



**Early
Learning**
ESSENTIALS



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025



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Message From Our Executive Director

At Early Learning Essentials, we believe that it truly takes a village to raise a child. This past 2024-25 school year reminded us just how powerful that village can be. We worked side by side with families, staff, and community partners to ensure that children not only learned but also grew in health, confidence, and resilience. Every success we celebrate, whether it was a child learning to write their name, a parent gaining confidence in their role as their child's first teacher, or a classroom filled with laughter and curiosity, was made possible because of the dedication and support of our families, staff, and community partners.

We are deeply grateful to our teachers and staff, who bring heart and commitment to their work every single day, and to the families who open their doors and share their journeys with us. Most of all, we celebrate the children, whose energy, creativity, and resilience inspire us to keep striving for the very best in early childhood education.

Together, we are building strong foundations for learning and life. Thank you to our community for your continued trust and partnership in this important work.

With gratitude,

Sonia Pineda
Executive Director, Early Learning Essentials



Message From Our Board Chair

I am grateful for the thoughtful work that is contributed by the members of the staff team, and the love and care from the family members towards the children that we care for. Children are the future and building the future starts when they are very young.

This year we are also grateful for the growing community support from volunteers, donors and interns. Sonia Pineda, our Executive Director has said many times that it takes a village to raise a child.

I am grateful to witness the many unique contributions by Early Learning Essentials and the many community partners that invest in the life of each child. Together, amazing things can happen in the life of each child and family! I am grateful to be associated with such a fantastic organization!

Sincerely,
Chris Hansen
Board Chair



Early Learning Essentials

Early Learning Essentials. (ELE), also known as Mountainland Head Start, Inc is a 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit organization based out of Provo, Utah. Our mission is *“empowering young children and families along a path to achieve their highest potential.”* We accomplish this by administering a Head Start program in Juab, Utah, and Wasatch Counties, and an Early Head Start Program in Juab County and south Utah county. These programs are funded through a federal grant with a 20% community support match. We are funded to serve 575 children and families in our Head Start program and 12 children/pregnant mothers in our Early Head Start program, for a total of 587 individuals.

ELE takes a two-generational approach to alleviating poverty in our community. We provide high-quality preschool services for 3 and 4-year-olds focusing on cognitive, physical and social/emotional development. We also provide social support services to the families, with particular focus on financial well-being, parenting, and promoting child development in the home.

Family Success Stories

The Kulynych Family

My name is Mariia Kulynych. I'm a mother of three and an immigrant from Ukraine. We are a family of five starting our life over in the United States after fleeing war. Back in Ukraine, I had a successful career as an HR manager and head of sales at a real estate company. I loved my work, I had a purpose, and I was proud of who I was.

After moving here, everything changed. I became a stay-at-home mom with two little boys at home and my daughter in school. I quickly found myself isolated, overwhelmed, and deeply depressed. My middle child was just three years old—so smart, curious, and incredibly social—but we couldn't afford preschool. I felt trapped, not just financially but emotionally.

And then Head Start found us.

They opened the door for my son to attend preschool and even offered support for my youngest. For the first time in a long time, I saw my son happy, learning, and growing with other kids. It changed everything. It gave us hope. Even though we later moved to Lehi and lost access to the program, my son still asks about preschool. I hope and pray I can give him that experience again.

Head Start didn't just help my kids—it helped me heal. I began recovering from depression. I started exercising, writing, and even authored a book. I'm now working on evaluating my master's degree in psychology from Ukraine and plan to serve the Ukrainian community here, many of whom are in desperate need of therapy and support.

Here's the truth: without help like Head Start, I don't know if I'd still be here. My depression, PTSD, postpartum struggles, and anxiety were crushing. But with support—real, meaningful support—I've been able to rebuild my life, my family, and my future. We are now tax-paying residents. My husband runs a handyman business. I stay home with our youngest and work toward becoming a licensed mental health professional. We contribute to this country with pride—and we live a peaceful, stable life. Not because we "pulled ourselves up," but because someone gave us a hand when we were drowning.

Thank you for supporting Head Start. It changes lives. It saved mine.

The Munson Family

I [would like] to express my heartfelt gratitude and strong support for the Head Start program, and to share the profound impact it has had on my family--specifically, on my three young daughters.

As a parent of five children, I can confidently say that the support, structure, and early education that Head Start has provided for my three girls has made a world of difference—not only in their development but in the well-being of our entire family. Each of my daughters entered the program at different stages, and each one has flourished in ways I never could have imagined.

Head Start gave them a safe and nurturing environment to learn, grow, and build confidence. They were exposed to essential early learning skills, social and emotional development, and healthy routines that set a strong foundation for success in kindergarten and beyond. The teachers and staff have treated my girls with love and respect, understanding their unique needs and empowering them with the tools they need to thrive.

