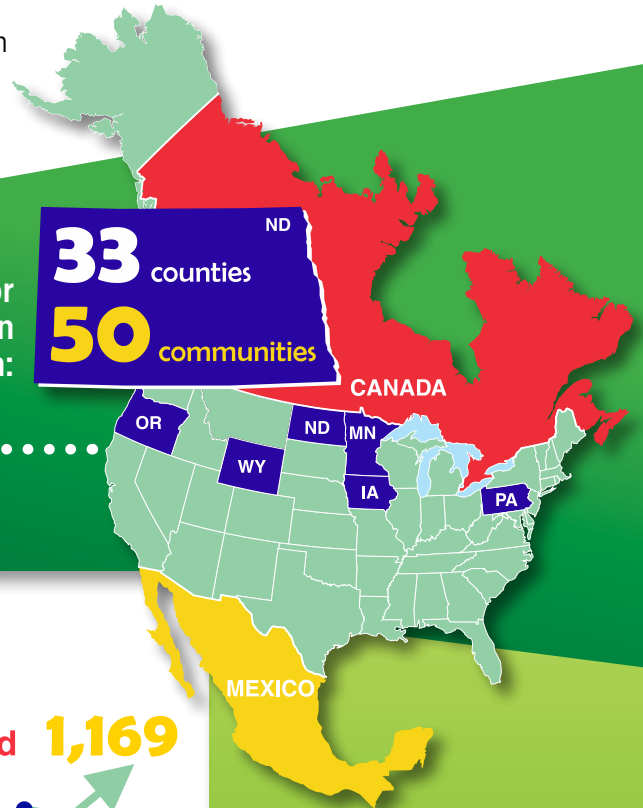


gearing up for Kindergarten

A School Readiness and Parent Involvement Program

A 10-year Review of the Program

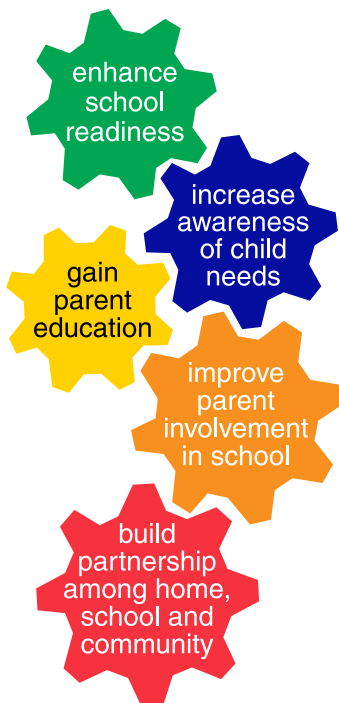
In 2006, Gearing Up for Kindergarten was developed and introduced at five sites in one North Dakota county. Ten years later, the program is used statewide, and in other states and internationally. This brief report shares highlights, research findings and stories that illustrate the program's impact in its first decade.



Gearing Up for Kindergarten is used in:

Why Gearing Up for Kindergarten?

The program helps families:



5,815

N.D. Families Served (2006–2015) **1,169**

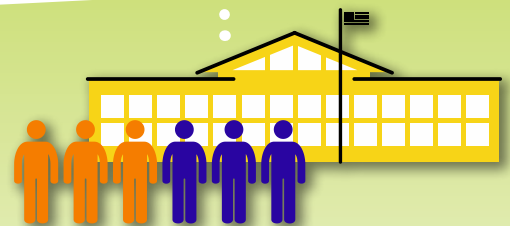
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2006

2015

Nearly half of all children entering school deal with some struggles that can interfere with school transition and success.



Gearing Up for Kindergarten can make a difference. Research illustrates the program's impacts and cost savings resulting from children not needing remedial services later.



Benefits for Children

Enhancing School Readiness and Helping Kids at Risk

In Gearing Up for Kindergarten, children and parents attend interactive learning sessions together. A child's involvement in education is like running a marathon. School readiness efforts assist children in getting to the starting line fully prepared.

Children who "start the race behind" due to deficits in early academic or social skills are at risk of having greater difficulty or even failing in school. Thus, Gearing Up for Kindergarten is designed to shrink the "readiness gap" for children by enhancing their early academic skills, increasing their social and emotional competence, building comfort and familiarity with school and its expectations, and identifying and intervening to support children with higher needs.

Enhancing Early Academic Skills

Children in the Gearing Up program showed

2x HIGHER

Gains in Basic Academic Skills

Today's expectations on incoming kindergarten students are higher than in previous generations. They are expected to be familiar with letters and numbers, show counting ability and display other early academic skills. Research with children in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program shows their gains in basic academic skills are, on average, two times higher than for children not in the program.

