



The 67th Legislative Assembly made a targeted state investment in programs serving children in the year before kindergarten that are committed to delivering the highest quality experiences to the children and families they serve, and whose actions can demonstrate the return on investment that is possible with intentional, research-supported investments in early childhood.

Best in Class is built on program characteristics that drive results – high quality, supported interactions between adults and children based on developmentally appropriate experiences. Teaching staff are coached and supported in implementing developmentally appropriate environments, play based curriculum, and authentic observation-based assessments to drive individualized experiences to support children in reaching widely held expectations in the year before kindergarten.

Eligible Programs

- **HHS approved four-year-old programs operated by educational facilities, public or private.** These entities must be compliant with ND Department of Public Instruction’s desk audits and federal Title program monitoring
- Federally funded **Head Start programs.** Head Start grantees must be compliant with Federal Head Start Monitoring Protocol
- **Licensed child care settings** (center or group), inclusive of those operated in connection with a church, business, or organization. These entities must be participating in our state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) with a current rating of Step 3 or higher

Best in Class Program Expectations

- Operate for a minimum of 400 hours over 32 consecutive weeks, serving children that are 4 years old before August 1st of the program year. Programs operating at least 800 hours over 32 consecutive weeks are encouraged.
- Conduct a randomized selection process for enrollment, prioritizing 50% of slots in each section for children whose family’s household income is less than 60% of state median income or children who have an identified developmental delay or disability.
- If charging tuition, use the HHS-approved sliding fee scale
- Maintain 1:10 ratio of staff to children
- Implement a research-based curriculum appropriate for the age of children served
- Utilize Teaching Strategies GOLD for observations and assessment of progress
- Coordinate and/or offer onsite health screenings and referrals (developmental, hearing, vision, dental & physical)
- Incorporate at least ten hours of research-based family engagement
- Participate in programmatic research, including randomized studies that examine core components of program design and program outcomes.

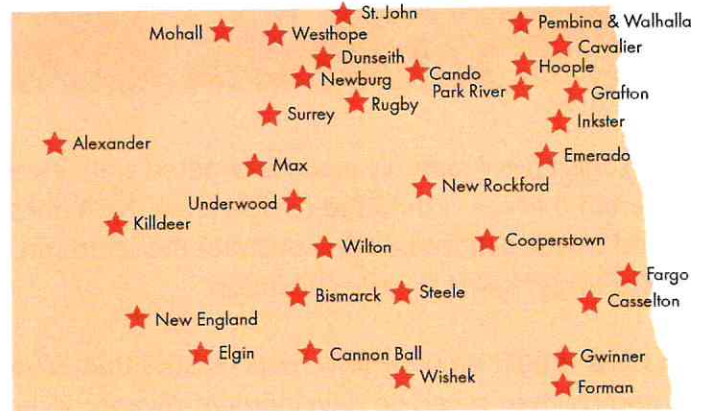
Participation

In our pilot thus far, we have fully committed the resources made available, serving 915 children in 36 different communities, utilizing two Best in Class coaches to serve 42 teachers. 99% of families completing the 2021-2022 parent survey felt their child had a successful year and were provided a quality experience and many mention their child's readiness for kindergarten.

