Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program

Evaluation Progress Report

Executive Summary

July 1, 2005 - June 30, 2006

What is the purpose of Nebraska's Early Childhood Education Grant Program?

Nebraska Early Childhood Education (ECE) Grant Program is designed to award state funds to public schools or Educational Service Units (ESUs) to assist in the operation of comprehensive center-based early childhood education programs intended to support the learning and development of children in the birth to kindergarten age range. The projects increased opportunities for at-risk children to participate in early childhood education programs by creating new, expanded, and/or combined programs funded through district, federal, or parent fees, and involved collaboration with Head Start and other community programs. The purpose of Nebraska's Early Childhood Education Grant Program is to provide high quality early childhood education program experiences that assist children to reach their full potential and increase the likelihood of their later success in school.

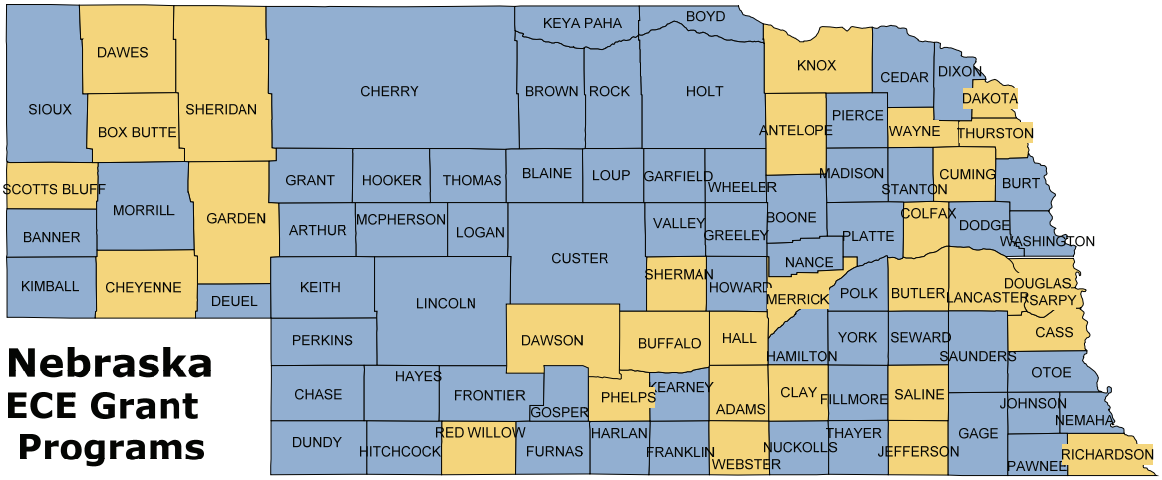
The ECE grant programs are required to serve children in inclusive classrooms that represent the range of abilities and disabilities of the children and the social, linguistic, and economic diversity of the families in the community. The programs target pre-kindergarten age children:

1. whose family income qualifies them for participation in the federal free or reduced lunch program;
2. who reside in a home where a language other than spoken English is used as the primary means of communication;
3. who were born prematurely or at low birth weight; or
4. whose parents are younger than eighteen or who have not completed high school.

Who are the grantees?

In the 2005-2006 year, Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) provided grant funds to 38 districts or Educational Service Units across the state to operate early childhood education programs. These programs have been funded from one to fourteen years.

Alliance Public Schools	Bancroft-Rosalie Community Schools
Central City Public Schools	Centura Public Schools
Chadron City Schools	Conestoga Public Schools
Crete Public Schools	David City Public Schools
Douglas County West Community Schools	Elgin Public Schools
ESU 9	Fairbury Public Schools
Falls City Public Schools	Garden County Public Schools
Gering Public Schools	Grand Island Public Schools
Holdrege Public Schools	Humboldt Table Rock Steinauer
Kearney Public Schools	Lexington Public Schools
Lincoln Public Schools	Loup City Public Schools
McCook Public Schools	Millard Public Schools
Omaha Public Schools	Overton Public Schools
Papillion LaVista Public Schools	Plattsmouth Community Schools
Santee Community School	Schuyler Grade School
Sidney Public Schools	South Central Unified #5
South Sioux City Community Schools	Southeast Consolidated Schools
Southwest Public Schools	Umon'hon' Nation Public School
Wakefield Community School	Walthill Public Schools



Nebraska ECE Grant Programs

ECE grant programs are located in the gold (light shaded) areas.