Increasing Social and Emotional Competence

Social and emotional readiness for kindergarten is another key element of preparing for school success. Too often, children entering kindergarten struggle in their social and emotional skills as they seek to get along with peers and follow teacher expectations. However, research shows children in Gearing Up for Kindergarten make solid gains in social and emotional competence.



Building Confidence and Familiarity With School

Many children deal with anxiety and lack of familiarity with school routines, expectations and environment as they enter kindergarten. Gearing Up for Kindergarten helps children gain confidence and familiarity with school so they can make a successful transition. The program's success in this area is highlighted in the following story.



Bethany Gets Ready for Kindergarten

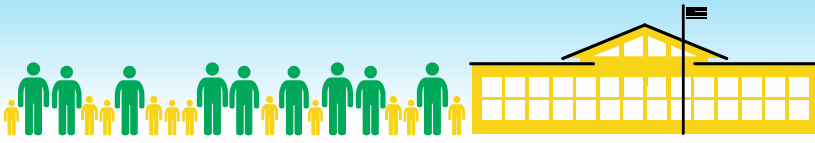
Before 5-year old Bethany started kindergarten in the fall of 2016, her parents wanted to find a way for her to become more familiar with her school and the kindergarten experience.

They learned about the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program, and Bethany and her parents participated in it during the spring of 2016 in Fargo, N.D. This program allowed them to meet each week with kindergarten teachers, other parents and children, and be involved in a variety of learning activities. They built relationships with other families and became familiar with the environment, routines and expectations associated with kindergarten.

As a result, Bethany's parents feel she has significantly increased her readiness for the school experience.

"She is much more comfortable emotionally about going to kindergarten," says Bethany's mother, Karen. "She is already familiar with her school and will know a few friends. We are more aware of engaging with her in learning opportunities during our daily routine. Also, we feel more prepared to develop a routine for kindergarten days in the future."





Benefits for Parents

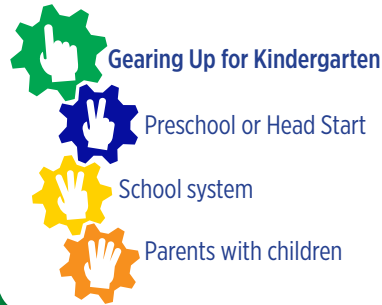
Building Parenting Skills and Learning Supports for Children

Parents are a child's first and most important teacher. Gearing Up for Kindergarten helps parents and other caregivers build their parenting knowledge and skills, explore how to provide a supportive learning environment at home and learn expectations for children's school readiness.

Learning About Healthy Parenting and School Readiness

Many parents need and want support in their role of preparing their children for success in school. Parents rated Gearing Up for Kindergarten as the most useful source of information.

Parent rankings of information sources:

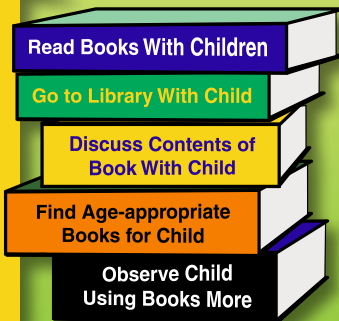


Source: Brotherson, S.E., and Savena, D. (2016, June). *Gearing Up for Kindergarten: Project overview and year-end report for 2015-16*. Project and evaluation report prepared for North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Fargo, N.D., June 2016.



Reading activity increased following participation in Gearing Up for Kindergarten

Source: Brotherson, S.E., and Savena, D. (2016, June). *Gearing Up for Kindergarten: Project overview and year-end report for 2015-16*. Project and evaluation report prepared for North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Fargo, N.D., June 2016.



Providing a Supportive Learning Environment

Parents in Gearing Up for Kindergarten are introduced to ideas and activities to support home learning with young children. In particular, program instructors emphasize and model parent-child reading activities.

Learning Expectations for School Readiness

Parents learn the expectations for children entering school so they are able to help their children become familiar with the school setting, teachers and routines. One mother's story of such an experience follows.

Kindergarten Preparation

Getting ready to enter kindergarten can be challenging for any child. But that transition can be even more difficult for children and parents from a different culture or background. They must navigate language differences and become familiar with a different educational system.

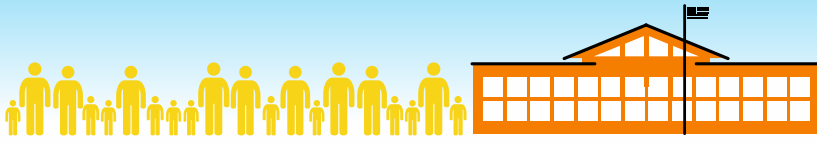
Sarah, who was born in Lebanon, faced that situation after she and her husband moved to Fargo. When her son, the oldest of her two children, was getting ready to start kindergarten, she enrolled him in Gearing Up for Kindergarten.

