

School Readiness Initiative in Lesotho

Process Evaluation results



Overview

The School Readiness Initiative (SRI), launched in 2020 with the Federer Foundation and the Network of Early Childhood Development of Lesotho (NECDOL), strengthens early childhood care and development (ECCD) in the country. The process evaluation shows that SRI has improved school readiness, strengthened early learning outcomes, enhanced teacher capacity through training and digital tools, and increased parental and community engagement. Learning environments have also improved, including access to meals and play-based resources.

Initiative reach and growth

Since 2020, the SRI has expanded steadily through a phased approach, increasing support for primary schools offering Reception Classes to 496 sites – 307 at schools and 189 at ECD centres, with approximately 32,000 children reached and 1,479 teachers trained on the Early Learning Kiosk. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has joined NECDOL as implementing partner and is working on 180 of these sites, which will be underway until 2028. While this increase reflects strong progress, it remains below the national target of 800, highlighting the need for accelerated scale-up.

Government leadership and multisectoral partnerships

The Government of Lesotho, particularly the Ministry of Education and Training, has shown strong commitment by aligning SRI with national policies, expanding reception classes, increasing ECCD funding, and supporting implementation. The Lesotho College of Education has integrated the SRI's ChildSteps tool as the national assessment tool, integrating it into its teacher training modules. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and UNICEF as well as private sector partners – including Econet's Higherlife Foundation, Vodacom Lesotho Foundation and Standard Lesotho Bank – have been instrumental in funding and scaling the programme.

Way forward

Sustained collaboration and investment are essential to expand access to quality early learning for all children in Lesotho.

“They can write, play and sing what they learned from school. They love school. To be close to senior classes helps. They are used to older learners. My child is in Reception Class. Children love the food at school, and they even go in rain, which influence parents to love school.”

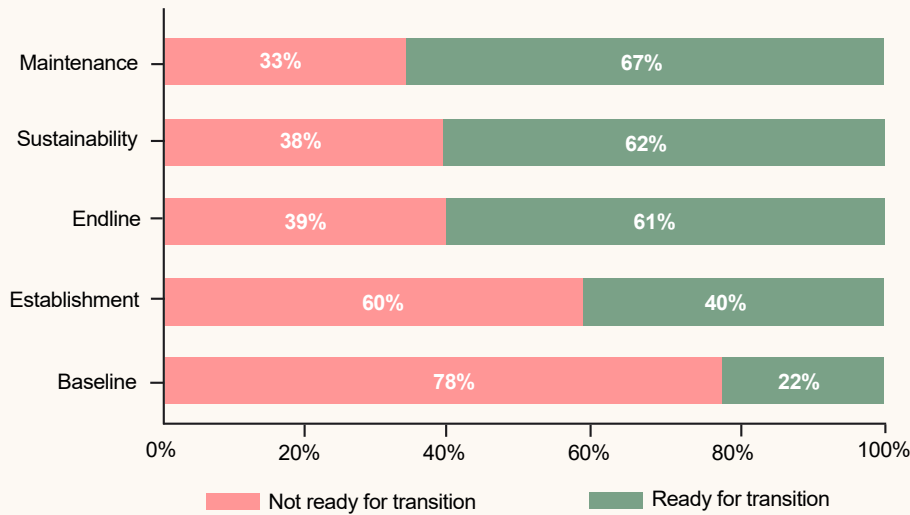
(Community leader)

SRI impact: Better learning, better teaching, stronger communities

1

Children participating in SRI demonstrate improved school readiness, including stronger early literacy, numeracy, social skills and smoother transitions into primary school.

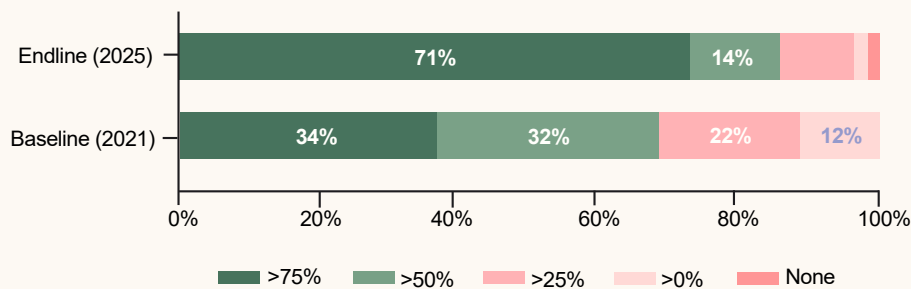
Preparation for transition



2

Teachers show increased confidence, improved classroom management, and more effective lesson planning. The continuous assessment tool ChildSteps has shifted practice from periodic to daily monitoring of child progress.

