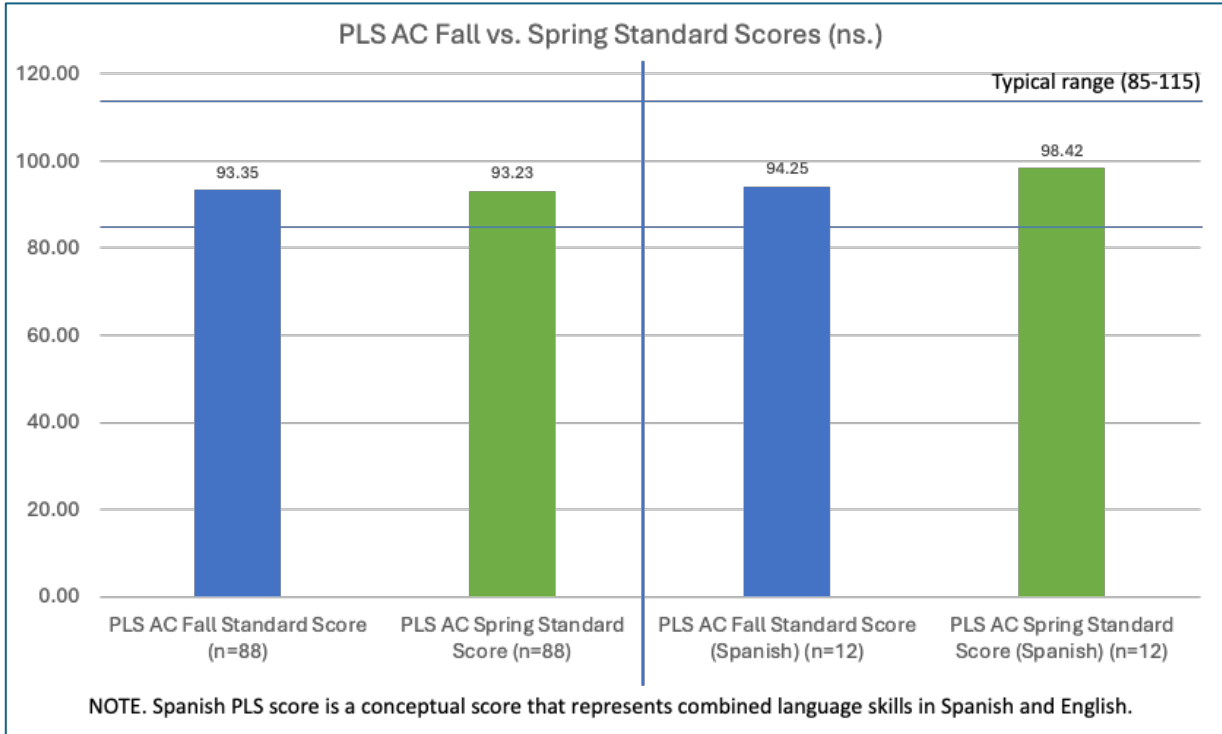


Figure 11. PLS-5 Standard Scores Over Time (Fall vs. Spring)

The PLS-5 standard scores of all children – both returning and new – were within the typical range although returning children’s scores were slightly higher than new children’s scores. Both groups made optimal progress from fall to spring.

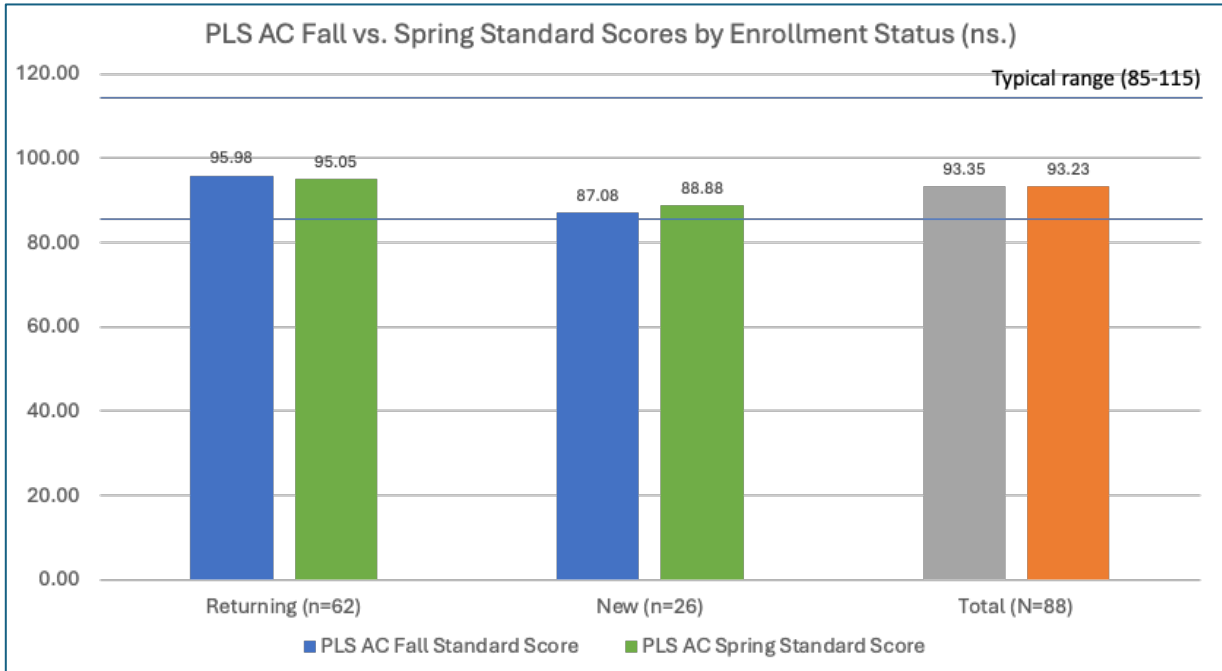


Figure 12. PLS-5 Standard Scores by Enrollment Status

Measure of Social-Emotional Development: eDECA

The eDECA is a standardized survey measure that teaching staff complete to assess children’s social and emotional health indicated as Total Protective Factors (TPF). The teaching staff are guided to consider the frequency of listed behaviors observed over the 4 prior weeks to the date of recording. TPF is determined by 4 domains: **Initiative, Self-Control, Attachment, and Behavioral Concerns**. Different sets of domains were assessed for different age groups (Table 3).

Table 3. Age Groups and Domains Assessed

Age Group	Domains Included
Infants	Attachment, Initiative
Toddlers	Attachment, Initiative, Self-Control
PreK (36 months and older)	Attachment, Initiative, Self-Control, Behavioral Concerns

Scores on the eDECA are reported as standard T-scores (i.e., scores 40–59 = Typical; below 40 = Concern; above 60 = Strength). The only exception is the Behavior Concern domain, for which scores above 60 indicate an area of ‘Concern.’ The domain scores are then used to create a TPF score for all versions.

Infants: The TPF scores of six infants show that, by the spring semester, all infants (100%) were within the typical range compared to the fall semester, which indicates improvement in their social-emotional development.