Beyond academics, Head Start has helped my family access vital resources, including parenting support, health services, and developmental screenings. These services have lightened the load for our family and have helped us stay informed and proactive about our children's growth and well-being. For example, my daughter was having strong behaviors and we needed help. Doing the ASQ assessment let me know as her parent where she needed help. I was able to make a plan with my daughter to help her in her hard moments throughout the day! It eased the stress of our family dynamics and she now feels more safe and happy.

Without Head Start, I truly believe my daughters would not be as prepared—socially, emotionally, or academically—as they are today. This program has not only helped them but has uplifted our entire household.



Being Good Stewards of Federal Funds

As a recipient of federal funds, Mountainland Head Start, operating as Early Learning Essentials, acknowledges the significant trust placed in our organization by taxpayers. We are committed to upholding this trust through rigorous monitoring practices, continuous efforts to enhance operational efficiency, and proactive measures to minimize waste.

During the 2023-24 school year, Early Learning Essentials received a Focus Area #2 federal review by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Based on the information gathered during this review, we are pleased to report that our program was found to receive just one small finding dealing with a missing federal interest posting in one of our locations. Other than that, our agency met the requirements of all applicable Head Start Performance Standards, or Public Law 110-134, Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, as well as other applicable laws, regulations and policy requirements.

Annual Independent Audit Results

For the fiscal year ending April 30, 2025, an audit was conducted by Squire & Company, PC. We are pleased to report that the audit yielded no findings. The auditor issued an unmodified opinion on our financial statements, indicating that there were no deficiencies or material weaknesses in internal control over financial reporting. Furthermore, the audit did not identify any deficiencies in internal control over compliance that would constitute a material weakness under the requirements of 2 U.S. Code of Federal Regulations Part 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance).

In-Kind Non-Federal Share

For the fiscal year 2024-2025, our federal requirements for in-kind/non-federal contributions—comprising 10 donations, volunteer time, supplies, and the value of donated classroom sites - totaled \$2,307,506. Thanks to the generosity of our dedicated parent volunteers, community members, local businesses, and partners, we successfully surpassed our non-federal match goals. The required federal match amount was \$2,485,115.

**Full financial statements and the 990 are available upon request.*

TOTAL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS RECEIVED 2024-2025

Head Start Grant	\$ 9,279,553
Head Start Training Grant	\$ 81,469
Head Start Grant Total	\$ 9,361,022
Cash Contributions	\$ 34,226
Other Revenue	
Contributions/Income	\$ 34,226
Child Care Food Program	\$ 501,033
Total	\$ 501,033
Head Start Grand Total	\$ 9,896,281

2024-2025 MOUNTAINLAND HEAD START BUDGET

Personnel	\$ 5,728,810
Fringe Benefits	\$ 1,904,808
Travel	\$ 25,000
Equipment	\$ 131,000
Supplies	\$ 212,612
Contractual	\$ 338,338
Construction	\$ -
Other	\$ 938,985
Training	\$ 81,469
Total	\$ 9,361,022

2024-2025 MOUNTAINLAND HEAD START EXPENDITURE

Personnel	\$ 6,104,255
Fringe Benefits	\$ 1,281,045
Travel	\$ 19,959
Equipment	\$ 131,794
Supplies	\$ 188,300
Contractual	\$ 422,190
Construction	\$ -
Other	\$ 1,098,765
Training	\$ 83,507
Child Care Food Program	\$ 566,466
Total	\$ 9,896,281

NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO PROVIDED VOLUNTEER SERVICES 2024-2025

Parents/Former Head Start Parents	1199
Community Volunteers	1092
Total	2291

PROPOSED 2025-2026 MOUNTAINLAND HEAD START BUDGET

Personnel	\$ 5,755,825
Fringe Benefits	\$ 1,904,808
Travel	\$ 25,000
Equipment	\$ -
Supplies	\$ 206,841
Contractual	\$ 357,154
Construction	\$ -
Other	\$ 898,925
Training	\$ 81,469
Total	\$ 9,230,022

