

Invest Early Early Childhood Initiative

Year 8 evaluation summary

Introduction

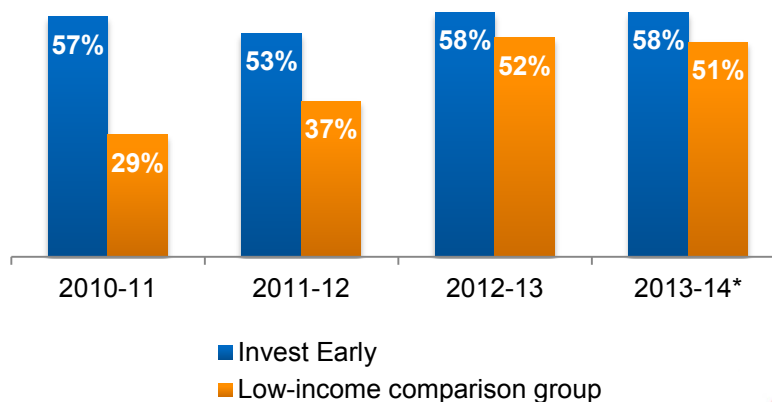
Wilder Research, in conjunction with the Invest Early leadership team and staff, is conducting a longitudinal evaluation of the program. Annual reports document the implementation and assessment of Invest Early and outcomes for the service system, families, and children.

Highlights

Invest Early is having **county-wide impacts**. The proportion of children receiving early childhood screens before age 4 has increased from 26 percent prior to Invest Early to an average of 38 percent each year since Invest Early. Moreover, the early childhood workforce is more educated. For example, in 2012-13, 304 adult caregivers of young children received some type of continuing education and training. Thirty-five early childhood caregivers have obtained degrees in early childhood education, and 111 have obtained Child Development Certificates since Invest Early started in 2005, exceeding the goals of Invest Early.

Invest Early **serves higher-risk and underserved populations**. Fourteen percent of the children served this year are American Indian, up from four percent in 2006-07. American Indian children make up 6 percent of the child population in Itasca County, indicating Invest Early is reaching this typically harder-to-reach population. In addition to being low-income, children served by Invest Early have three other risk factors, on average, which put them at risk for delayed child development.

Kindergarten readiness over time, 2010 - 2013



* Note: 2013-14 is adjusted for two of the four districts.

Invest Early **prepares low-income students for school success**. At the end of the year, 87 percent of all the Invest Early participants were in the normal range of development in all domains assessed. Kindergarten entry results show that Invest Early children have outperformed their low-income comparison peers for the last four years.



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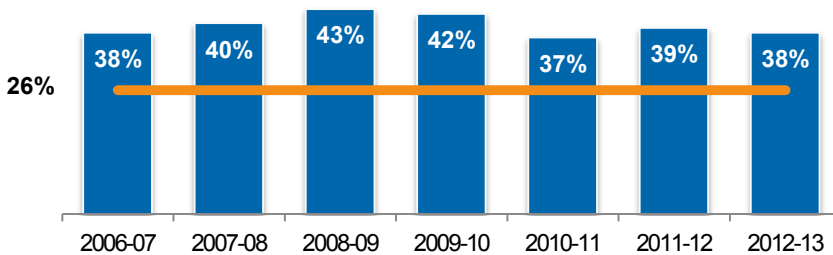
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Invest Early is having county-wide system impacts for children and families

Early childhood screenings

Invest Early children are screened within 45 days of enrollment in the program. County-wide, children are being screened significantly earlier than before Invest Early, but improvements have leveled off. In the past year, 38 percent of early childhood screenings were conducted before age 4, compared with about 39 percent last year and 26 percent prior to Invest Early.

Percent screened before age 4 compared to baseline



Educating and training early childhood caregivers and teachers

In 2012-13, 304 caregivers received some type of early childhood training, exceeding the goal of reaching at least 200 caregivers per year.

As of this year, 30 early childhood educators have earned a two-year early childhood degrees, two have earned a bachelor's, and three have earned a master's. In addition, 111 have obtained Child Development Certificates.

Profile of Invest Early participants

In year 8, 501 children age 5 and younger and 424 families participated in Invest Early, compared with 389 children and 310 families last year. Of the children served this year, 17 percent were age 2 or younger, 16 percent age 3, and 67 percent ages 4 or 5. Most (82%) are white.