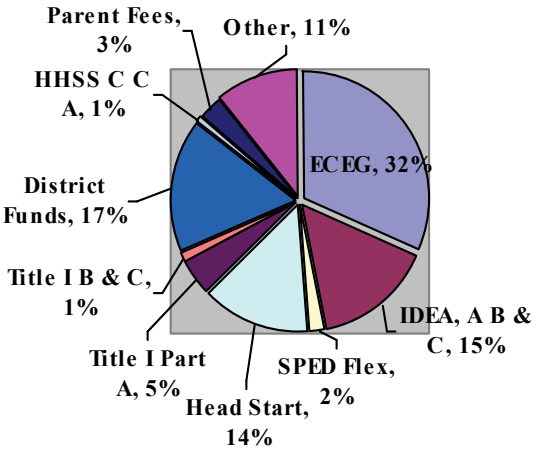
Who are the children served?

In 2005-2006, a total of 1,483 children were served across programs. Typical classroom size ranged from 16 to 20 children. The majority of the programs served preschool children and their families. Four-year-old children were the largest group represented (58%), followed by three-year-olds (34%). Fewer were served in the younger age groups. The single largest group was White not Hispanic (54%), followed by Hispanic (27%), Black (9%), American Indian/Alaskan (8%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (2%).

How are the programs funded?

Overall operational budgets totaled $10,952,700 in the 2005-2006 program year. This included in-kind contributions. Nebraska ECE grant funding represented approximately 32% of the overall operational expenditures. The remaining 68% match clearly exceeded the Nebraska Department of Education's 50% requirement. The largest categories of funding included: Nebraska ECE grant program (32%), local district funds (17%), special education funds (17%), and Head Start (14%). Together, these categories accounted for more than 60% of the funding.

Distribution of Funding



What is the quality of the early childhood education programs?

Quality early childhood education programs have been linked to immediate, positive developmental outcomes, as well as long-term positive academic performance (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Bryant, et al., 2000; Ramey & Ramey, 1998). In order to evaluate the quality of the Nebraska programs, a number of different evaluations tools were used, including the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998) and the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) (Smith, Dickinson, 2002), or the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2003). Base-line information was obtained by completing these environment rating scales in a sample of classrooms (at least one from each program). NDE has established standards for quality based on each tool. Due to the few numbers observed and rated with the ITERS, scores are not being reported.

High quality early childhood education settings were demonstrated in the majority of Nebraska's preschool programs.

- 94% of previously funded preschool programs met criteria on the ECERS
- 64% of the newly funded preschool programs met criteria on the ECERS
- 100% of previously funded preschool programs met criteria on the ELLCO
- 64% of the newly funded preschool programs met criteria on the ELLCO

It was anticipated that fewer of the new programs would meet the criteria during their first year of operation. Technical assistance was provided for those programs not meeting criteria.

How many programs have achieved NAEYC accreditation?

Programs are encouraged to achieve accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) within the first 3 years of operation and to keep the accreditation current thereafter. A total of 24 (63%) of the programs have obtained NAEYC accreditation.

What benefit does participation in Early Childhood Education (ECE) grant programs have for the children they serve?