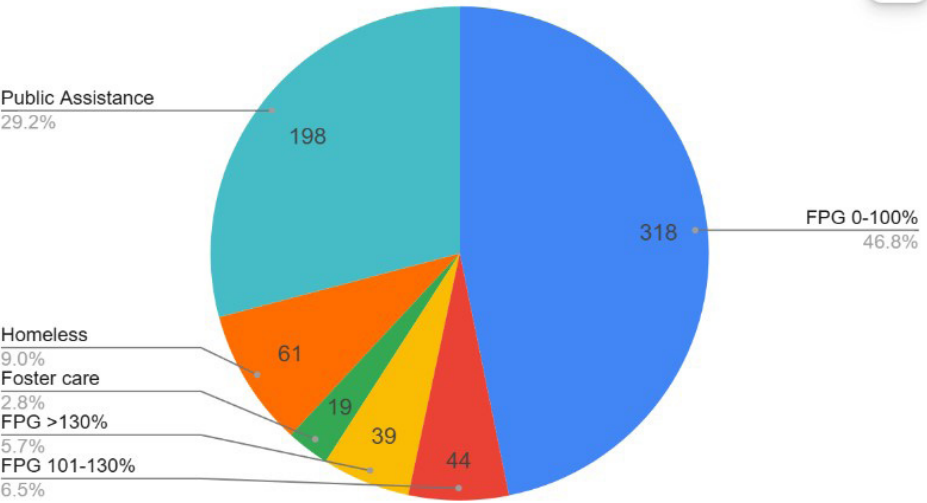
Enrollment

ELE served a total of 678 children from 620 families through our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. To the right is a breakdown of the income eligibility statuses for all enrolled children in these programs.

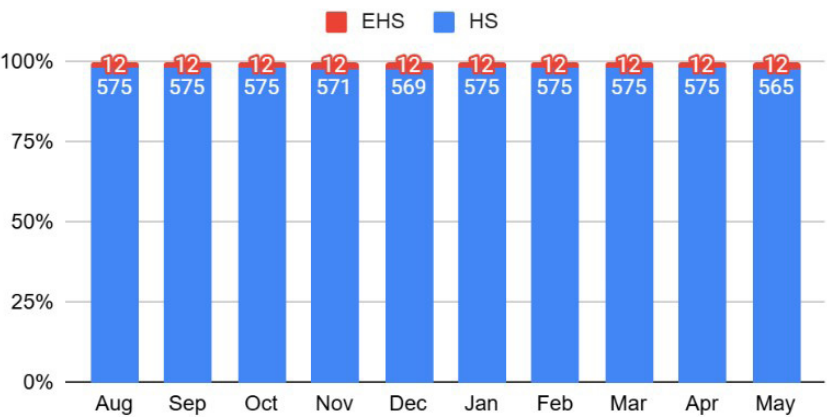
The program aims to keep full enrollment throughout the year. We successfully maintained enrollment at or above 97% of available slots for the entire 2024-25 school year. Our average monthly enrollment for the year as a percentage of funded enrollment was 99.7%. The chart to the right displays the monthly enrollment for each month of the school year.

In our service area there are an estimated 5,005 children birth to four years old who are living below the federal poverty guidelines. Based upon that estimate from the US Census Bureau, Early Learning Essentials served roughly 13.5% of income and age-eligible children in our service area.

Income Status of Enrolled Children in Head Start & Early Head Start



Monthly End of Month enrollment numbers



School Readiness and Preparing Children for Kindergarten

At Early Learning Essentials, we are dedicated to preparing every child for a bright academic future, providing them with the tools they need to succeed in school and life. Our mission focuses on nurturing the full developmental potential of each child, ensuring they are fully ready for kindergarten and beyond. We believe that by fostering a love for learning and providing high-quality early education, we can positively impact the lives of both children and their families, giving them the confidence and skills needed for future achievements.

Our approach to kindergarten readiness is built on five key developmental domains, which are critical for fostering school success:

- Approaches to learning: Encouraging curiosity, initiative, and a love for learning.
- Social and emotional development: Helping children build self-regulation, social skills, and emotional resilience.
- Language and literacy: Strengthening communication skills and early literacy foundations.
- Cognitive development: Promoting problem-solving skills and critical thinking
- Perceptual motor and physical development: Supporting physical health, coordination, and fine and gross motor skills.

At ELE, we believe in establishing a comprehensive foundation for each child's school readiness. To achieve this, we implement the Creative Curriculum, an evidence-based framework that is specifically designed for children ages 3 to 5 and is fully aligned with the Utah Core Standards for Early Learning. This curriculum celebrates children's natural curiosity and encourages active exploration, providing a holistic approach to learning. It is carefully structured around engaging, thematic units that encompass every aspect of a child's development, from social-emotional growth and academic skills to physical development and language acquisition.



In addition to the Creative Curriculum, we integrate Conscious Discipline, a proven methodology that addresses the unique developmental needs of each child. Conscious Discipline offers practical tools and strategies for creating a safe, nurturing environment where children can thrive emotionally, socially, and academically. Together, these two programs work hand in hand to provide an individualized and well-rounded learning experience, supporting the diverse needs of every child and ensuring they are fully prepared for the next step in their educational journey.