Pilot Year 1 2021-2022



Pilot Year 2 2022-2023



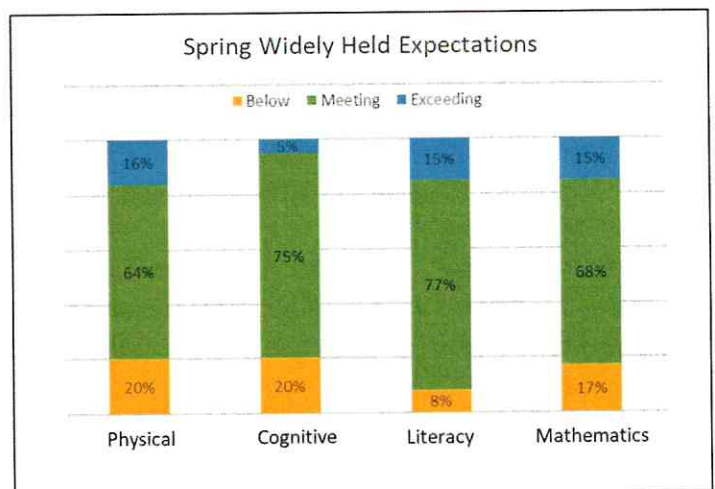
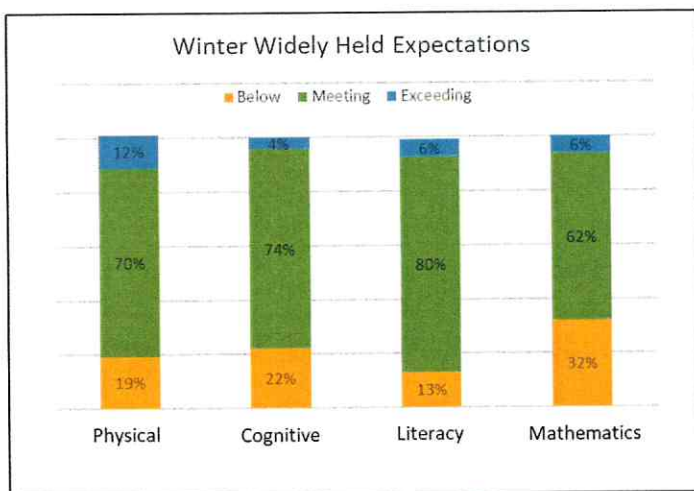
Child Outcomes

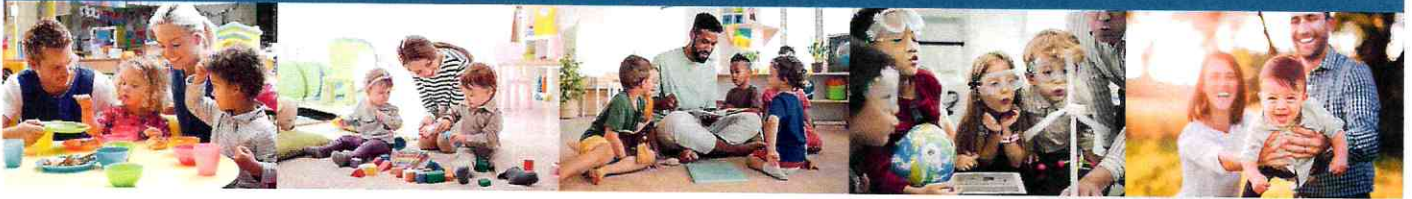
Developmentally appropriate, ongoing, observation-based assessment occurs when teachers are observing children during regular, everyday play-based activities on a continuous basis throughout the year. Best in Class teachers use authentic observation-based assessments to complete three checkpoints using Teaching Strategies GOLD® to document children's learning over time, inform instruction, and facilitate communication with families.

GOLD® developmental progressions are based on widely held expectations that describe the range of knowledge, skills, and abilities that children of a particular age typically demonstrate over a year of life. These expectations are based on the latest research in early childhood and are frames of reference that help parents and teachers focus on the development of the individual child.

Beginning Trend Line Data

Programs in the first pilot year completed two checkpoints. Scale scores correlate moderately strongly with age and since the tool being used in meant to measure progress across skills that follow a developmental progression, these results are positive and promising.





Spotlight on Grafton Public School Best in Class

Grafton Public Schools participated in the inaugural year of Best in Class (2021/22).

They were awarded **four** sections of the program’s small group size (8 – 10 kids). They decided to operate two additional sections of pre-kindergarten that utilized Best in Class teachers and the same resourced environment in the time slot that was opposite of their Best in Class- funded sessions.



Based on the school’s fall kindergarten assessment data, the children who had a Best in Class experience in the year before kindergarten **STARTED kindergarten an average of 12% AHEAD** of where the children without a Best in Class experience started.

Start-of-Kindergarten assessments show early signs of positive impact

Best in Class cohort (2022-23) compared to cohort without Best in Class experience (2021-22)



The **Best in Class** program represents a targeted state investment in programs that are committed to delivering the highest quality experiences to the children and families they serve, and whose actions can demonstrate the return on investment that is possible with intentional, research-supported investments in early childhood.

