

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM

Evaluation Progress Report

Executive Summary

July 1, 2003—June 30, 2004

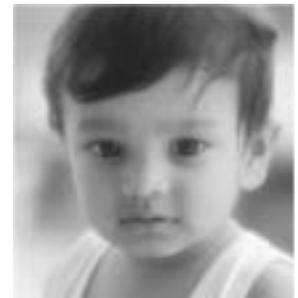
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF NEBRASKA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM?

Nebraska's Early Childhood Education Grant Program was designed to award state funds to schools or Educational Service Units to assist in the operation of early childhood programs. These programs are intended to support the development of children from birth to kindergarten through the provision of comprehensive center-based programs. In most cases the projects expanded and/or combined existing pre-kindergarten programs funded through district, federal, or parent dollars, and involve collaboration with Head Start. LB 759, enacted in the 2001 Legislative Session, revised the Early Childhood Act originally passed in 1990 (79-1101 through 1104 R.R.S.) that enabled the funding of pilot Early Childhood Projects. The action to revise the law and to increase the funding was a part of Governor Johann's Early Childhood initiative, *Children Can't Wait*. The purpose of Nebraska's Early Childhood Education Grant Program is to assure quality education for children.

The early childhood 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.

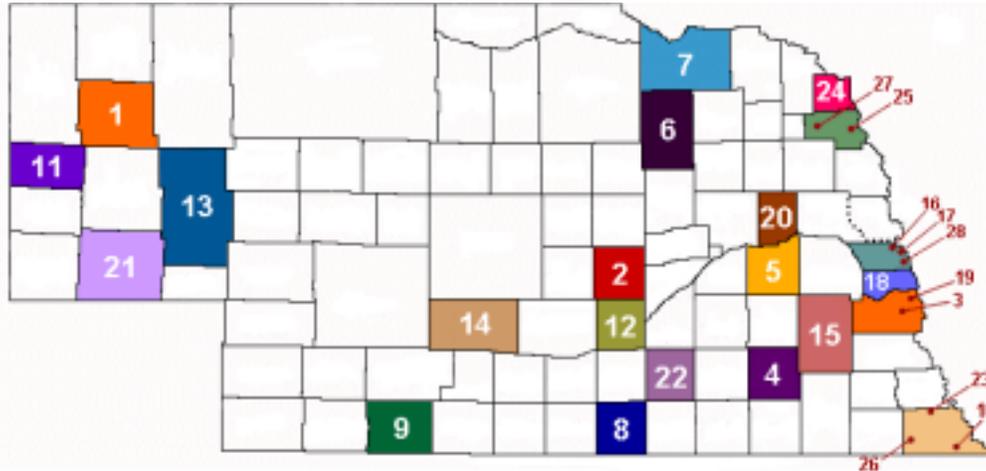
The programs target prekindergarten-age children:

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



WHERE ARE NEBRASKA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAMS LOCATED?

Nebraska currently funds 28 programs from 28 districts across Nebraska. Typical classroom size included 16-20 children. Districts are highlighted on the map below.



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| <p>1. Alliance Public Schools - Alliance Early Childhood Program</p> <p>2. Centura Public Schools - Bright Beginnings Preschool @ Cairo</p> <p>3. Conestoga Public Schools - Cubs Preschool @ Murray</p> <p>4. Crete Public Schools - CIRCLE</p> <p>5. David City Public Schools - ABC Early Childhood Programs</p> <p>6. Elgin Public Schools - Elgin Early Learning Center</p> <p>7. Educational Service Unit #1 - Growing Together Early Childhood Program @ Santee</p> <p>8. Educational Service Unit #9 - Webster County Early Learning Centers</p> <p>9. Educational Service Unit #15 - Kidz Zone/Partners in Parenting @ McCook</p> <p>10. Falls City Public Schools - Parent-Child Center</p> <p>11. Gering Public Schools - Project Success</p> <p>12. Grand Island Public Schools - Gold Star Preschool Program</p> <p>13. Lewellen Grade School - Early Childhood Education-Garden County</p> <p>14. Lexington Public Schools - Lexington Early Learning Center</p> | <p>15. Lincoln Public Schools - ExCITE</p> <p>16. Millard Public Schools - Early Start Preschool Program</p> <p>17. Omaha Public Schools - Educare Center of Omaha, Inc.</p> <p>18. Papillion LaVista Public Schools - Growing Together</p> <p>19. Plattsmouth Community Schools - Success Now</p> <p>20. Schuyler Grade School - Early Learning Center</p> <p>21. Sidney Public Schools - Early Childhood Learning Center</p> <p>22. South Central Unified System #5 - Clay County Learning Centers for Children</p> <p>23. Southeast Consolidated Schools - Mustang Preschool @ Stella</p> <p>24. South Sioux City Community Schools - Siouxland Family Center @ Dakota City</p> <p>25. Umon'hon' Nation Public Schools - Shin'ga Zhin'ga Child Development Center @ Macy</p> <p>26. Unified School System #2007 - HTRS Early Childhood Education Center @ Humboldt</p> <p>27. Walthill Public Schools - Wazhing'a Ti Zhing'a Early Childhood Center</p> <p>28. Westside Community Schools - LEAP-66</p> |
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WHO ARE THE CHILDREN ENROLLED?