Invest Early children live in households with a median income of \$20,020 per year. Over a third (36%) live in single-parent households.

Risk factors

In addition to being from low-income households, participating children and families have, on average, three other life circumstances at the time of enrollment that place them at risk. The most common risk

factors are similar to past years: experiencing a family stressor in the past year, such as death, divorce, or unemployment (42%); living in a single-parent household (33%); and lack of opportunities for the child to socialize with peers (25%). In addition, a fifth of the children have a developmental or medical concern. This year, as in previous years, the youngest children (under age 3) have one more risk factor, on average, than those age three to five.

Based on staff observations, a third of parents sometimes or frequently seem overwhelmed or stressed and have difficulties coping with personal or family matters, with no change in level of frequency during the year. Two-thirds of the parents report feeling challenged by life's demands.

Quality of Invest Early early care and education

Based on classroom observations this year, Invest Early classrooms were rated above average on emotional support and instructional support, and within the average range for classroom organization.

Invest Early children and families show progress during their participation

Children's growth and development

As measured by the GOLD assessment tool, children in the Invest Early program experienced growth and development in all domain areas. At the end of the year, 87 percent of all the Invest Early participants were in the normal range of development on all seven of the GOLD domains.

Developmental growth during program year, 2012-13

Age	Start of year	End of year
Infants/toddlers (0-2 year-olds)	58%	94%
Preschoolers (3 year-olds)	44%	84%
Pre-kindergarten (4-5 year-olds)	39%	85%

Home learning environment improvements

Participating families' home learning environments improved significantly on all 15 items rated, more than in the last four years. Notable improvements include parents' increased encouragement of children to learn the alphabet and numbers, and children's increased access to age appropriate books, music, toys, and toys in the home.

Family involvement in Invest Early

About half (47%) of parents reached or exceeded the goal of committing 30 volunteer hours to Invest Early, down slightly from the last two years (56-58%). Similar to previous years, parents volunteered most for special events, field trips, and reading to children.

Parents rate their experience and satisfaction with Invest Early positively

Parents rated the Invest Early program and staff highly.

In terms of the program satisfaction, 99 percent are satisfied with the education their child received, say the services they received met their expectations, and would recommend the program to others.

In terms of the staff, 99 percent of parents say the staff know a lot about children and how to teach them and respects the parent as an individual; 98 percent say staff communicates with the parents in a way they understand; and 95 percent say staff give parents useful suggestions, recommendations, and advice; and 94 percent say staff are sensitive to their family and cultural issues.

Regarding their child's development, 99 percent of parents say their child has made progress in developing language skills, and 98 percent say their child made progress in social skills needed for school.

Parents also rated their own parenting skills high. For example, 90 percent say they better understand their child's needs and development; 90 percent say they understand what their child needs to succeed in school more now; 85 percent say involvement in the program helped them to improve their parenting skills; and 83 percent say staff helped them identify their strengths as a parent.

Invest Early is effective in preparing low-income students with multiple risk factors for school success

2013-14 kindergarten class

This year, only data from Grand Rapids and Nashuak-Keewatin, data for about half (310) of the Invest Early and comparison group students, were included in this report. Therefore, results have to be used with caution.

This year, 82 percent of the Invest Early low-income students demonstrated school readiness skills and knowledge fairly consistently (23%) or proficiently (59%), compared with 74 percent of the low-income comparison group (53% proficient) without Invest Early, School Readiness, or Head Start experience, and 88 percent of higher-income kindergarteners (68% proficient) who were not in Invest Early.

Over the last 4 years, Invest Early students have outperformed the low-income comparison group in kindergarten readiness.

Elementary grade test scores

Based on third grade MCA test results in the spring of 2013, Invest Early and low-income comparison group students had similar standardized scores in reading and math, with about half meeting or exceeding standards for reading, and 66-76 percent meeting or exceeding third grade math standards. This cohort, however, also performed similarly on their kindergarten assessments.

Based on fifth grade MCA test results in the spring of 2013, 58 percent of the Invest Early children meet or exceed standards for reading, compared to 37 percent of the low-income comparison group. In math, the two groups had similar scores, with about 40 percent of the Invest Early and low-income comparison group children meeting or exceeding standards.