Best in Class is built on program characteristics that drive results:

- Staff to child ratio of 1:10 or better; class size of 20 children or lower
- Evidence based curriculum appropriate for the age of children served and aligned with early learning standards
- Specialized teacher education with training in early childhood instruction and child development
- Coaching and ongoing professional development for staff
- Regular assessment of child progress
- Vision, hearing and health screenings and referrals

2021-2022 North Dakota Combined Upstart Programs – Final Outcomes

June 2022

About Waterford Upstart: Waterford Upstart is an **in-home kindergarten readiness program** that was created by the Utah legislature in 2009. The program is implemented by Waterford.org and helps children develop the cognitive and social-emotional skills they need for school success.

- Preschool-age children use **Waterford Upstart software in the home for 15-20 minutes a day**, five days a week. The usage model falls **well within the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommendation of no more than one hour of screen time per day for 4-year-old-children**.
- Children receive a **personalized curriculum in reading, math, and science**.
- **Each family receives coaching to ensure strong parental engagement**. Waterford Upstart empowers parents in the education of their young children through a parent engagement curriculum developed over the program's 12 years of experience working with families. While the curriculum is in English, **families are supported in English and Spanish, with translation services offered in additional languages**, as needed.
- **Social-emotional learning** is modeled in the curriculum and developed by parents through off-line activities.
- **All participants receive computers and Internet service is included as part of the program** if the home does not have connectivity.

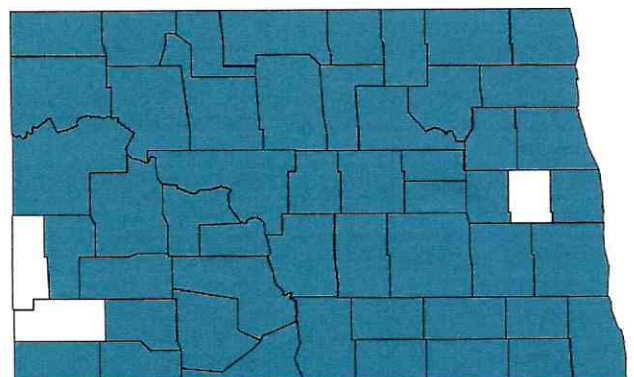
Evidence of Effectiveness: Upstart's evidence of effectiveness has been thoroughly vetted in the most rigorous contexts and was a critical factor in recent **federal Education, Innovation and Research (EIR) Expansion Grant** and **TED Audacious Project** awards.

- Meets **What Works Clearinghouse standings without reservations** and **ESSA Tier 1 Strong Evidence** standards.
- Upstart's **third-party randomized controlled trial (RCT) study for the U.S. Department of Education produced significant and sizable positive effect sizes**: 0.42 standard deviations of improvement in literacy for the reading group relative to the math group, and 0.38 in math for the math group relative to the reading group.
- Similarly, over **eleven years of external evaluations** in Utah show Upstart children achieve 2X-3X the learning of non-Upstart children and those **learning gains are maintained through the 4th grade**.

North Dakota Combined Upstart Programs: Waterford was awarded a **federal EIR Expansion Grant** that is being used to provide Waterford Upstart in the Great Plains states that historically have not provided significant funding for early childhood education, including Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. In addition to Waterford's federal EIR Expansion Grant, a **Memorandum of Agreement between Waterford and the Departments of Public Instruction and Human Services** provided the program for interested families beyond the scope of the federal program during the 2021-2022 school year. **In total, Waterford Upstart has been provided to approximately 1,800 preschool-age children across North Dakota over the past three school years.**

- Waterford Upstart is **aligned to North Dakota Early Learning Standards** and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework; meets WIDA standards for language development; is a Certified Autism Resource; and is endorsed by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE).
- Statewide, approximately **1,000 children from 176 municipalities across 50 counties** participated in the combined Upstart programs during the 2021-2022 school year.
 - **97.00% were rural participants and 31.90% were ≤185% of the Federal Poverty Level.**