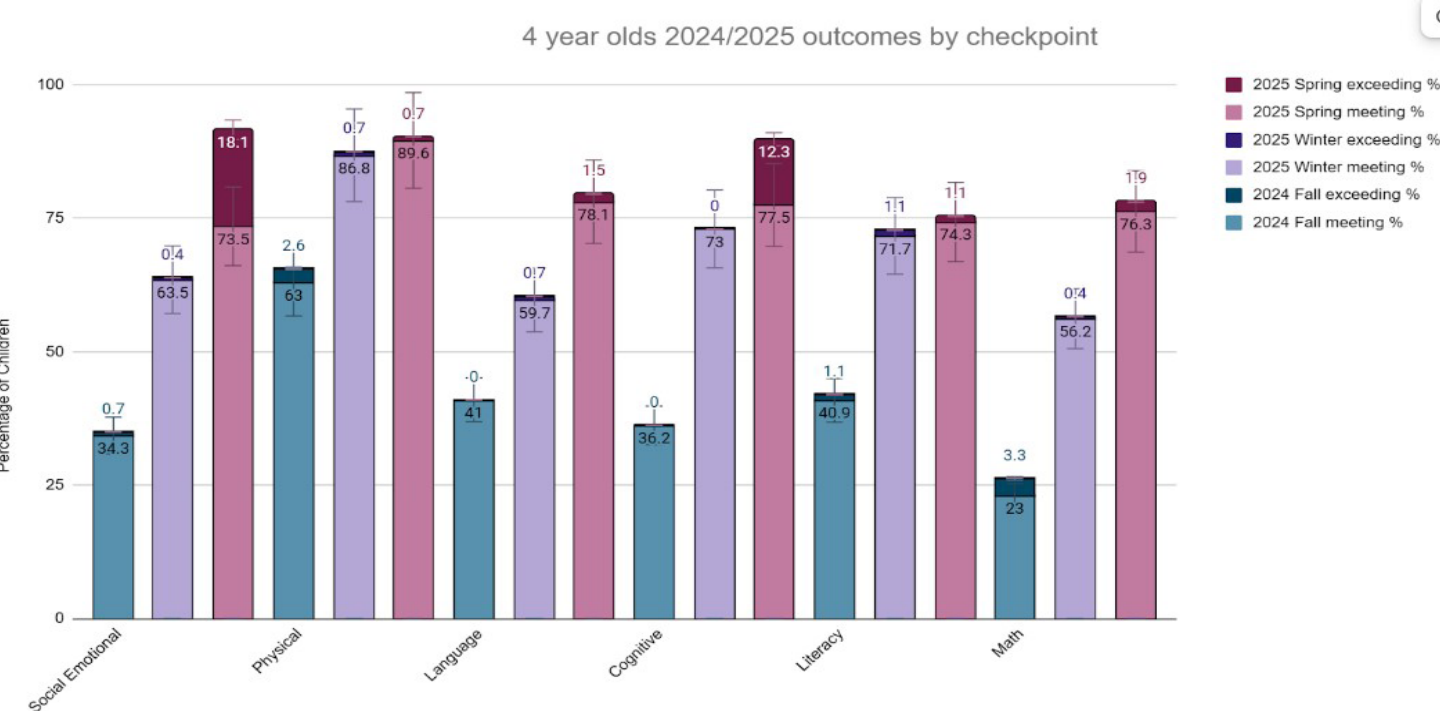
ELE consistently tracks progress toward school readiness goals and uses this data to enhance our proven practices. Our Head Start program establishes specific goals for each child's development across 12 key areas, measuring growth through 99 dimensions. This progress is carefully monitored through ongoing observations and the use of the research-based assessment tool, "Teaching Strategies Gold." Data is collected at three checkpoints throughout the year, providing a clear picture of each child's progression.