In 2003-04, a majority of the 1,357 children served were from low-income families, as was reflected by the 66 percent of children who were eligible for free/reduced lunch. The majority of these programs served preschool children and their families. The programs served a very small number of children (4%) who were premature or low birth weight. Many children (32%) had a home language other than English and had parents (16%) who were less than 18 years of age or were not high school graduates. Distribution by age and ethnicity are summarized in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1
Report of Children Enrolled—By Age

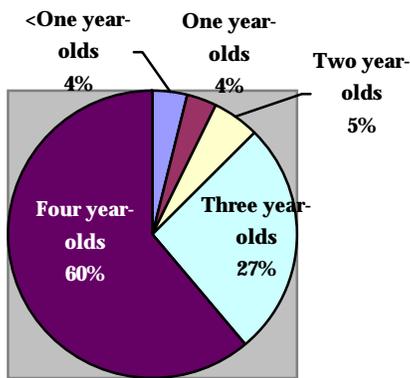
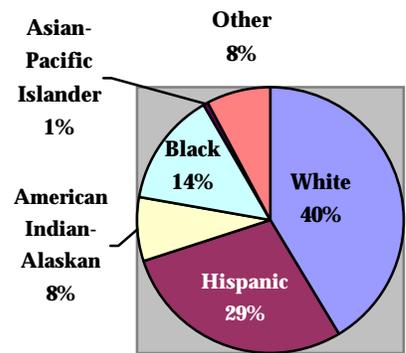


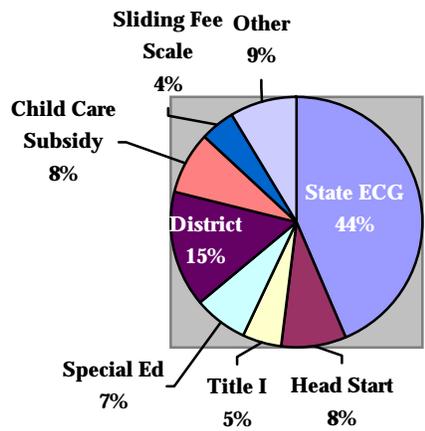
Figure 2
Report of Children Enrolled—By Ethnicity



HOW ARE THE PROGRAMS FUNDED?

Overall, the majority of children were served through State Early Childhood Grants and District funds. Less frequently identified funding sources included: Head Start funds, Special Education funds, Sliding Fee Scale, Child Care Subsidy, Title I, and parent pay. The "other" category typically represented parent pay.

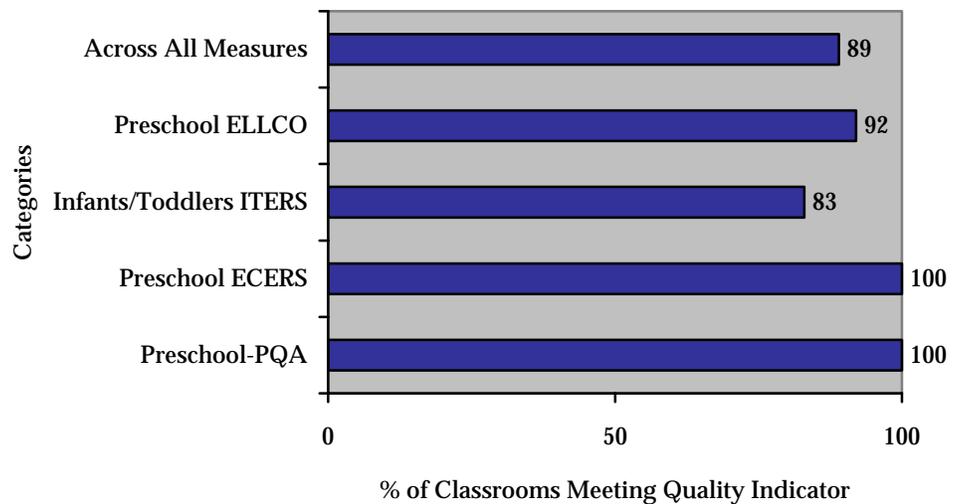
Figure 3
Demonstrates the percentage funded by category.



WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS?

Quality early childhood 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 evaluation tools were available to programs including the Infant/Toddler Environment Ratings Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2003), the Early Childhood Environment Ratings Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998), the High/Scope Program Quality Assessment (PQA) (High/Scope Press, 1998), or the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) (Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge & Anastasopoulos, 2002). Baseline information was obtained by completing one or more of these observational environment rating scales in a sampling of classrooms (at least one from each program). The Nebraska Department of Education has established standards for quality based on each tool. Eighty-nine percent of early childhood classrooms met or were above the state established indicator of quality (these findings are summarized in Figure 4). Overall, these results suggest that high quality early childhood programs are available for children who participate in the state funded Nebraska early childhood programs.

Figure 4
Percentage of Classrooms Achieving the State Indicator of Quality.