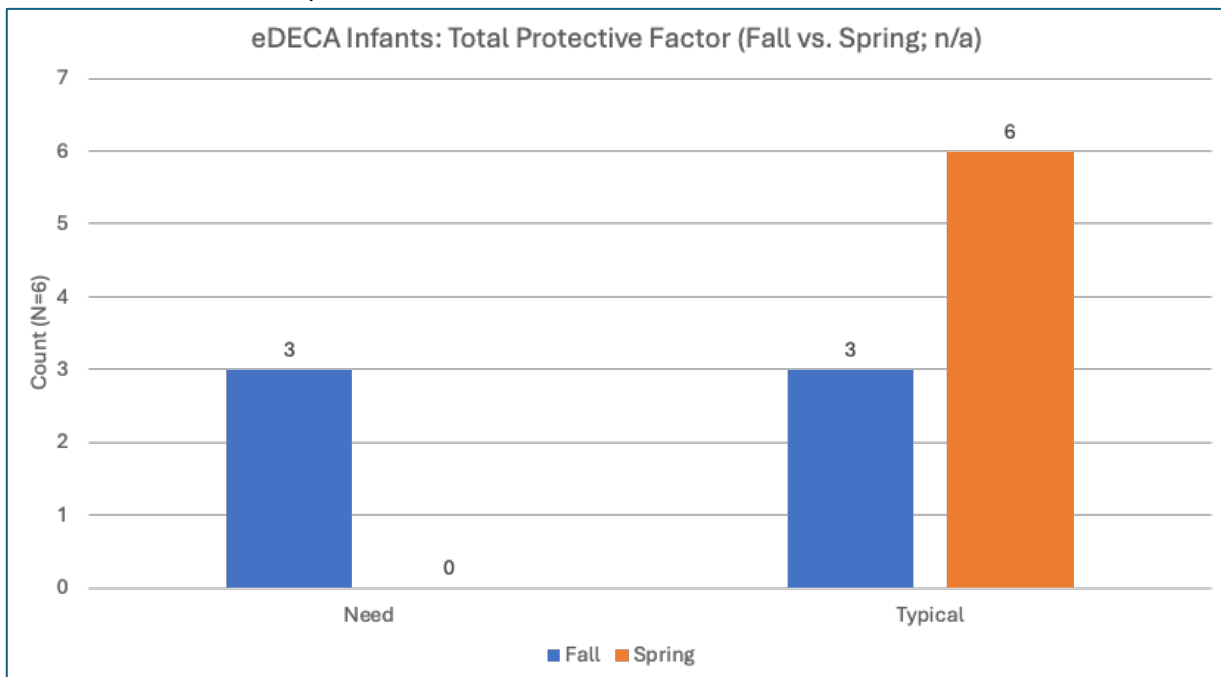


Figure 13. eDECA Infants Total Protective Factor Over Time (Fall vs. Spring)

Toddlers: The TPF scores of 24 toddlers show that, by the spring semester, all but one toddler (96%) were within the typical or advanced (strength) range compared to the fall semester, which indicates overall improvement in their social-emotional development.

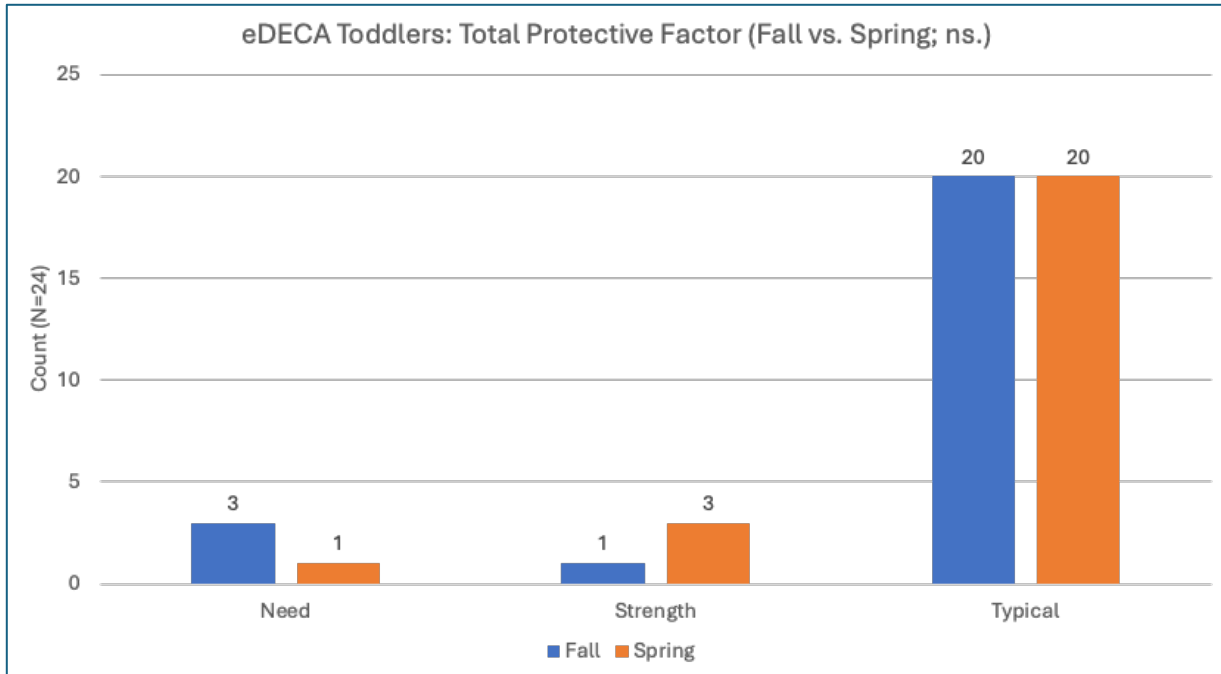


Figure 14. eDECA Toddlers Total Protective Factor Over Time (Fall vs. Spring)

Preschoolers: The TPF scores of 98 preschoolers show that, by the spring semester, all but eight preschoolers (92%) were within the typical or advanced/strength range compared to the fall semester, which indicates a significant improvement in their social-emotional development especially in the Need and the Strength categories.