Assessment completion rate for teachers



“At some point in time, Reception Class learners were mixed with those of Grade 1, one couldn’t spot the difference between Reception Class and Grade 1 learners in terms of discipline and attention. This was a good observation showing growth of Reception Class children. Even their listening skills were at the same level.”

(Principal from Mohale’s Hoek)

“SRI children develop surprisingly fast. We used to think reading and writing was primary school’s duty. Children are now creative, they like singing and African stories that are related to concepts.”

(District Education Officer)

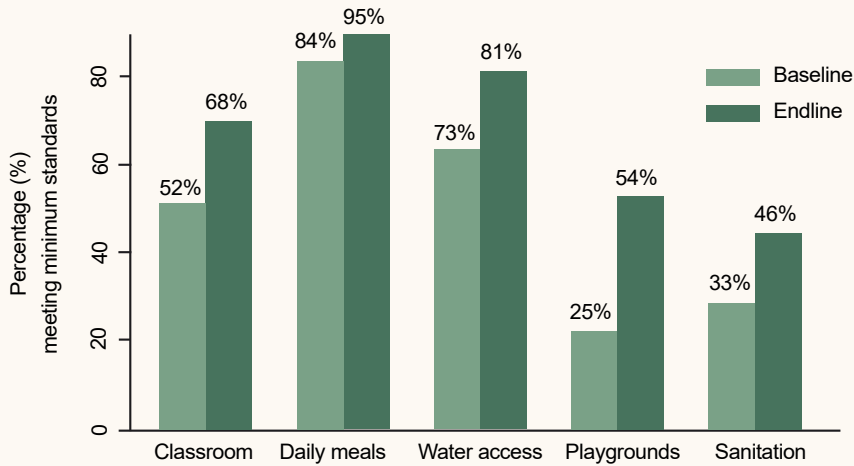
“My child is a very quiet person to an extent that you would say she can’t speak, but since she got to Grade R, she is more confident and engages in conversations.”

(Parent)

3

Learning environments have improved, with most centres providing daily meals and increased access to water. Safe and stimulating playgrounds have expanded significantly, contributing to better child engagement.

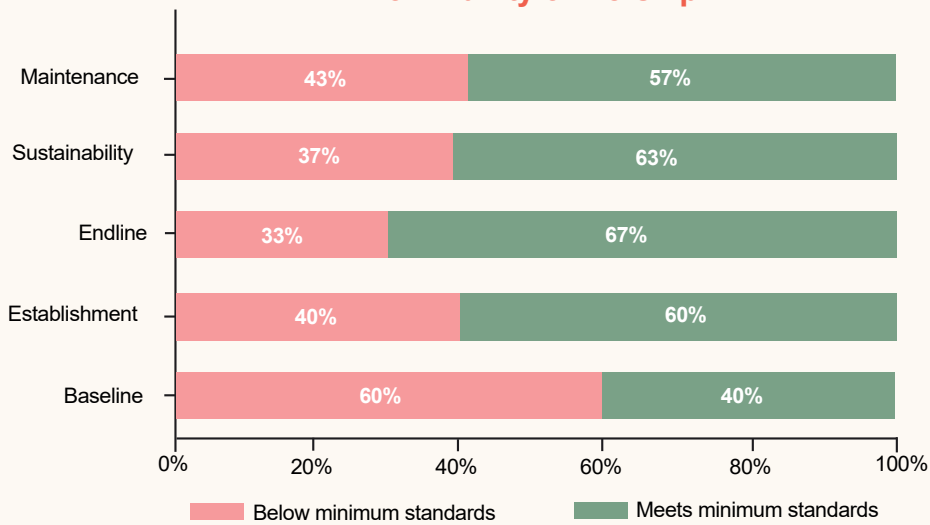
Improved conditions for early learning



4

Community involvement has also strengthened, with parents more actively supporting learning at home and contributing to school development. This growing ownership is a key factor in sustainability.

Community ownership



What collective actions are needed for every Basotho child to access ECCD?

- Strengthen government ownership and system integration: Embed SRI into national plans, budgets and monitoring systems.
- Increase public financing: Expand government funding and explore blended financing models.
- Institutionalise teacher support systems: Integrate into pre- and in-service training, with ongoing coaching.
- Simplify and strengthen digital systems: Integrate tools into government systems, reduce duplication, and support digital literacy.
- Strengthen district-level systems: Build capacity of district officials for supervision and data use.
- Invest in community engagement: Strengthen structures and scale successful community-driven models.
- Support financial sustainability of ECCD centres: Introduce income-generating activities and financial support mechanisms.
- Prioritise equity in scale-up: Target underserved communities and adapt models for inclusion.
- Strengthen data systems and government capacity: Improve data management, ownership, and use for decision-making.
- Accelerate expansion of reception classes: Prioritise attaching Reception Classes with adequate resources.