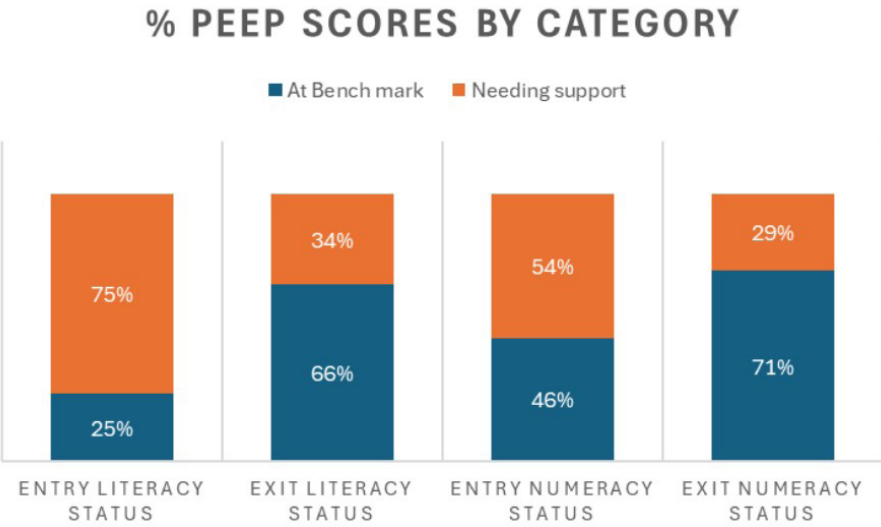
Head Start defines school readiness as the skills and knowledge children need to be successful in school and in life. By using a research-based curriculum with a clear scope and sequence, and by implementing this curriculum with fidelity, we ensure that every child is both emotionally and academically prepared for kindergarten. Our goal is for children to leave Head Start with confidence and a positive attitude toward school, setting them up for success in kindergarten and beyond. We also credit our success in School Readiness to our dedicated staff, who work hard to provide high-quality teaching and create the best possible learning experiences for the children and families we serve.

On the next page you will find a graph that illustrates the developmental progress our Head Start children achieved during the 2024-2025 school year, from fall to spring. For those transitioning to kindergarten, we observed growth in every domain. The most significant growth occurred in the Mathematics domain, with 25.6% of children meeting

expectations in the fall, and by spring, outcomes were at 76.3% meeting and 1.9% exceeding expectation, indicating a remarkable growth (57.9%). The second-highest growth was in the Social/Emotional domain, with 35% meeting expectations in the fall and 91.6% meeting these expectations by spring, reflecting a growth of 56.6%.



We also use the state Preschool Entry and Exit Profiles (PEEP) to demonstrate progress in literacy and mathematics. While we weren't able to bring all children up to benchmark for the state's profile by the end of the year, we were able to significantly increase the percentage of children who were meeting developmental benchmarks by the time they left the program. Literacy scores jumped by 41% and numeracy scores jumped by 25%. The state PEEP report for the 2023-24 school year indicates that throughout the state they had a 39% increase in literacy and a 22% increase in numeracy between the entry and exit scores.





Health and Nutrition

Services

At Early Learning Essentials, we understand that healthy children are better able to engage in learning, which allows them to get more out of the educational opportunities presented to them. With that in mind, our Health Services team collaborated with Head Start families and health professionals within our community to ensure the children we served during the 2024-2025 school year were up-to-date on a schedule of well child checks and preventive care including immunizations, as well as annual physical and dental exams.

This year we dealt with ongoing student absenteeism and parental resistance in meeting health requirements. We also saw an increase in the numbers of children who are not eligible for health or dental insurance programs combined with a lack of dental resources for uninsured in our service area. Despite the challenges, the Health Services staff were successful in partnering with the vast majority of parents and health professionals in preparing the children to be physically ready for kindergarten.