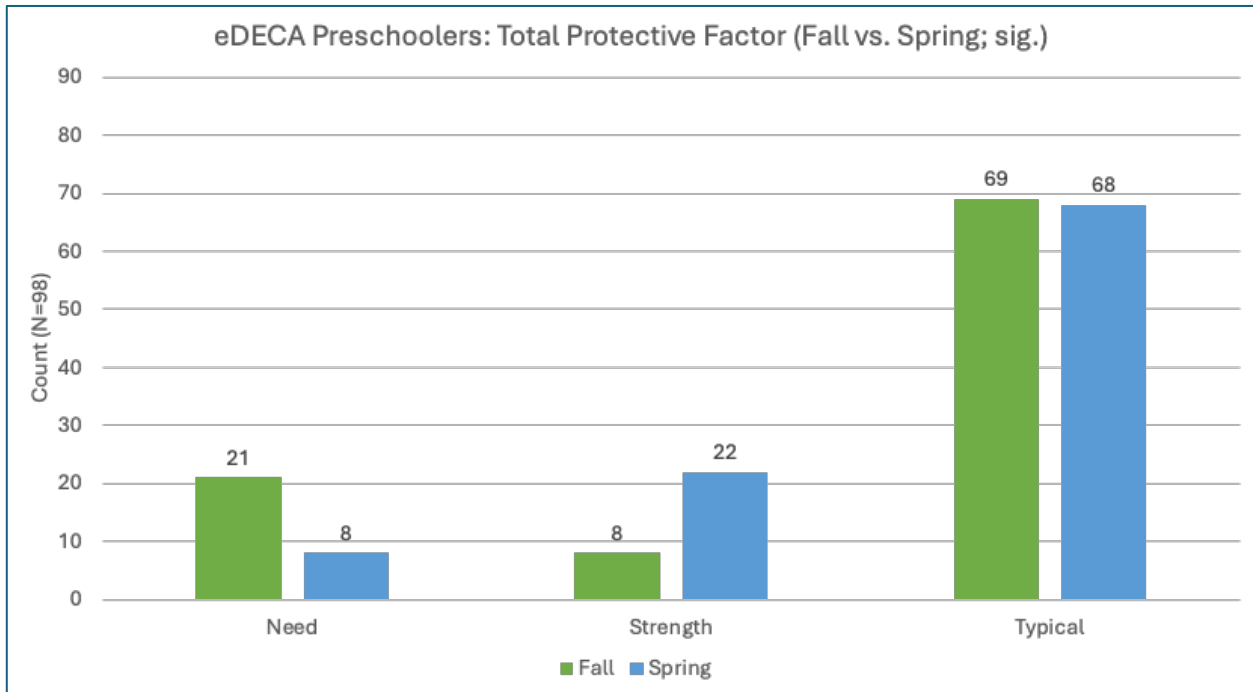


Figure 15. eDECA Preschoolers Total Protective Factor Over Time (Fall vs. Spring)

Kindergarten-Bound Children

Fifty-six K-bound children were assessed on the PPVT-4; 30 children on the PLS-5; and 49 children on the eDECA. Mean standard scores of each measure collected in Spring 2024 are included in Table 4 along with the mean scores from Spring 2023. Typical ranges relative to same-age peers are also included for reference.

Table 4. Summary of K-bound Children’s Developmental Outcomes

	K-bound Children Spring 2024	K-bound Children Spring 2023	Typical Range
PPVT-4 Receptive Vocabulary	90.54 (<i>n</i> = 56)	95.00 (<i>n</i> = 41)	85–115
PSL-5 Auditory Comprehension	90.03 (<i>n</i> = 30)	93.19 (<i>n</i> = 19)	85–115
eDECA Total Protective Factor	53.40 (<i>n</i> = 49)	55.38 (<i>n</i> = 48)	40 or higher
eDECA Behavioral Concerns	52.92 (<i>n</i> = 49)	50.17 (<i>n</i> = 48)	59 or lower

PPVT-4 Results (Receptive Vocabulary)

The average PPVT-4 scores of both K-bound and non-K-bound children were within the typical range of development. K-bound children’s average score was slightly lower than the non-K-bound children, but this difference was not statistically meaningful.

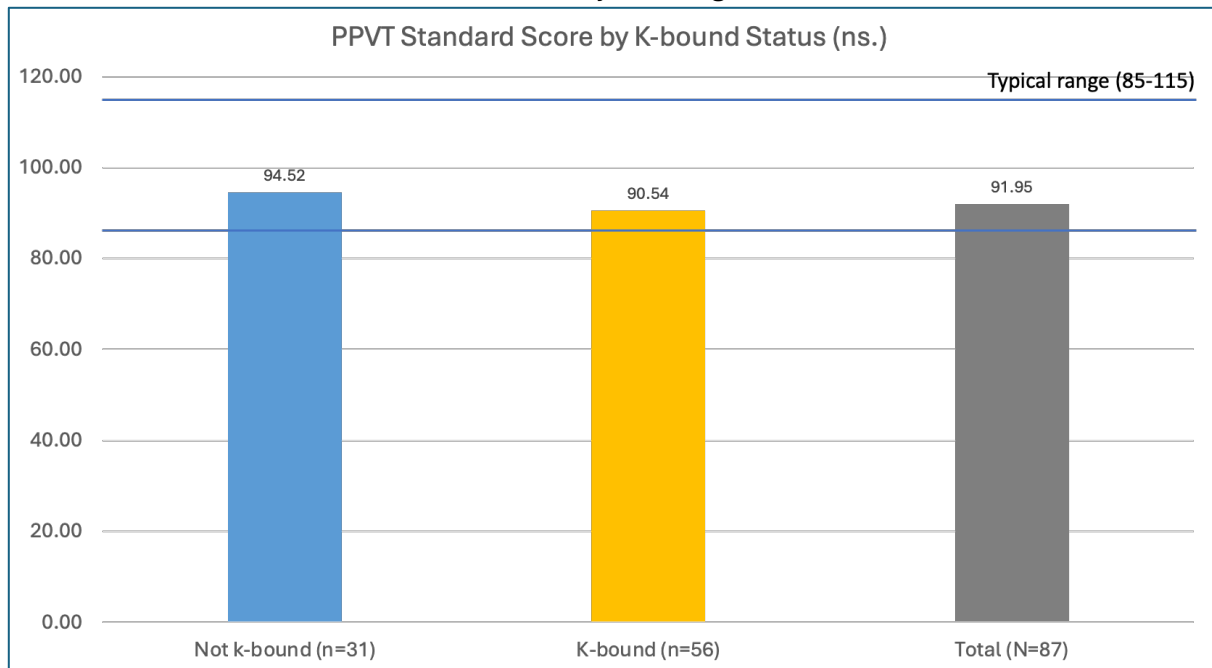


Figure 16. PPVT Standards Scores by K-bound Status

PLS-5 Results (Auditory Comprehension)

The average PLS scores of both K-bound and non-K-bound children were within the typical range of development. K-bound children’s scores were slightly lower than the non-K-bound children, but this difference was not statistically meaningful.