Short-Term Outcomes

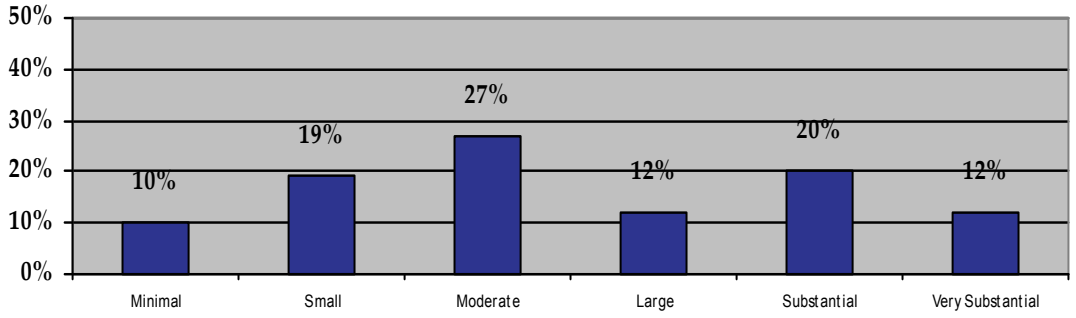
High/Scope Child Observation Record. The development and learning of preschool children were monitored through the use of the High/Scope Child Observation Record (COR). The majority of the programs utilized and reported on this developmental assessment. Twenty programs provided outcomes on COR data for 517 preschool children. Programs reported the number of children with observation data for both fall and spring. For this evaluation, gain scores were reported for language/literacy and math/logic. The gain scores were categorized by levels of gain ranging from none to 2.5 or greater. The COR ratings range from 1 to 5 on each domain. Gain was determined by the difference from fall to spring ratings.

69% of the children obtained 1 level or greater gains in math and logic.

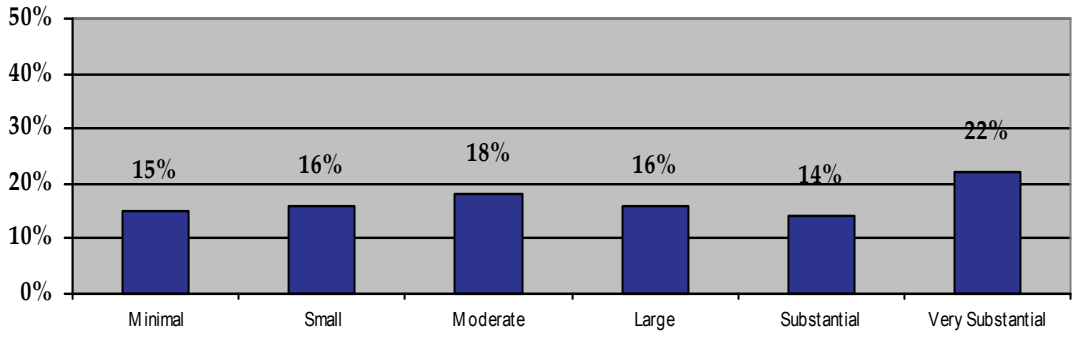
71% of the children obtained 1 level or greater gains in language and literacy.

As a group, preschool children achieved positive gains in language/literacy and math/logic. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the children obtained 1 level or greater gains in language and literacy skills and 69% of the children obtained 1 level or greater gains in math and logic skills. The following graphs illustrate the percentage of children associated with each category of gain in language/literacy and math/logic.

Language/Literacy COR Gains



Math/Logic COR Gains

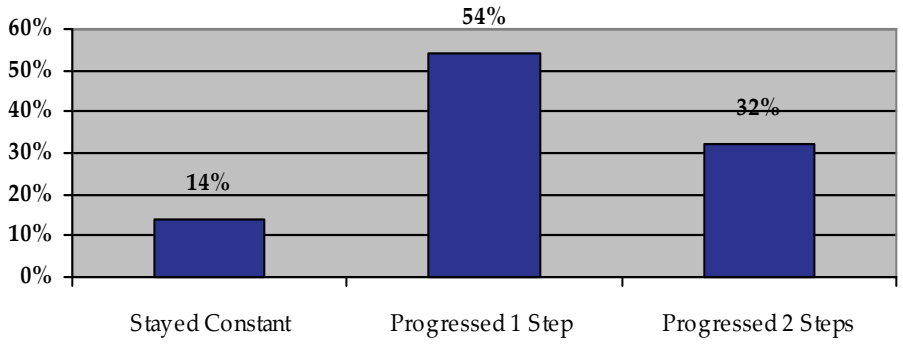


Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum. The developmental skills of preschool children were also monitored through the use of the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (CCDC) for Ages 3-5. Creative Curriculum outcome data provided scores for children based on a sequence of four steps, with each step on the continuum representing a more difficult developmental concept. Four programs provided Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum data on 50 children. Programs reported the number of children with observation data for both fall and spring. For this evaluation, gain scores were reported for language and math. The majority of the children made at least one step gain in both areas. More progress was made in cognitive development with 50% of the children making a two step gain.