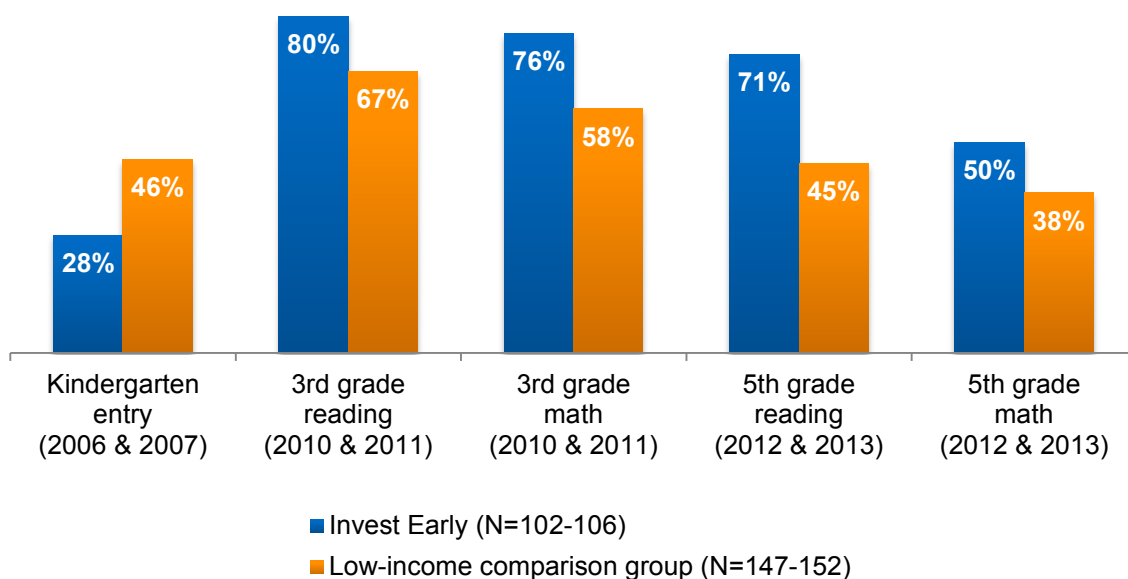
Invest Early participants across time

In this eighth year of the project, two cohorts of Invest Early students have completed the 5th grade and matched achievement data are available for three time periods: kindergarten entry, end of 3rd grade, and end of 5th grade.

Based on kindergarten assessments and MCA reading and math tests, a smaller percentage of Invest Early students in the first two cohorts were rated ready for kindergarten compared to the low-income comparison group students. Over time, however, the Invest Early students scored better than their low-income peers in third and fifth grade.

More than three-quarters of the first two cohorts of Invest Early children met or exceeded third-grade standards for reading and math, compared with 67 percent of the comparison group in reading and 58 percent in math. By fifth grade, 71 percent of Invest Early children met or exceeded standards for reading and 50 percent for math, compared with 45 percent of the comparison group in reading and 38 percent in math.

Invest Early cohorts 1 and 2: Meets or exceeds achievement standards



Methods and background

Kindergarten readiness assessment

Invest Early uses the Minnesota Work Sampling System Kindergarten Entry Developmental Checklist^{®2} developed by the Minnesota Department of Education to assess kindergarten readiness. The checklist is completed by kindergarten teachers during the first couple months after kindergarten entry on five domains: personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, the arts, and physical development and health. Each domain is measured by a set of indicators. Students' performance on each indicator is rated: "not yet," "in process," or "proficient."

Home learning environments

Invest Early staff members visit participating children's homes to talk with parents about the benefits of providing an educational learning environment at home. Based on their observations and discussions, staff rate participants' home learning environment in terms of the amount of access children have to learning materials and how frequently parents engage in learning activities with their children. Ratings were conducted at the beginning and end of the program year to determine if improvements occurred over time.

Children's growth and development during the program

To assess participants' developmental status and growth, Invest Early staff used the Teaching Strategies GOLD, an observation-based assessment that measures 64 dimensions of 36 objectives in nine developmental areas along a 10 level continuum ("not yet" to level nine). The expectations for each age overlap to acknowledge that children develop in stages at various rates.

Staff also assess preschool children (age 3 through 5) on emergent math and literacy skills using the Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI) and Preschool Numeracy Indicator (PNI).

Classroom environments

Invest Early assesses all classrooms on the quality of classroom learning environments using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).



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For more information

This summary presents highlights of the *Invest Early, Early Childhood Initiative, year 8 evaluation*. For more information about this report, contact Richard Chase at Wilder Research, 651-280-2706.

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