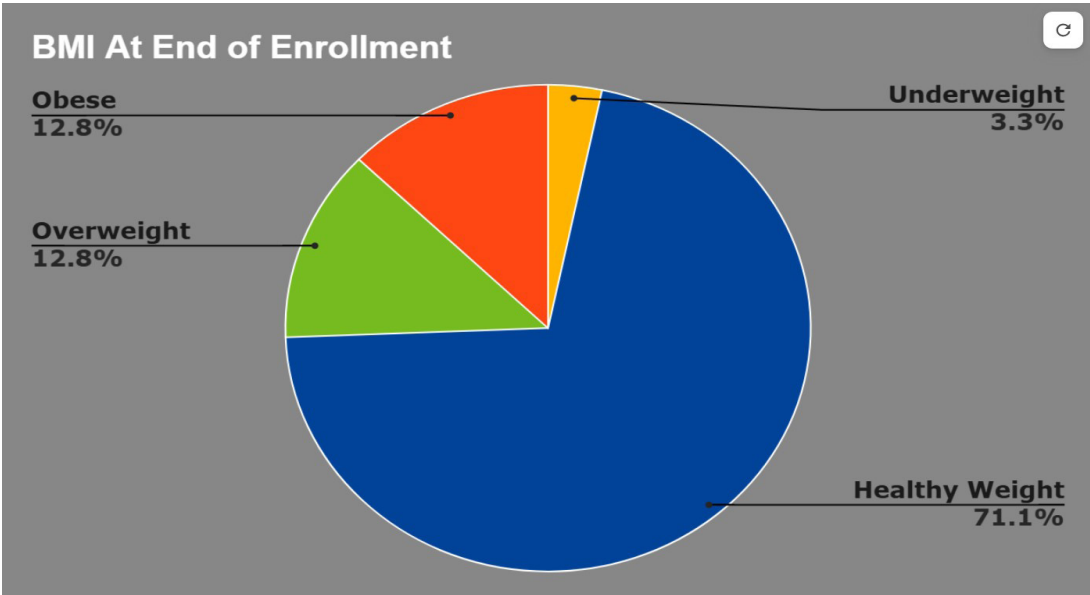
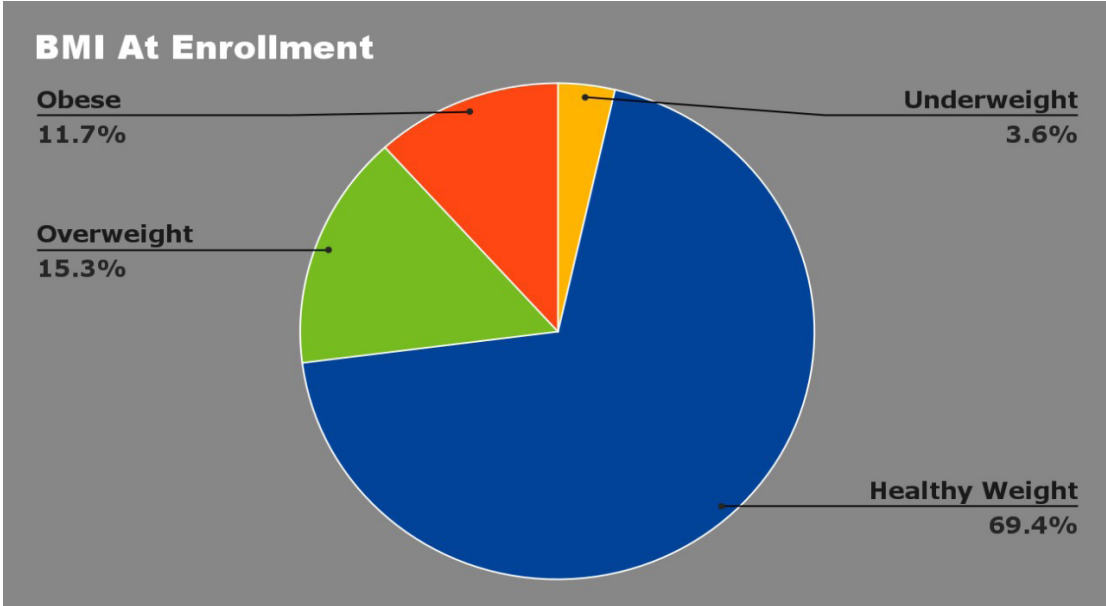
2024-2025 Enrollment Numbers Related to Health Results	
Children who were enrolled at least one day	662
Children who were enrolled less than 90 days	66

Of the Children Enrolled at least 1 day	Number	Percentage
Children with up to date immunizations	662	100%
Children with medical homes	649	98%
Children with an annual physical exam	640	97%
Children with dental homes	623	94%
Children with an annual dental exam	626	95%

Nutrition Services

Meal time at Early Learning Essentials is an extension of the classroom wherein children learn gross and fine motor skills, table manners, social skills, and many other self-help skills to prepare them for school. Each day, children are offered a nourishing breakfast, lunch and snack that is prepared and served on-site. Menus and recipes are created by a registered dietitian and follow the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern. Meals served are planned to be colorful, delicious, and nutritious in order to foster the appropriate growth and development of the children. Each week includes a culturally diverse meal to help children try new and interesting foods they may have never had before. The menu offers a variety of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, lean meats and dairy, and whole grains. We look forward to continuing to develop menu items to provide good nutrition to our children.

Each meal is being served in the classroom. There are three sites (Orem to Aspen, Lehi to Saratoga Springs, and Springville to Spanish Fork) where food is transported from one location to the other. This way all the children can have hot lunches. At the beginning of the program year, 69.3% of children who had growth assessments were classified as healthy weight, 3.6% were underweight, 15.3% were overweight



and 11.7% were classified as obese based on the BMI-for-age growth charts. By the end of the program year, 71.1% of children were classified as healthy weight, 3.3% were underweight, 12.8% were overweight and 12.8% were classified as obese. While we had fewer children who were both overweight and under weight, by the end of the year, we also had more children who were at a healthy weight, but also our rates of obesity went up.