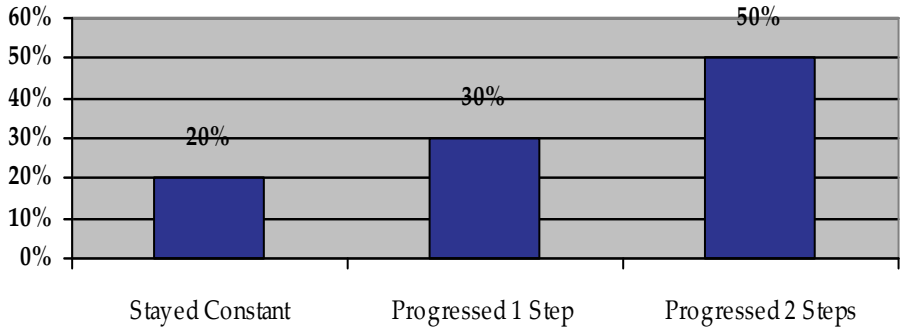
86% of the children progressed one or more steps gain in language development.

80% of the children progressed one or more steps gain in cognitive development.

Summary of CCDC Gains Related to Language Development



Summary of CCDC Gains Related to Cognitive Development



Long-Term Outcomes

Standardized Achievement Outcomes. The long-term impact of an ECE grant program experience was evaluated by collecting mathematics and reading achievement scores for a sampling of children who attended Nebraska's state-funded early childhood education grant programs. Results for third or fourth, eighth, and eleventh grade students were aggregated from five programs and included a total of 118 students. The results indicated:

- The 3rd and 4th grade sample included assessment data for 71 students. Most of these children were in the 50th percentile or greater group (66% reading and 66% math).
- The 8th grade sample included assessment data for 28 students. Most (81%) of these children were in the 50th percentile or greater group in math. Fewer 8th graders (39%) were in the 50th percentile or greater group in reading.
- The 11th grade sample included assessment data for 19 students. Most (79%) of these children were in the 50th percentile or greater group in math. Fewer 11th graders (53%) were in the 50th percentile or greater group in reading.

Nebraska Student-Based, Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) Outcomes. Three programs provided STARS outcome data for children who had an ECE grant program experience. There was an equal split among elementary and secondary students for the STARS scores, with 40 in 4th grade, 21 in 8th grade and 20 in 11th grade. Twenty-two percent of the students were identified as receiving special education services. The results indicated:

- The majority of the children in 4th grade were scoring at least "proficient" in the areas of math (88%), writing (63%), and reading (78%). Writing scores were considerably lower than reading or math scores.
- The majority of the children in 8th grade were scoring at least "proficient" in the areas of math (79%), writing (81%), and reading (90%). More children were proficient in reading than math or writing.
- The majority of the children in 11th grade were scoring at least "proficient" in the areas of math (80%), writing (70%), and reading (90%). More children were proficient in reading than math or writing.

Summary

Clearly, the results of this evaluation indicate that Nebraska's investment in early childhood education grant programs yielded positive outcomes for the young children it served. Immediate short-term outcomes were realized as reflected in documented substantial developmental gains over the course of the year. Similar post developmental scores across gender and ethnicity suggest that the intervention was equally successful for all groups of children. Longitudinal data suggest continued positive long-term outcomes as the children served in these programs experienced academic success.

The majority of ECE grant children across grade levels met or exceeded district standards in reading, writing, and math.

The full report can be found at www.nde.state.ne.us/ECH/ECGrantProg.htm

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