■ Upstart Counties



2021-2022 Combined Upstart Programs Registrations by County

County	Count
Adams	5
Barnes	3
Benson	9
Billings	1
Bottineau	10
Bowman	5
Burke	6
Burleigh	93
Cass	107
Cavalier	2
Dickey	4
Divide	7
Dunn	4

County	Count
Eddy	1
Emmons	4
Foster	4
Grand Forks	147
Grant	7
Griggs	1
Hettinger	5
Kidder	8
Lamoure	4
Logan	1
McHenry	9
McIntosh	7
McKenzie	20

County	Count
McLean	23
Mercer	10
Morton	46
Mountrail	17
Nelson	1
Oliver	6
Pembina	30
Pierce	5
Ramsey	6
Ransom	29
Renville	5
Richland	7
Rolette	28

County	Count
Sargent	12
Sheridan	7
Sioux	8
Stark	16
Stutsman	16
Towner	1
Traill	19
Walsh	29
Ward	132
Wells	8
Williams	65
TOTAL	1,000

2021-2022 Combined Upstart Programs Registrations by Municipality

Municipality	Count
Alexander	1
Argusville	1
Arnegard	2
Arthur	1
Ayr	1
Baldwin	1
Bathgate	1
Belcourt	5
Belfield	1
Bellington	1
Beulah	1
Bismarck	87
Bottineau	6
Bowbells	3
Bowman	1
Burlington	1
Buxton	2
Cando	1
Cannon Ball	4
Carpio	1
Carrington	3
Carson	4
Casselton	4
Cavalier	18
Cayuga	1
Center	6
Cleveland	1
Cogswell	1
Coleharbor	1
Crosby	7
Dawson	1

Municipality	Count
Epping	1
Fairview	1
Fargo	65
Flasher	3
Fordville	2
Forman	5
Fort Ransom	1
Fort Yates	4
Galesburg	1
Gardner	1
Garrison	4
Glasston	1
Glen Ullin	1
Glenburn	3
Grace City	1
Grafton	15
Grand Forks	125
Granville	3
Grassy Butte	2
Gwinner	2
Halliday	2
Hannaford	1
Hannover	1
Harvey	8
Harwood	1
Hatton	3
Hazelton	1
Hazen	4
Hebron	5
Hettinger	4
Hillsboro	8

Municipality	Count
Linton	1
Lisbon	26
Maddock	3
Mandan	34
Mandaree	1
Manning	1
Martin	2
Max	4
Mayville	4
Mcclusky	4
Mcleod	2
Medina	2
Medora	1
Mercer	1
Milnor	2
Minot	88
Minot AFB	23
Mohall	2
Napoleon	1
Neché	3
New England	4
New Leipzig	1
New Rockford	1
New Salem	2
New Town	5
Nome	1
Norhtwood	2
Oakes	2
Oberon	1
Palermo	1
Park River	5

Municipality	Count
Rugby	5
Ruso	1
Rutland	1
Ryder	3
Saint John	7
Saint Michael	2
Saint Thomas	2
Scranton	2
South Heart	1
Stanley	7
Stanton	5
Steele	5
Strasburg	1
Streeter	1
Surrey	6
Tappen	1
Thompson	13
Tioga	5
Towner	2
Turtle Lake	1
Underwood	5
Valley City	1
Velva	1
Verona	2
Voltaire	1
Wahpeton	2
Walhalla	1
Washburn	1
Watford City	14
West Fargo	29
Westhope	1

Municipality	Count
Denhoff	1
Des Lacs	2
Devils Lake	6
Dickinson	12
Douglas	5
Drake	2
Drayton	1
Dunn Center	1
Dunseith	12
Edinburgh	2
Elgin	2
Ellendale	2
Emerado	2
Enderlin	2

Municipality	Count
Hoople	5
Horace	2
Jamestown	10
Kenmare	1
Kintyre	1
Knox	1
Lamoure	2
Langdon	2
Lansford	3
Larimore	4
Leeds	1
Leonard	1
Lignite	1
Lincoln	6