Our figures relating to childhood obesity are slightly less than national averages. According to the 2011 Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System data, nearly one third of children aged two to four were overweight or obese.^{[1][2]} Early Learning Essentials takes every effort to contribute to childhood obesity prevention by providing foods that are high in nutrients and low in fat, sugar and salt. Newsletter articles were sent to parents emphasizing the importance of healthy foods and family meals, and recipes for healthy Early Learning Essentials meals were provided for parents. Additionally, one home visit included a discussion of the child’s growth chart. Families were given a nutrition handout that corresponded with their child’s BMI. Families were also able to learn about good nutrition practices at Parent Meetings. Families have the option of meeting with a registered dietitian for nutrition consultations if desired.

[1] <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/pednssfactsheet.pdf>
[2] <http://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/prevention/nutrition/pednss/2011/table12c.htm>

Parent Engagement and Family Outcomes

ELE continues to actively engage all families through open, effective communication. Parent feedback remained positive, with both English- and Spanish-speaking families reporting high levels of respect and strong language support. Parent officer engagement remained steady, and the program also supported children transitioning to new classrooms, including Kindergarten, through dedicated transition activities and Kindergarten Transition Fairs

This year, we launched the DUDE Challenge for the first time, achieving strong results in engaging fathers and emphasizing the importance of their involvement across the program. Parents responded enthusiastically, with many sharing that the activities helped them create meaningful memories and strengthen family bonds. One parent said, “I am super happy we’re making memories—something we can enjoy later.” Several noted that the challenges encouraged participation from all their children. Overall, the DUDE Challenge brought families together, promoted fun and meaningful interactions, and helped build new, everyday traditions.

Highlights of other activities included:

- * Launch of the All Pro Dads chapter at ELE
- * 7-week Conscious Discipline Parenting Curriculum
- * 3-hour Financial Fitness Seminar
- * Fall family activity
- * Monthly DUDE activities
- * End-of-Year Carnival and Recruitment Open House
- * Kindergarten Transition Fairs in partnership with Alpine, Nebo, Provo, Wasatch, and Juab School Districts

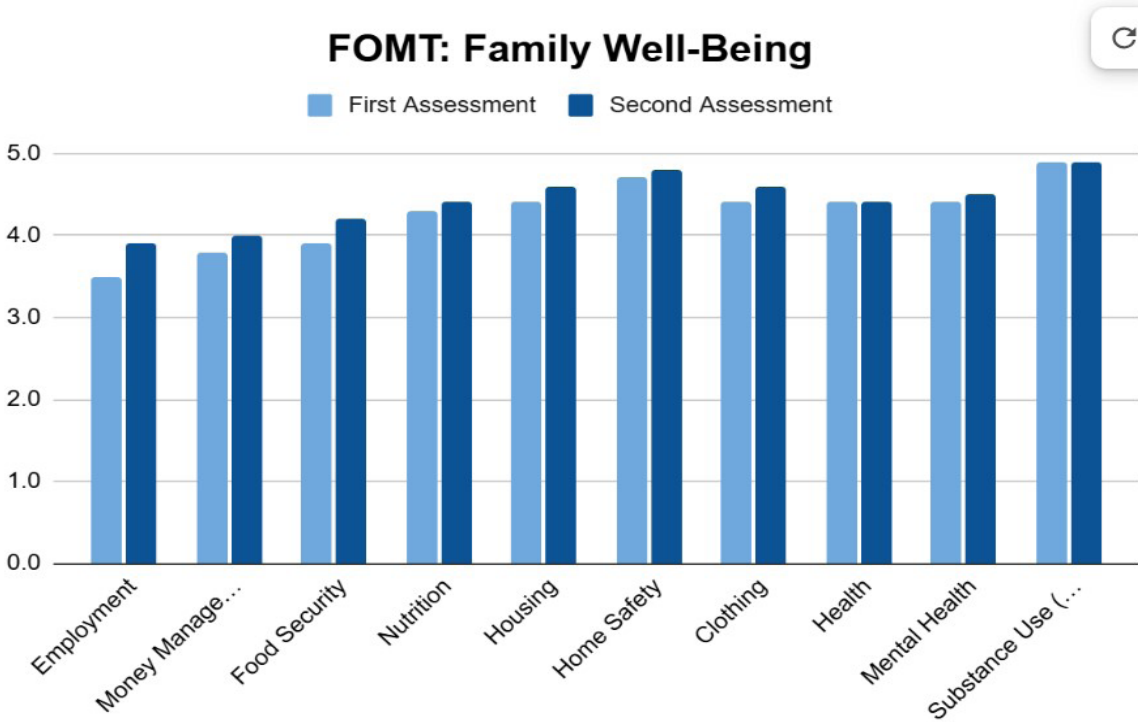
These efforts reflect ELE’s ongoing commitment to strengthening family engagement and supporting smooth transitions for all children.