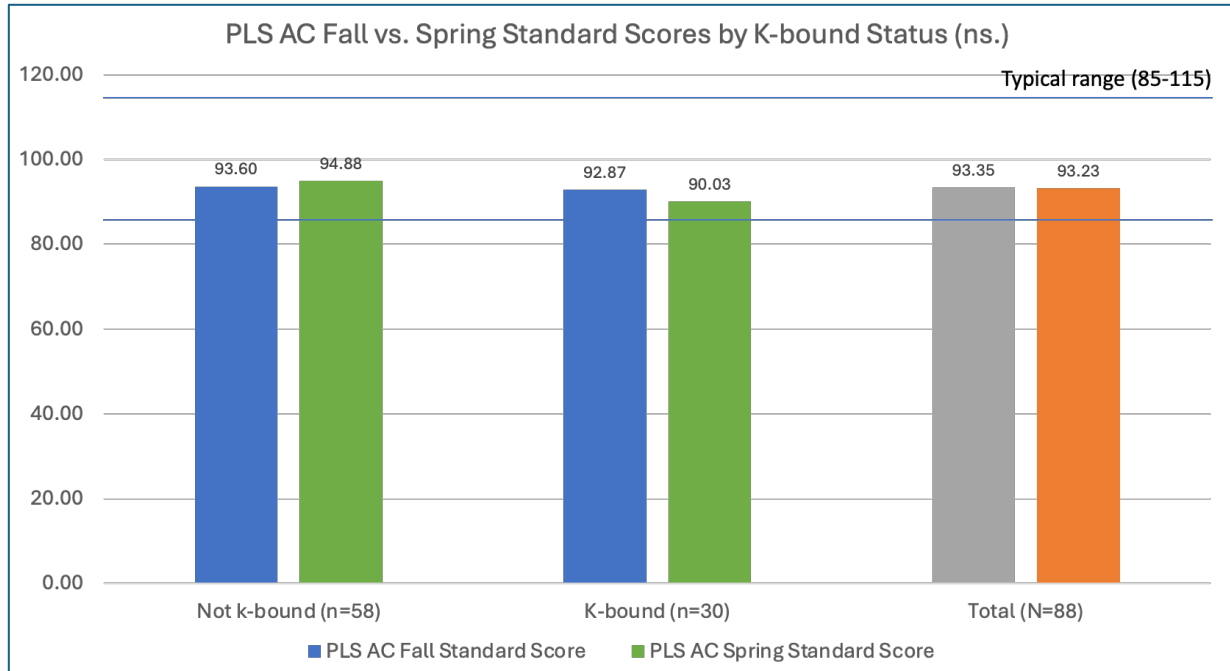


Figure 17. PLS-5 Standard Scores by K-bound Status (Fall vs. Spring)

eDECA TPF Results (Total Protective Factors: Social-Emotional Development)

The average eDECA scores of both K-bound and non-K-bound children were within the typical range of development. K-bound children’s scores were higher than the non-K-bound children, and their scores improved from the fall to the spring semester.

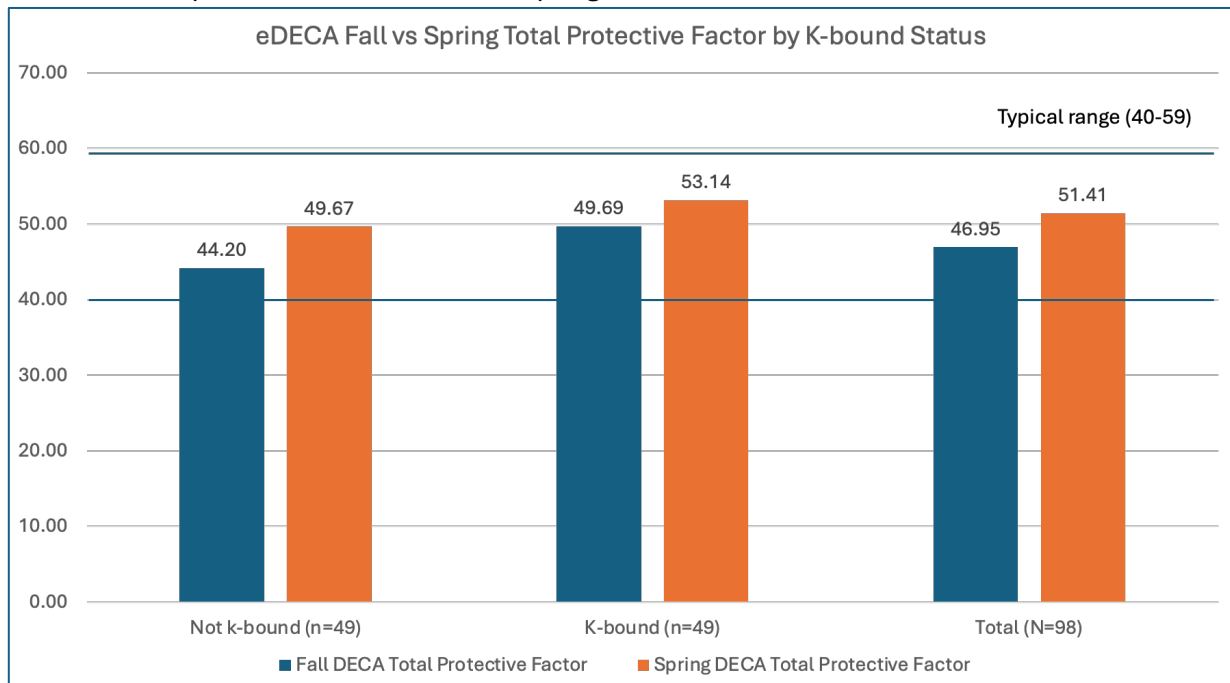


Figure 18. eDECA Total Protective Factor Scores by K-bound Status (Fall vs. Spring)

eDECA BC Results (Behavioral Concerns: Social-Emotional Development)

The average eDECA Behavioral Concerns scores of both K-bound and non-K-bound children were within the typical range of development, which indicates no concerns.

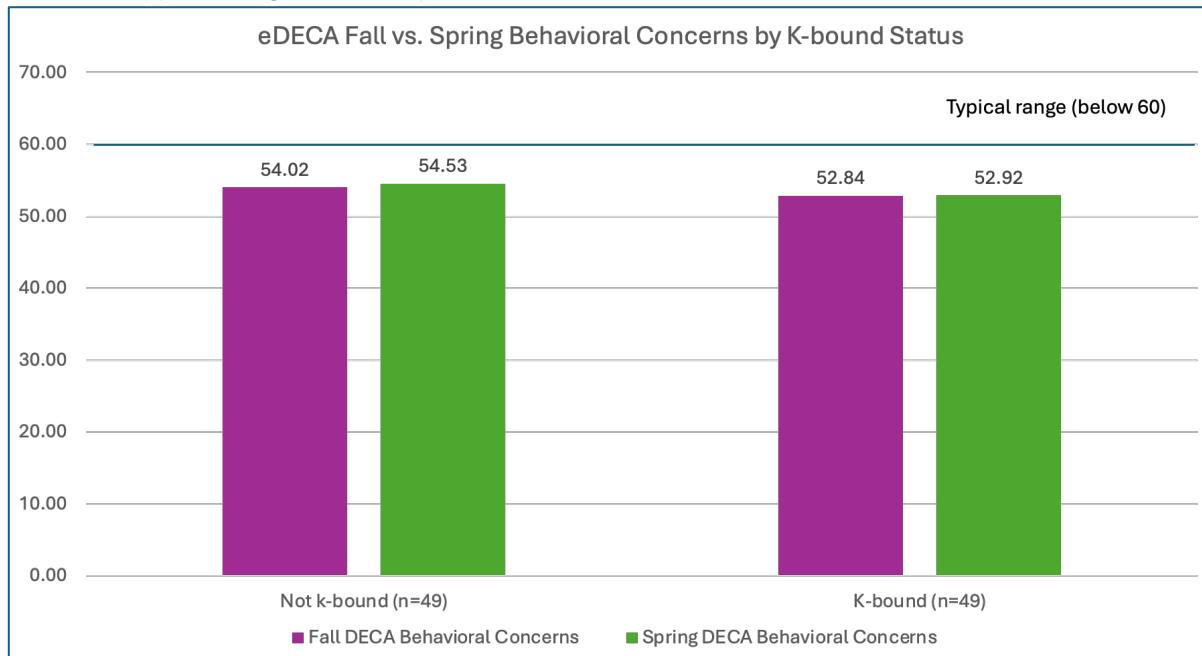


Figure 19. eDECA Behavioral Concerns Scores by K-bound Status (Fall vs. Spring)

Transition to Kindergarten

The LEP team collaborated with Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) to follow up on Educare Lincoln program completers to examine how they were performing in kindergarten. The data presented were based on 33 Educare Lincoln graduates (2022–2023 cohort) and a matched sample of 33 non-Educare students enrolled in LPS for kindergarten in the 2023–2024 school year. Students were matched based on: 1) race and ethnicity; 2) gender; 3) free or reduced lunch; 4) special education; and 5) English learner status. Two measures were used to examine their learning outcomes: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (**DIBELS**: basic early literacy skills) and **LPS student report card grades** (early literacy and math skills: phonics and word analysis, fluency, number sense; Table 5).