Programs are required 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. Six programs are currently accredited, 19 are in the self-study phase, and three have not yet begun the self-study process. Of those currently in the self-study phase, 7 expected validation visits in 2004-2005.



WHAT BENEFIT DOES PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD GRANT PROGRAMS HAVE ON THE CHILDREN THEY SERVE?

Summary of Short-Term Developmental Outcomes

Assessment of short-term child development outcomes indicated that children demonstrated positive outcomes as measured in Spring 2004. State standards were established based on children's gains in skills as assessed in the fall and spring. Specific results of the three assessment measures are described in the following:

Developmental skills of preschool children in 24 programs monitored from fall to spring through the use of the *High/Scope Child Observation Record - Preschool and Infant & Toddler (COR)* found that:

- ◆ 80% of the preschool children made .4 gain or greater on language/literacy measures.
- ◆ 83% of the preschool children made .4 gain or greater on mathematics measures.
- ◆ 73% of the infants made .8 gain or greater on communication measures.
- ◆ 61% of the infants made .8 gain or greater on exploration and logic measures.

Developmental skills of preschool children in one program monitored from fall to spring through the use of *Work Sampling* found that:

- ◆ 100% of the preschool children made one level or more gains on language and literacy measures.
- ◆ 100% of the preschool children made one level or more gains on mathematical thinking measures.

Developmental skills of preschool children in three programs monitored from fall to spring through the use of *Creative Curriculum* found that:

- ◆ 69% of the three-year-old children achieved the upper two levels in both language-literacy and cognitive skills.
- ◆ 95% of the four-year-old children achieved the upper two levels in language-literacy skills.
- ◆ 98% of the four-year-old children achieved the upper two levels in cognitive skills.



Although children made gains across literacy-related areas, when group scores were summarized, a pattern emerged that suggested that outcomes (total skills acquired) for preschool children appeared to be slightly lower in the areas of language and math. As a group, programs should examine why language/literacy and math/logic areas, while positively rated, were somewhat lower.

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS (ECPs)



The Early Childhood Education Grant Program is designed to assist schools and education service units in providing high quality programs that lead to positive long-term outcomes for young children, including ongoing success in school. One of the challenges of collecting data for long-term outcomes is the mobility of families and the resulting attrition of numbers of children remaining in the school district over time. Seven programs submitted 13 sets of long-term outcome data (1-kindergarten, 1- second grade, 2 - third grade, 5 - fourth grade, 2 - fifth grade, 1- sixth grade, and 1- seventh grade). A total of 159 ECP children were compared to 443 others (reading) and 145 ECP children to 423 others (math). Preliminary data comparing the long-term impact of early childhood experiences on achievement scores (reading and math) from children served in these seven programs compared to other children not served by the ECP programs are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Comparison of the percentage of children that scored 50th percentile or greater on achievement testing

Subject	Across Grade Levels		4 th Grade	
	ECP Programs	Peer Group	ECP Programs	Peer Group
Math	70	66	70	62
Reading	66	68	60	65

The results indicate that:

- ◆ *READING* Children served by state-funded early childhood programs slightly under-performed their peers.
- ◆ *MATH* Children served by state-funded early childhood programs out-performed their peers.

Overall, these results indicated that the ECP children and their comparison peers demonstrated similar reading and math outcomes. Based on the assumption that the ECP group consisted of more children who were from low socio-economic status and therefore were more "at-risk" than the peer group to which they are compared, the closer their scores are to the peer group, the better. However, there are some limitations to consider when interpreting the significance of the long-term outcome data. First, most of the state-funded early childhood programs were less than three years old; therefore, long-term outcome data were only available from a small number of previously funded pilot projects. Second, projects submitted group aggregate data only, limiting analysis. Third, projects took different approaches in identifying their peer populations. A small number of projects submitted peer group data that included a matched sample with respect to demographic characteristics. For most projects, the peer group comparisons represented all of the other children served in that school or district at similar grade-levels. This group of peers typically was dissimilar to the ECP children, overall representing children with higher socio-economic status. Finally, the role of early childhood experiences on the peer group cannot be factored in as this group of children's participation in community early childhood programs is unknown. Refinement of long-term data collection is needed to better ascertain the long-term benefit of participation in early childhood programs.

SUMMARY

Nebraska's Early Childhood Grant Program funded 28 programs to serve over 1,300 young children and their families. Overall, 89% of the classrooms demonstrated high quality programming based on environment and/or literacy rating scales. The results of this evaluation indicate that Nebraska's children are achieving positive short-term pre-academic outcomes. In language and literacy outcomes, 73-100% of children who were assessed fall and spring met the state indicators of achievement. In math, 61-100% likewise met the state indicators. Preliminary data suggests that long-term outcomes are promising in the area of math, in which ECP children out-performed their peers. In contrast, ECP children scored slightly less in reading than their peers. Continued collection of data is necessary to further evaluate the long-term impact of children's academic achievement. The results of this evaluation indicate that Nebraska's investment in early childhood programs has yielded quality programming and short-term positive pre-academic outcomes for young children they serve.

The full report can be found at www.nde.state.ne.us/ech/statewideprogreport.pdf

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