Family Advocates worked closely with families throughout the year to help them achieve their goals in seven key areas. Family Partnership Agreement (FPA) goals were set and many were successfully completed and/or carried forward. Family Advocates made referrals to agencies who could address ongoing needs in food, English language, housing, clothing, and counseling/treatment.

Family Outcome Measurement Results

We track family progress using our Family Outcomes Measurement tool, which assesses families’ status in these areas on a 1-5 scale—1 being in crisis, 3 being stable with support, and 5 being self-sufficient. A total of 480 parents of enrolled students completed both the first and second FOMT assessments. The FOMT has a maximum score of 150. On average, families entered the program with a score of 127 and exited with a score of 130, showing a modest overall increase of 3 points. The most notable improvements were seen in the areas of Employment, Food Security, and Community Support Network. Employment showed the largest gain, increasing by nearly half a point (0.4).



Mental Health Outcomes

The Disabilities and Mental Health (DMH) team worked throughout the 2024–2025 school year to ensure that children with disabilities were fully supported and that Head Start’s requirement of reserving at least 10% of enrollment slots for students with disabilities was met. This year, 105 students were enrolled with an IEP, making up 13.9% of our total actual enrollment. Of these students, 68 were diagnosed with speech and language delays, 36 were identified with developmental delays, and 1 student received a 504 plan for a health impairment.

All first-year students at Early Learning Essentials received developmental and speech screenings within the required 45-day window. In total, 461 screenings were completed. These screenings help identify early concerns in areas such as motor, cognitive, language, social, emotional, and behavioral development.

Families also played an important role in the screening process. Parents completed 659 ASQ:SE-2 questionnaires during the year, which provided valuable insight into each child’s social-emotional development and guided the supports offered by our team. Of those screened, 200 children showed elevated results on the ASQ:SE-2. These children were supported through classroom monitoring, collaboration with families, and Pyramid Model strategies to strengthen social-emotional skills.

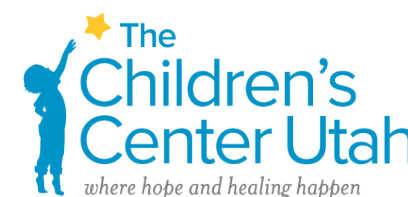
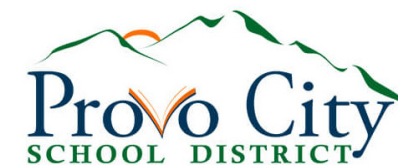
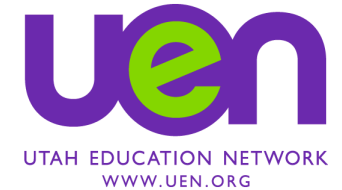
The DMH team worked particularly closely with Alpine and Nebo school districts to ensure referrals and evaluations were completed in a timely manner. Over the year, 66 referrals were submitted (41 to Alpine and 23 to Nebo). From these referrals, 36 new IEPs were developed. For students awaiting evaluations, accommodations and classroom support plans were created so no child went without needed assistance.

Beyond compliance and screenings, the DMH team partnered with teachers, families, and mental health consultants to create safe, nurturing classroom environments. Staff received coaching, modeling, and professional development focused on behavior supports, Conscious Discipline, and trauma-informed practices. Through these combined efforts, the DMH team continued to ensure that every child has access to the tools and interventions needed to thrive in school and beyond.

Community Partners

ELE believes that collaboration with community agencies facilitates the possibility of collective impact and builds positive relationships that support parents' progress toward their goals for themselves and their children. We cannot achieve success alone. Our community partners provide culturally and linguistically responsive services and helpful resources to work with families on such goals as parents' educational advancement, economic mobility, and other aspects of family well-being. Some of our strongest partners include:

- Alpine, Provo, Nebo, Juab, Wasatch School Districts
- BYU Comprehensive Clinic
- Circles of Utah County
- Community Action and Food Bank
- Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS)
- Department of Workforce Services (DWS)
- Deseret Industries
- Family Haven
- Help Me Grow Utah
- Housing Authority of Utah County
- Kids On The Move
- Latino Mental Health Behavioral Services
- Nurturing Fathers Program
- Sandstone Psychology
- Tabitha's Way Food Pantry
- Thanksgiving Point
- The Children's Center of Utah
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- United Way of Utah County
- Utah Health Department
- Utah State University
- Utah Transit Authority (UTA)
- Vroom (Envision Utah)
- Wasatch Mental Health
- Waterford Upstart





A special thanks to all of our Staff, Parents, Board Members, Policy Council, Volunteers, and Community Partners who make our mission and vision a reality.



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