Table 5. Measures Used to Assess Kindergarten Children in LPS

DIBELS	LPS Student Report Card Grades
<p>The DIBELS assess early reading skills based on 4 subtests: Word Reading Fluency, Nonsense Word Fluency, Phonemic Segmentation Fluency, and Letter Naming Fluency. Classifications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive support – Students perform well below the benchmark for grade-level proficiency goals and are at risk for reading difficulties. • Strategic support – Students perform just below benchmark levels and are at some risk for meeting grade-level proficiency goals. 	<p>Student report card grades on early literacy (Phonics and Word Analysis, Fluency) and early math (Number) were collected. Classifications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – Students do not meet standards • 2 – Students approach standards • 3 – Students meet standards • 4 – Students exceed standards

DIBELS	LPS Student Report Card Grades
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core and Core+ support (Proficient) – Students perform at or above benchmark and are not at risk for meeting grade-level proficiency goals. 	

Overall Performance of Educare Graduates to Non-Educare Students

Educare graduates and non-Educare (matched) students showed similar patterns in early literacy and math scores/grades. Additionally, Educare graduates demonstrated a greater ability to respond positively to educational experiences. For example, greater percentages of Educare graduates moved from ‘Needs intensive support / Does not meet standards’ category to ‘Needs strategic support / Approaching standards’ or ‘Proficient / Meets or exceeds standards’ categories over the academic year than non-Educare students. Similar patterns were shown in their report card grades as well.

Early Literacy

The percentage of Educare graduates classified as not needing additional support on early reading skills was **comparable** to the percentage of non-Educare students with the same classification (50%) by the end of their kindergarten year although more students needed intensive support in the fall compared to non-Educare children (75% vs. 67%). The fall-to-spring increase in the percentage of students not needing additional support is greater for Educare graduates (change from 12% to 50%) compared to non-Educare students (change from 21% to 50%) with Educare graduates demonstrating a greater ability to respond positively to educational experiences.

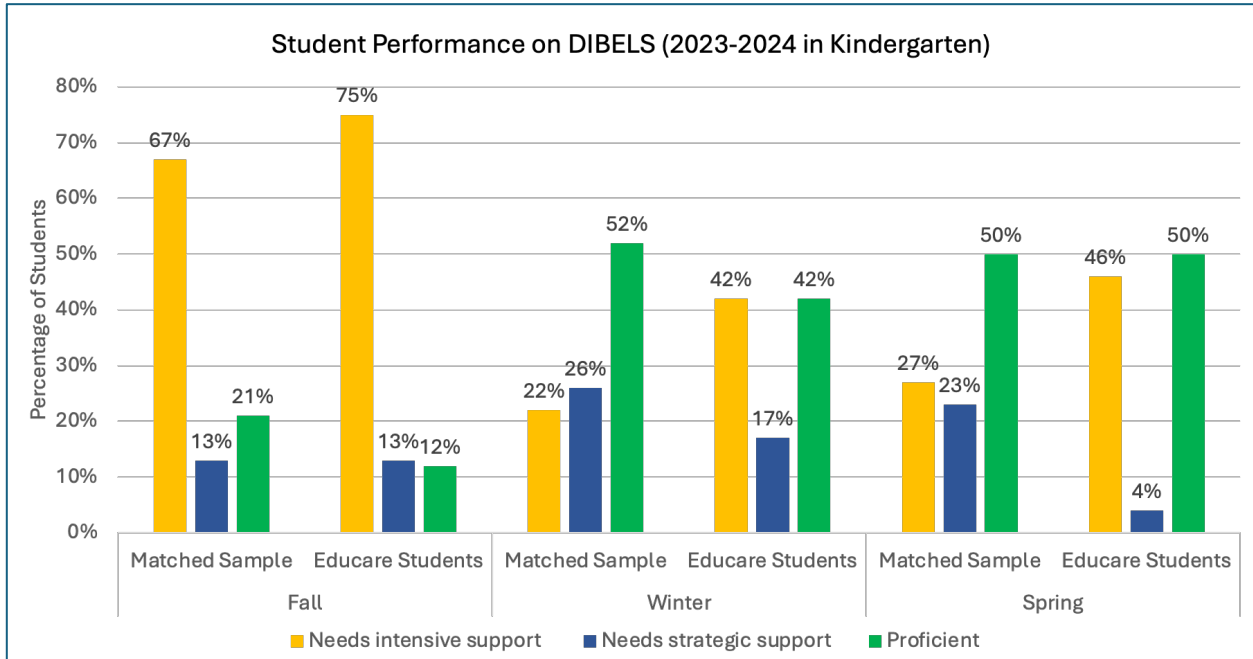


Figure 20. Student Performance on DIBELS in 2023–2024

The percentage of Educare graduates who did not meet district standards decreased from 33% to 18% (vs. non-Educare students: from 27% to 22%) while more Educare graduates approached district standards (change from 6% to 15% over the school year).