Municipality	Count
Pembina	3
Petersburg	1
Pingree	1
Portland	1
Powers Lake	2
Ray	6
Reeder	1
Regent	1
Reynolds	2
Richardton	2
Robinson	1
Rogers	1
Rolla	4
Ross	1

Municipality	Count
Wheatland	1
White Earth	3
Wildrose	2
Williston	50
Wilton	6
Wishek	7
Woodworth	1
Wyndmere	2
York	1
Zahl	1
TOTAL	1,000

2021-2022 Combined Upstart Programs Demographic Information

Ethnicity/Race	Count	Percent
Caucasian	778	77.80%
Native American/Alaskan Native	61	6.10%
African American	48	4.80%
Latino/a	47	4.70%
Other	22	2.20%
Asian	20	2.00%
Decline to Answer	19	1.90%
Pacific Islander	5	0.50%

Equipment Provided	Count	Percent
Received Computer	1,000	100.00%
Received Internet Service	46	4.60%

Socioeconomic Status	Count	Percent
Total Registrations	1,000	100.00%
≤185% Federal Poverty Level	319	31.90%

Average Curriculum Usage: The average total reading usage for participants was 1,786.41 minutes and the average total math and science usage for participants was 829.56 minutes over the course of the program.

Reading Program Outcomes: The Waterford Assessment of Core Skills (WACS) is a computerized adaptive test of early literacy for students in Pre-Kindergarten through second grade with initial content validity established against state and national standards. To establish concurrent validity and predictive validity, student performance on WACS was compared to performance on five commonly-used standardized tests also measuring early reading skills, including DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), IRI (Idaho Reading Indicator), ITBS (Iowa Tests of Basic Skills), SAT 10 (Stanford Achievement Test Series), and TPRI (Texas Primary Reading Inventory).

WACS Grade Equivalent Difficulty Ranges: The following table provides question difficulty ranges for the Waterford Assessment of Core Skills (WACS) by grade level. Each grade level is divided into thirds: Kindergarten Beginning, Kindergarten Intermediate, and Kindergarten Advanced.

Grade	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
Preschool	1001 - 1333	1334 - 1666	1667 - 2000
Kindergarten	2001 - 2333	2334 - 2666	2667 - 3000
First	3001 - 3333	3334 - 3666	3667 - 4000
Second	4001 - 4333	4334 - 4666	4667 - 5000

Average final scores for children that completed WACS showed the following notable outcomes:

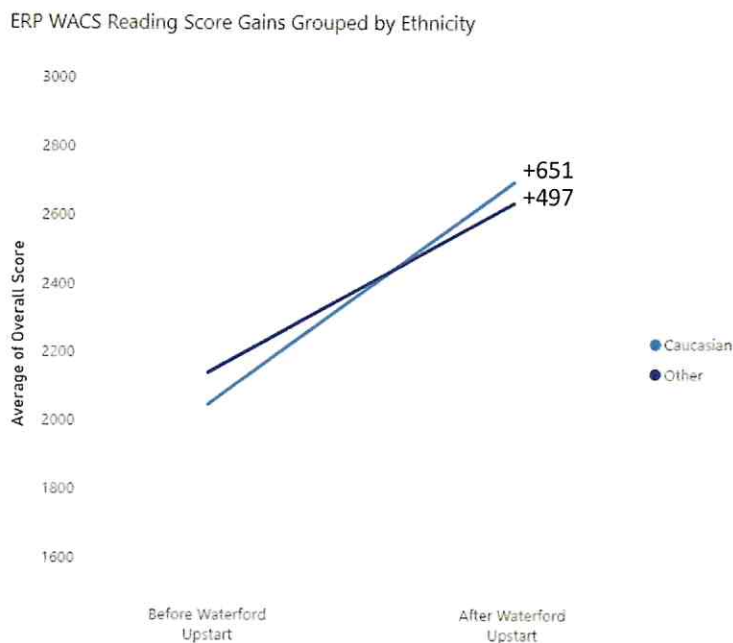
- Children's outcomes averaged at the "Kindergarten Advanced" level (with an average final WACS score of 2686.84) where most children score at near the end of the Kindergarten year.
- 94.33% of children scored at "Kindergarten Beginning" or above, demonstrating strong school readiness outcomes.