"For me, the best thing was the parent sessions, talking to the other parents about how to discipline children, eating habits and being firm with your decisions. For my son, the best thing was the social aspect. It has enhanced his social skills. He is better prepared to attend kindergarten."

"The parenting aspect of this program helped me to greater understand where my child is at developmentally and how to help her move forward to get ready for kindergarten."
- father of child in Gearing Up for Kindergarten

"I liked that the school is getting the parents involved and teaching skills to families. Also, I like that my son gets comfortable with the teachers and the school environment before he starts kindergarten."
- mother of child in Gearing Up for Kindergarten





Benefits for Schools and Communities

Supporting Families and Saving Dollars

One of Gearing Up for Kindergarten's objectives is to build positive working relationships among families, schools and communities to facilitate school readiness and success. These relationships support high-quality early learning for children and saving money by reducing the need for remediation later.

"It helps me as a principal to start to build relationships with those families ... With Gearing Up, I know them and their parents' names. That's a great jump start in building relationships ... It's about how to form a strong link, and it is just correlated to academic achievement, and we feel that also linked to ... having a strong culture at our school."

– North Dakota school administrator on Gearing Up for Kindergarten

"We have been doing Gearing Up for Kindergarten at our school for the last several years. I can't say enough about what the program has done for our students and their readiness for kindergarten. ... Going through the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program gives the parent and the teacher valuable information about the child and his or her readiness to start kindergarten. I highly recommend it."

– Debbie Hansen, elementary school principal, Surrey, N.D.

Building Positive Relationships with Families

In a 2015 study, more than 25 teachers and school administrators identified key benefits of Gearing Up for Kindergarten. The top five were:

- Building relationships with families and children entering kindergarten
- Developing shared understanding of children's school readiness and providing needed support
- Increasing familiarity with kindergarten environment and expectations
- Establishing cooperation in learning supports among home, school and community
- Facilitating parent involvement and community engagement in school readiness

Source: Saxena, D., and Brotherson, S.E. (2016). A qualitative exploration of teacher perspectives on the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program: Identified benefits for children and families. Fargo, N.D.: North Dakota State University.

Support for Quality Early Learning Experiences

National research suggests that nearly half of U.S. children begin kindergarten not fully prepared for school. High-quality early learning experiences are critical to closing the "readiness gap."

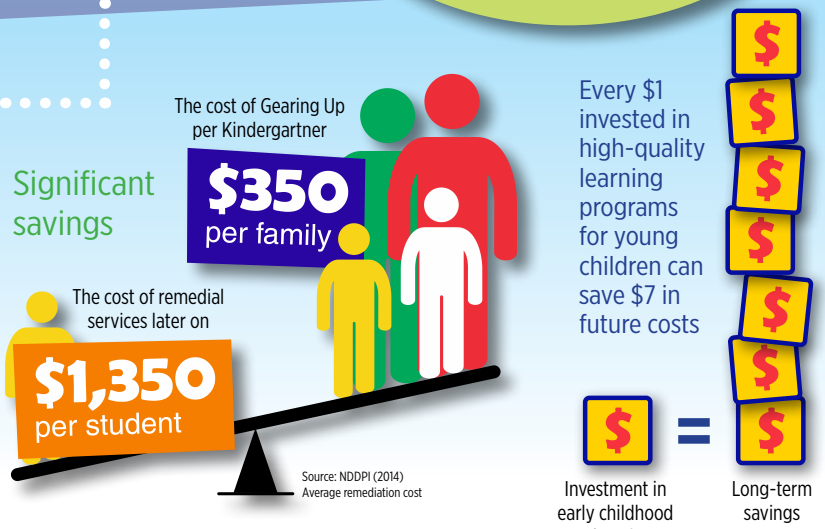
"I was fortunate to be involved at the ground level with Gearing Up for Kindergarten. It has had a significant impact on how strongly I feel about early education and the power of parent involvement at the primary level. ... Gearing Up for Kindergarten can be a significant benefit in helping to make the kindergarten experience much better for the child and the parent."

– Rob Lech, superintendent of schools, Jamestown, N.D.

Saving Money by Reducing Future Costs

Research from the National Bureau for Economic Research indicates that every \$1 invested in high-quality early learning programs for young children results in \$7 in savings due to reduced costs associated with remedial education, less crime and higher labor productivity.

Also, children who attend early learning programs are more likely to graduate from high school and college, get better jobs and pay more in taxes, and are less likely to misuse alcohol or drugs, become incarcerated, be unemployed or receive special education services.



For Further Information

For more information on Gearing Up for Kindergarten, contact the NDSU Extension Service at 701-231-8652 or visit the program's website at www.gearingupnd.org.