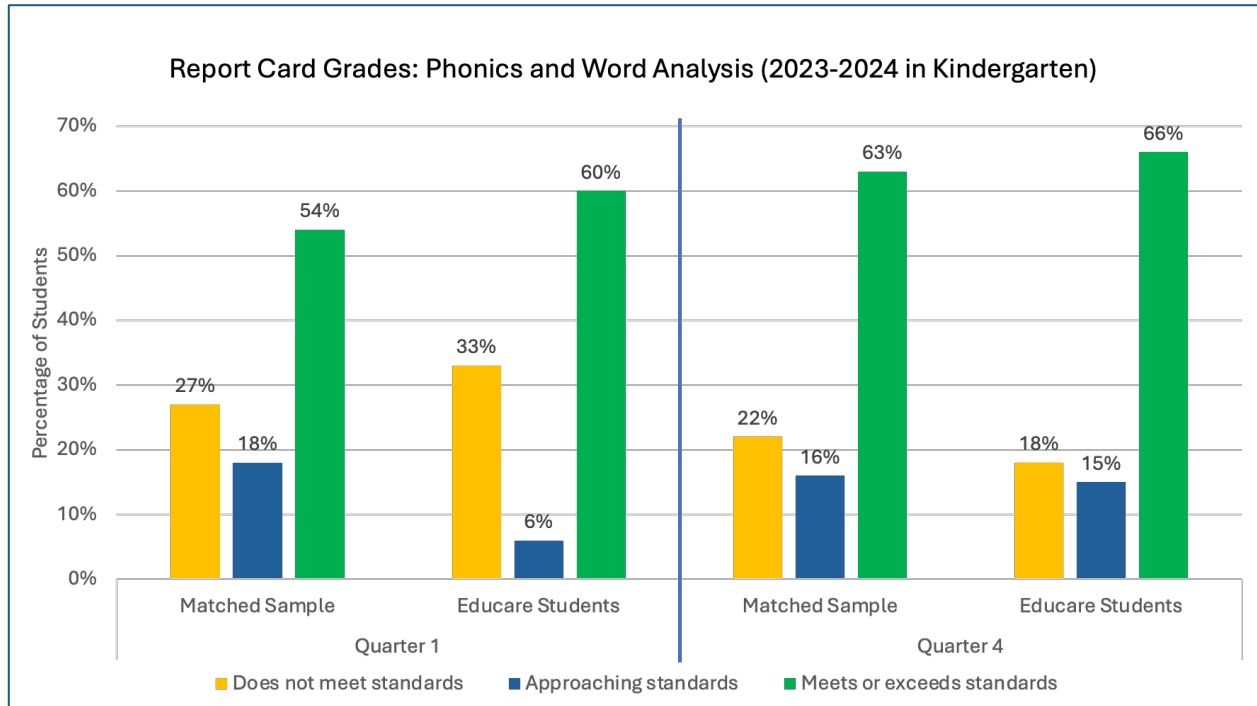


Figure 21. Report Card Grades on Phonics and Word Analysis in 2023–2024

A greater percentage of non-Educare students showed meeting district standards than Educare graduates. However, it is notable that the percentage of Educare graduates who did not meet district standards decreased from 21% (first quarter) to 3% (last quarter).

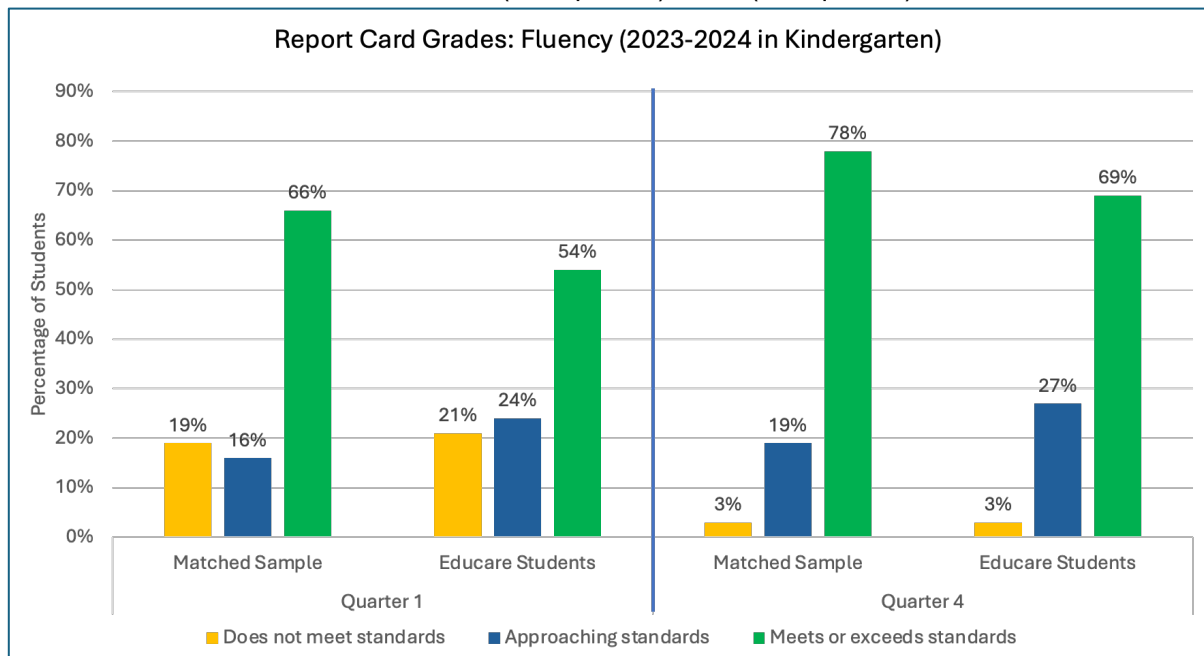


Figure 22. Report Card Grades on Reading Fluency in 2023–2024

Early Math

Educare graduates and non-Educare students showed similar patterns in their math (number sense) learning. Although the percentage of students approaching district standards increased slightly, the percentage not meeting standards also increased for both groups.

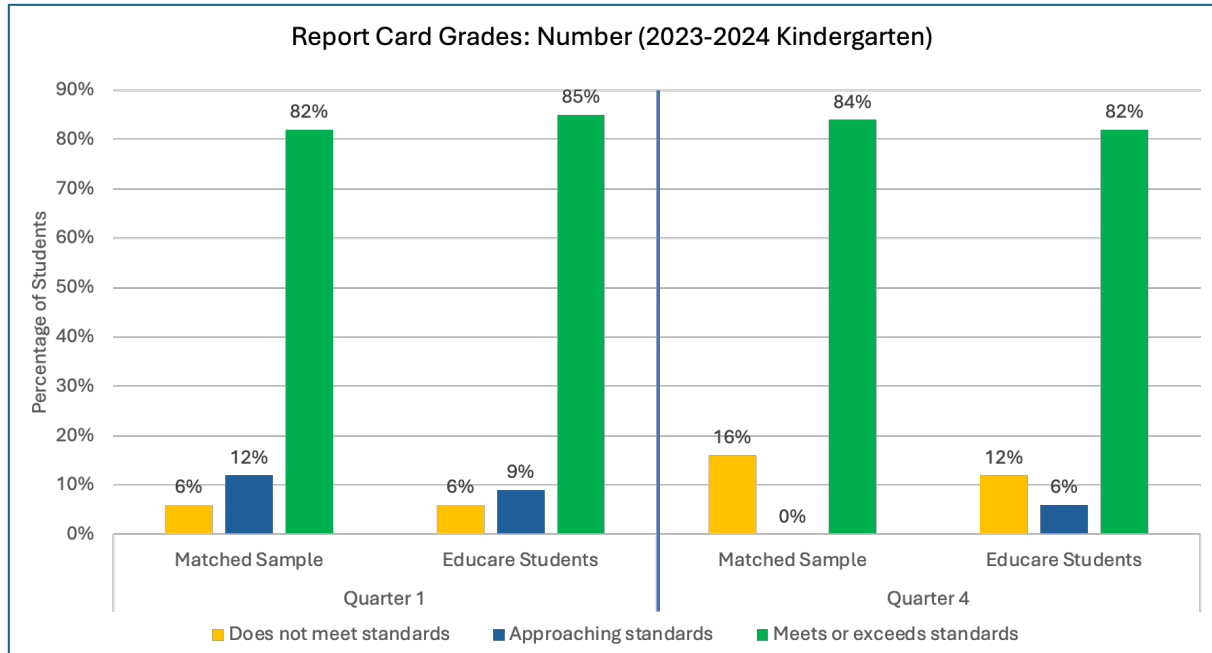


Figure 23. Report Card Grades on Number Sense in 2023–2024



CLASSROOMS

What is the level of classroom quality?