The following table provides results on assessed skills and shows average final WACS subtest scores and their grade equivalents for the program.

Measured Skill	Average Final WACS Score	Grade Equivalent of Average Final WACS Score
Letter Recognition	2068	Kindergarten Beginning*
Letter Sound	2531	Kindergarten Intermediate
Initial Sound	2625	Kindergarten Intermediate
Blending	2722	Kindergarten Advanced
Listening Comprehension	2884	Kindergarten Advanced
Non Words	3211	1 st Grade Beginning
Sight Words	3022	1 st Grade Beginning
Real Words	3274	1 st Grade Beginning
Reading Comprehension	2503	Kindergarten Intermediate
Vocabulary	2970	Kindergarten Advanced

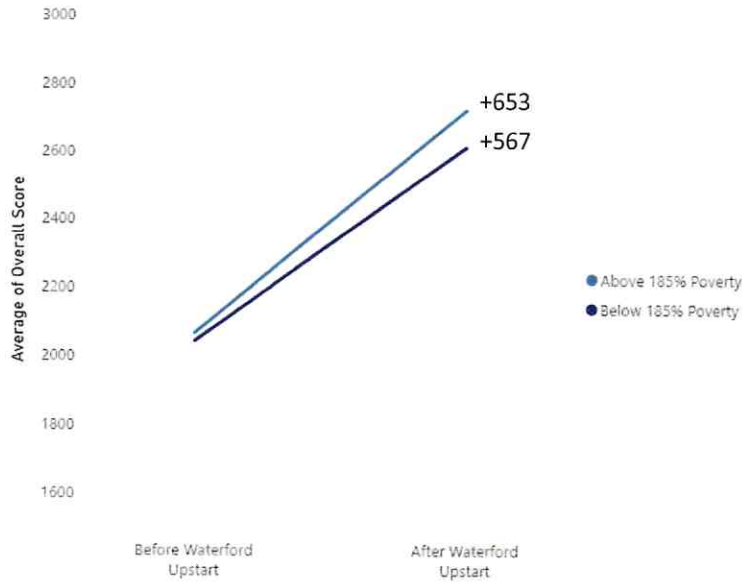
* Note that “Kindergarten Beginning” is highest possible achievement level for the “Letter Recognition” skill.

The following graphs show WACS reading score gains grouped by reported ethnicity/race, socio-economic status (SES), and gender for the 2021-2022 combined Upstart programs. The numbers within the graph indicate point score gains from pretest to posttest.



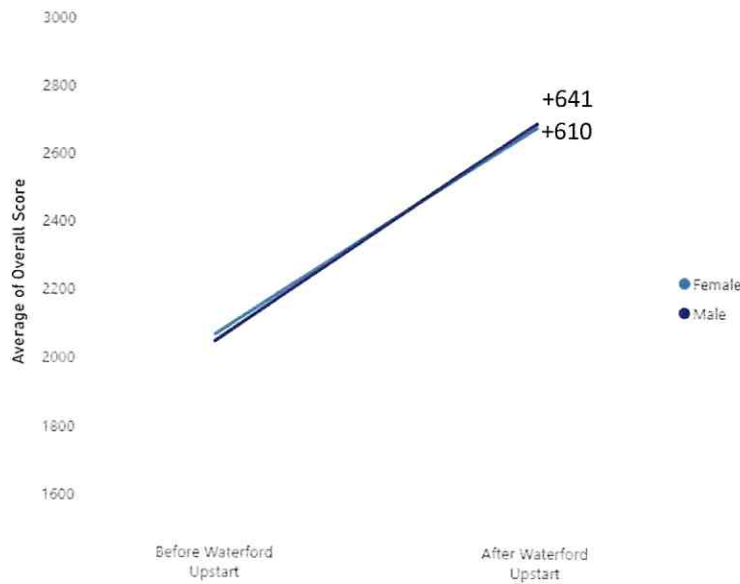
Ethnicity/Race	Percent of Cohort	Average Final WACS Score	Grade Equivalent of Final WACS Score
Caucasian	77.80%	2697.21	Kindergarten Advanced
Other	22.20%	2636.29	Kindergarten Intermediate