Classroom quality is measured for all infant, toddler, and PreK classrooms (Table 6).

Table 6. Measures Used to Assess Classroom Quality

Measure	Classroom assessed	Time period	Score Range
Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-3 (ITERS-3; Harms et al., 2017)	Infant & toddler classrooms	Fall 2023 Oct.–Nov.	1 to 7 5 or higher = high quality
Infant Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS: Hamre et al., 2014)	Infant classrooms	Spring 2024 Feb.–Mar.	
Toddler CLASS (Pianta et al., 2012)	Toddler classrooms		
PreK CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008)	PreK classrooms		

The ITERS-3 focuses on the physical environments, materials, health and safety practices and interactions between children and teacher(s). CLASS focuses on the interactions that take place between the teacher(s) and children and support for development. CLASS measures the emotional climate of the classroom, practices that support children’s learning, methods of promoting problem solving, and positive social-emotional interactions.

Infant CLASS: Infant classrooms maintained high quality across all CLASS dimensions (i.e., highest: Teacher Sensitivity = 7; lowest: English Language Support = 5.5).

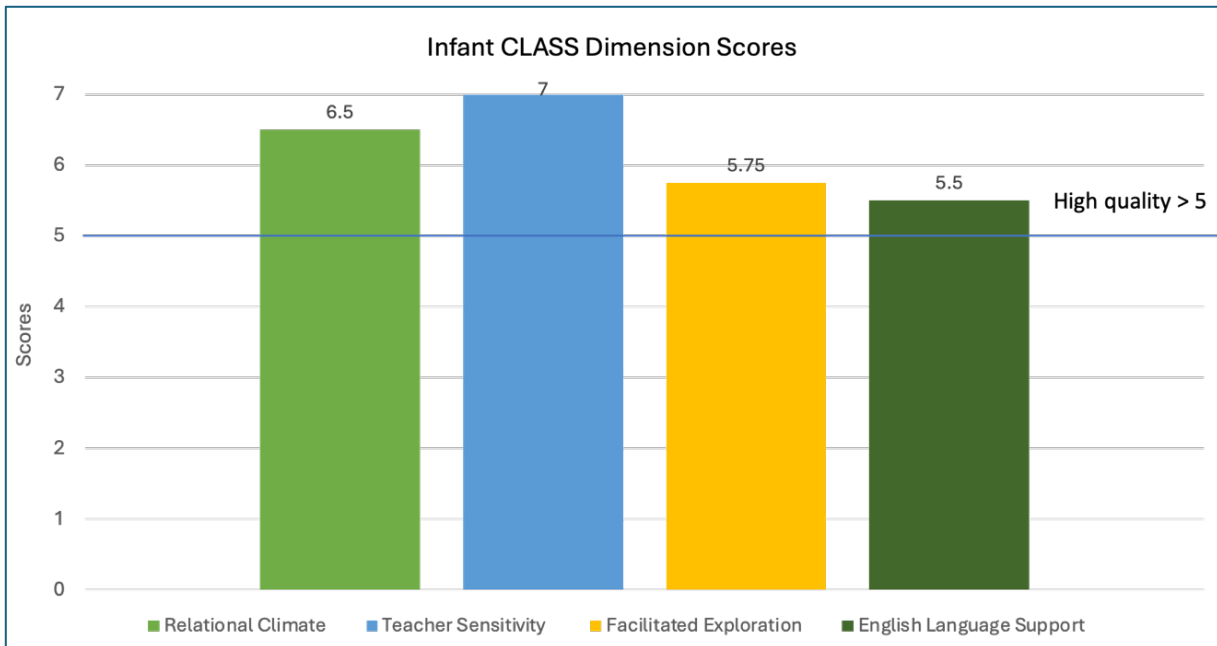


Figure 24. Infant CLASS Dimension Scores

ITERS-3: The average ITERS-3 score of 7 infant and toddler classrooms was 6.06 in 2023–2024, which was slightly lower than the average score (6.29; 5 classrooms) in 2022–2023. However,

infant and toddler classrooms maintained ‘good to excellent’ quality across all domains (i.e., lowest: Activities = 5.53; highest: Space and Furnishing = 6.68) despite changes in teaching staff.

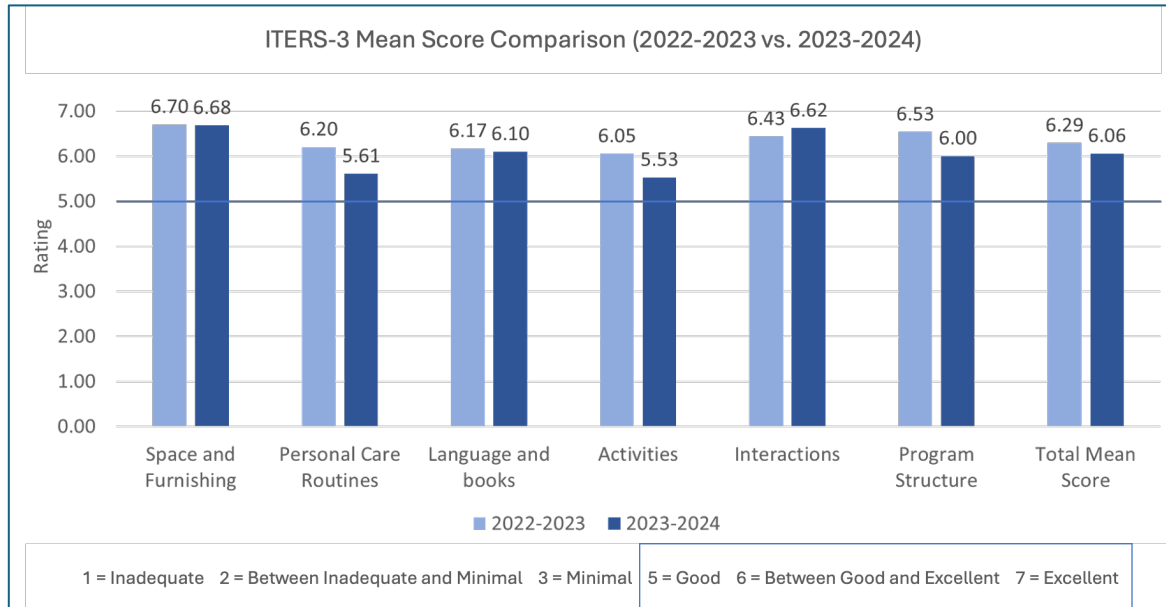


Figure 25. ITERS-3 Mean Score Comparison (2022–2023 vs. 2023–2024)

Toddler CLASS: The quality of toddler classrooms stayed consistent from 2022–2023. Toddler classrooms maintained high quality in providing children with emotional and behavioral support. However, the overall quality was slightly lower (although staying within the ‘good’ quality range) in facilitating toddlers’ learning in the classroom.

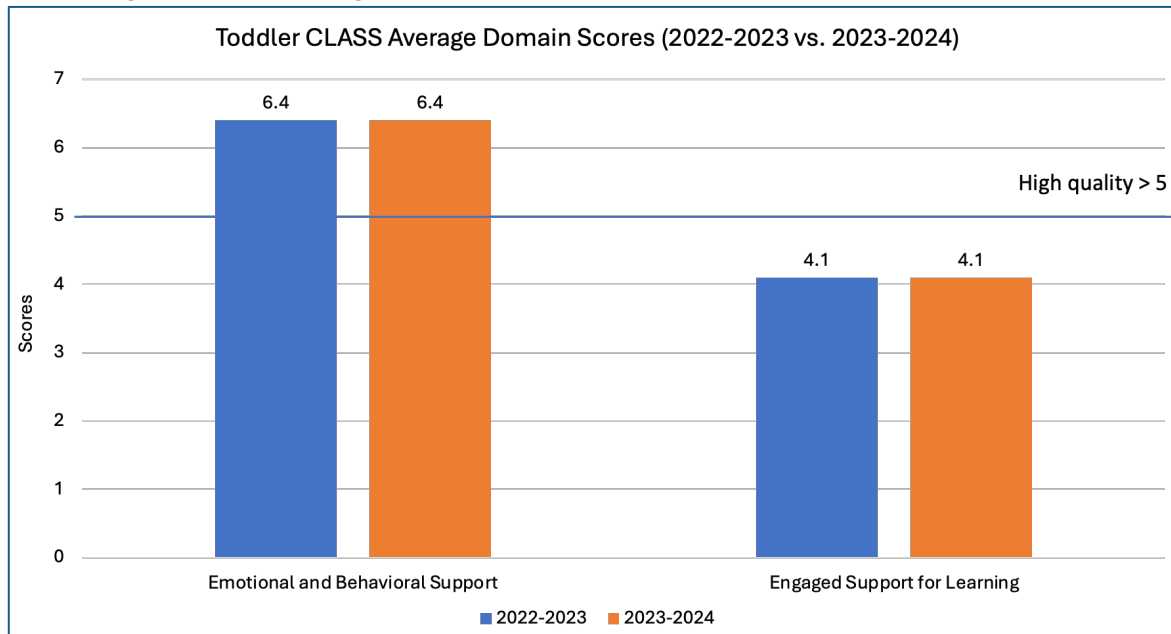


Figure 26. Toddler CLASS Average Domain Scores (2022–2023 vs. 2023–2024)

PreK CLASS: The quality of PreK classrooms in 2023–2024 showed a slight improvement from 2022–2023. PreK classrooms maintained high quality in providing children with emotional support

and effective classroom organization. However, the overall quality was slightly lower in supporting PreK children’s learning in the classroom (i.e., Instructional Support).

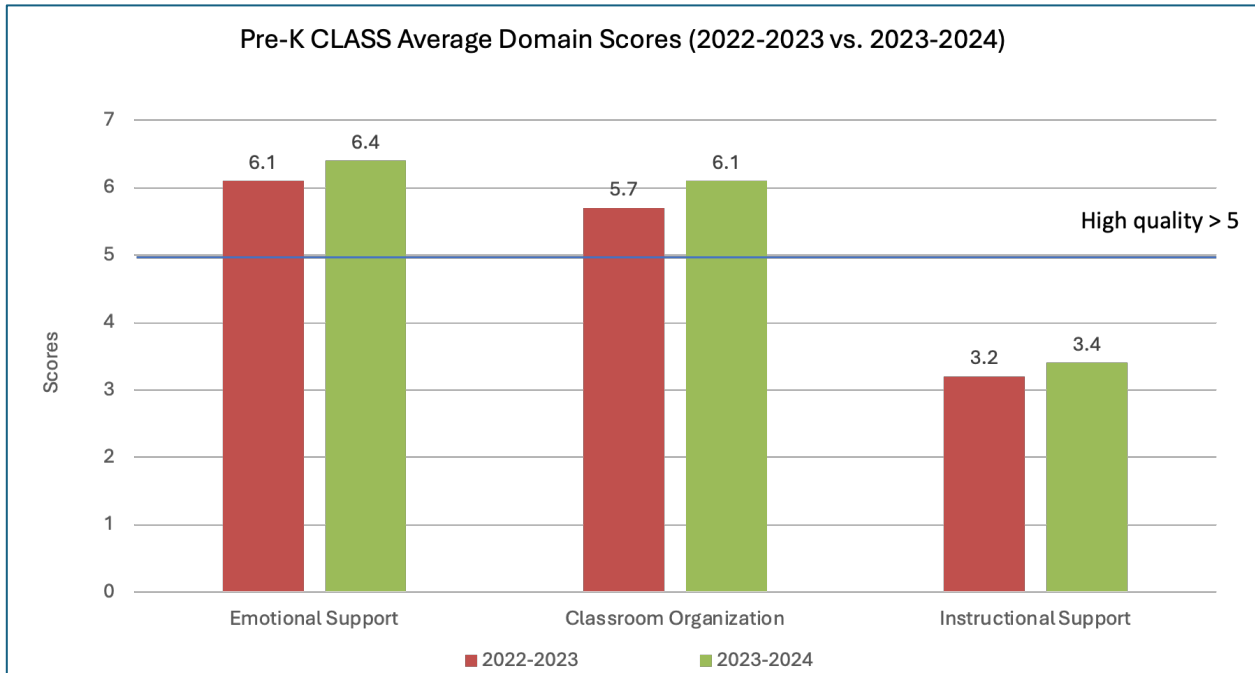


Figure 27. PreK CLASS Average Domain Scores (2022–2023 vs. 2023–2024)



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Educare Lincoln continued to build and sustain strong family partnerships, impacted the development and learning of Educare Lincoln children, and provided high-quality care, all of which contribute to Educare Lincoln's continued success. Based on the review of the 2023–2024 data on families, children, and classrooms, the Educare Lincoln leadership and evaluation team discussed the following next steps to further support Educare Lincoln children's development and learning.

- **Support families in building social capital and creating support systems in the community.**
 - The Family Engagement Specialists plan to provide professional development about communicating and working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
 - Educare Lincoln families can be invited to family workshops (e.g., school readiness, learning at home, etc.) to learn and share knowledge and strategies with one another and with Educare Lincoln staff.
- **Identify children who need immediate support and provide targeted support for learning and development.**
 - The LEP team started creating individual reports for children as needed (those scoring below the 80–85 range on the PLS-5) and sharing them with Educare Lincoln staff. The Educare Lincoln staff will use those reports to plan and embed specific learning opportunities for children who need additional support.
 - The Educare Lincoln and the LEP teams plan to provide a professional development opportunity for staff to learn more about how to communicate children's assessment results with families. It seems critical to reflect on how we are currently assessing the language abilities of multilingual learners and learn about how our assessment practices can be improved.
- **Develop a clear structure and framework for guiding lesson plans to reflect the Educare Lincoln philosophy.**
 - The Educare Lincoln leadership team plans to highlight their philosophy on early care and education (e.g., play-based learning, valuing child's perspectives) in staff interviews, orientation, and all professional development sessions and emphasize how it should be infused in all lesson plans.
- **Build a clearer connection between professional development and classroom practices.**
 - All staff receive training on the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines and the Pyramid Model, and data are an important part of staff training. The LEP team can support staff in better understanding how to make data-informed decisions while the Educare Lincoln leadership team supports the process with collaborative coaching.