ERP WACS Reading Score Gains Grouped by SES



Socio-economic status (SES)	Percent of Cohort	Average Final WACS Score	Grade Equivalent of Final WACS Score
>185% Federal Poverty Level	68.10%	2720.15	Kindergarten Advanced
≤185% Federal Poverty Level	31.90%	2610.91	Kindergarten Intermediate

ERP WACS Reading Score Gains Grouped by Gender



Gender	Percent of Cohort	Average Final WACS Score	Grade Equivalent of Final WACS Score
Female	49.65%	2680.93	Kindergarten Advanced
Male	50.35%	2692.66	Kindergarten Advanced

Parent Satisfaction: Parents/guardians participating in the program completed a comprehensive survey to provide feedback related to their, and their child's, experience in the program.

Survey Responses

% Agree	Respondents' experiences with the Waterford Upstart program
88% YES	I like that the program expects our family to create a daily routine for using it.
93% YES	The program helped prepare my child for kindergarten.
73% YES	The program helped prepare ME to help my child in school next year.
72% YES	The program helped me realize the importance of participating in my child's learning.
65% YES	The program made me feel equipped to engage with my child's teacher next year.
96% YES	I feel confident that I can help my child transition from PreK to kindergarten.
89% YES	When using the program, my child experienced higher quality experiences, compared to other apps or TV programs.
82% YES	The program was engaging to my child.
85% YES	My child is now better able to work independently.

% Agree	Respondents' experiences with Waterford Upstart representatives
92% YES	A representative gave me what I needed to effectively support my child.
93% YES	A representative helped solve the issues I had.
99% YES	A representative was friendly and polite when we communicated.
99% YES	A representative was knowledgeable about the program and software.

% Agree	Respondents' evaluation of the Waterford Upstart program
86% YES	Reading Program: In general, did your child enjoy using the program?
99% YES	Reading Program: Do you think the program was age appropriate?
91% YES	Reading Program: Do you feel the weekly usage requirements were appropriate?
90% YES	Math and Science Program: In general, did your child enjoy using the program?
99% YES	Math and Science Program: Do you think the program was age appropriate?
94% YES	Math and Science Program: Do you feel the weekly usage requirements were appropriate?

Average Response	Respondents' satisfaction with the Waterford Upstart program
9.18	On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend Waterford Upstart to a friend or colleague?
8.86	On a scale of 0 to 10, overall, how satisfied are you with your and your child's experience using the Waterford Upstart program?

Additional Comments

- *I am very thankful for the program. I have taught Kindergarten for 5 years and 3 years in 1st. So, I know the importance of those foundational skills that were offered. This was something that my child could experience without mom harping to learn these skills. Gave her independence to learn and me the ability to expand on those concepts.*
- *I sometimes caught him singing songs he learned from Waterford and he sings it to his little brother. The power words and powerful! Every time he sees those words when we are outside, he could read them fast.*
- *I really enjoyed watching my daughter learn new skills and improve those she already knew.*
- *I am beyond happy with how ready my son is for kindergarten in the fall. This program really has set him to excel next year. I am looking forward to see how much he uses this in kindergarten. I feel like he will be one of kiddos who is kindergarten ready.*

- *We absolutely love this program and are so thankful we did it! Our coach Wendy was amazing!*
- *I think the program is great. Sometimes life got a little too crazy with sickness and events to fit things in, but I think that was good practice for us trying to juggle and identify priorities.*
- *I am so thankful that this program was offered to me. It has done wonders for our child and helped our family transition for Kindergarten.*
- *My son was very engaged and learned a lot with this program.*
- *Mary was so great! One week my daughter was struggling and she reached out to see what we thought might be the issue and the next week she called to tell us how much she had improved!*
- *This was a really great program for kids. And it was wonderful that my district decided to pay for it.*
- *Helped him with his focus.*
- *We have been so happy with the program!*
- *I wish she could use the program another year.*