

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM

Evaluation Progress Report

Executive Summary

July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007

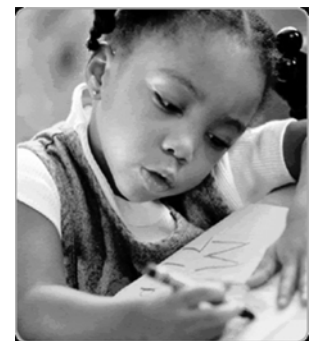
The Nebraska Early Childhood Education (ECE) Grant Program is designed to award state funds to public schools or Educational Service Units (ESUs) to assist in the operation of comprehensive early childhood education programs intended to support the learning and development of children in the birth to kindergarten age range.

The programs increase opportunities for at-risk children to participate in early childhood education programs by creating new, expanded and/or combined programs funded with school district funds, federal funds, and/or parent fees, and involve collaboration with Head Start. The purpose of the Nebraska ECE 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 community.

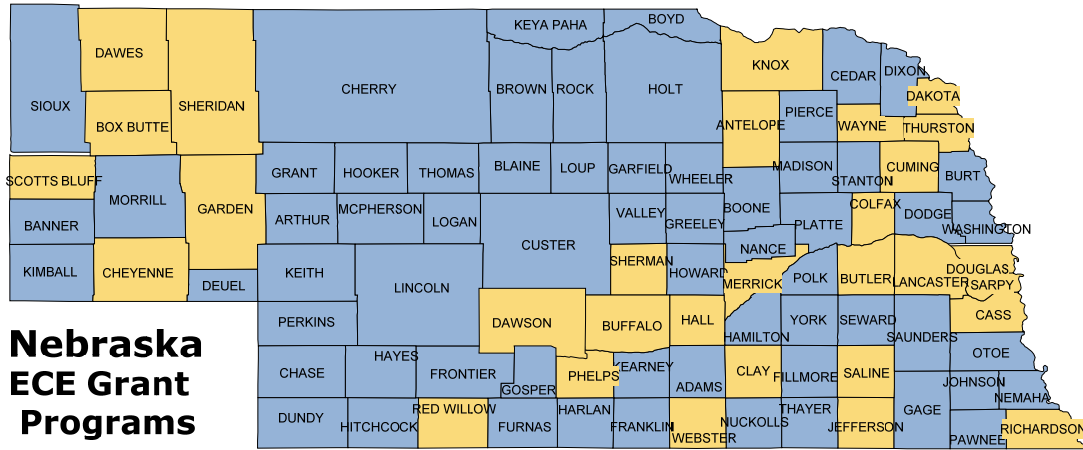
The ECE grant programs target prekindergarten-age children:

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 as verified by a physician, or
4. whose parents were younger than eighteen or who had not completed high school.



WHO ARE THE GRANTEES?

In the 2006-2007 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 two to fifteen years.



**Nebraska
ECE Grant
Programs**

■ Counties where ECE grant programs are located.

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 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 Schools	Schuyler Community Schools
Sidney Public Schools	South Central Unified #5
South Sioux City Community Schools	Southeast Nebraska Consolidated Schools
Southwest Public Schools	Umon'Hon' Nation Public Schools
Wakefield Public School	Walthill Public Schools

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN SERVED?



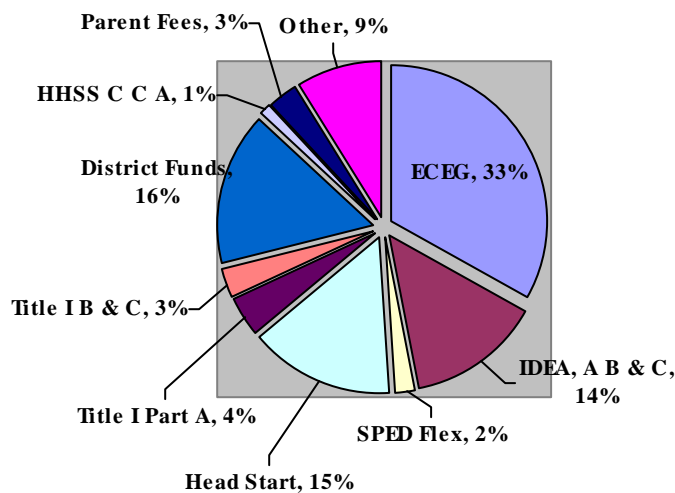
In 2006-07, a total of 1,618 children were served across the 38 funded programs. This represents an increase over previous years. A total of 1,483 children were served in the 2005-06 year and 1,068 in 2004-05. The majority of the programs served preschool children and their families. Four-year-old children were the largest age group represented, followed by three-year-olds. Fewer were served in the younger age groups below age three. The single largest racial/ethnic group reported was White not Hispanic, followed by Hispanic.

HOW ARE THE PROGRAMS FUNDED?

Overall operational budgets totaled \$11,144,230 in the 2006-2007 program year. This amount included grant funds plus the in-kind contributions of the district and their partners. Nebraska ECE grant funding represented approximately 33% of the overall operational expenditures. The 67% match, clearly exceeded the Nebraska Department of Education's 50% requirement. The largest categories of funding included:

- ◆ Nebraska ECE Grant Program (33%),
- ◆ local district funds (16%),
- ◆ special education funds (14%), and
- ◆ Head Start (15%).

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 evaluation 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, Sangeorge & Anastasopoulos, 2002), or the Infant/Toddler Environment Ratings Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2003). Baseline 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 of programs rated with the ITERS, scores are not being reported.

- ◆ 100% of the preschool programs met criteria on the ECERS
- ◆ 90% of the preschool programs met criteria on the ELLCO

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

Technical assistance was provided for those programs not meeting criteria.

HOW MANY PROGRAMS HAVE ACHIEVED NAEYC ACCREDITATION?

National accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) continues to be a major tool for assessing program quality and assuring that families have input into the design and operation of the program. A total of 15 programs have received 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 (COR). Twenty-four (24) programs provided fall and spring observational data for a total of 756 preschool children. For this evaluation, gain scores were reported for language/literacy and math/logic. The COR ratings range from 1 to 5 on each domain. Gain was determined by the difference from fall to spring ratings. Data is summarized in the following tables.

Summary of Preschool Findings by Age Group: COR

Language/Literacy Skills			Math/Logic			Social Relations		
Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain
State Summary for 3-Year-Olds n=450								
2.14	3.53	1.39	1.93	3.47	1.54	2.45	3.90	1.45
State Summary for 4-Year-Olds n=306								
2.38	4.09	1.71	2.10	4.23	2.13	2.93	4.59	1.66

Comparison of Males and Females : COR

Language/Literacy Skills			Math/Logic			Social Relations		
Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain
Females n=378								
2.31	3.88	1.57	2.05	3.86	1.81	2.51	4.10	1.59
Males n=378								
2.17	3.63	1.46	1.95	3.70	1.75	2.43	3.94	1.51



Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (CCDC). CCDC 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. Twelve (12) programs provided fall and spring observational data for a total of 308 children. Seventeen (17%) percent were children with an Individual Education Program (IEP).

The CCDC ratings are based on a 6 point scale with a range from 0 to 5. The gain scores were reported for language and cognitive skills.

The tables below summarize the data including results based on the sub-population of gender.

Summary of Preschool Findings by Age Group: CCDC

Language/Literacy Skills			Cognitive		
Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain
<i>State Summary for 3-Year-Olds n=167</i>					
3.10	3.99	.89	2.83	3.83	1.0
<i>State Summary for 4-Year-Olds n=141</i>					
3.66	4.52	.86	3.44	4.40	.95

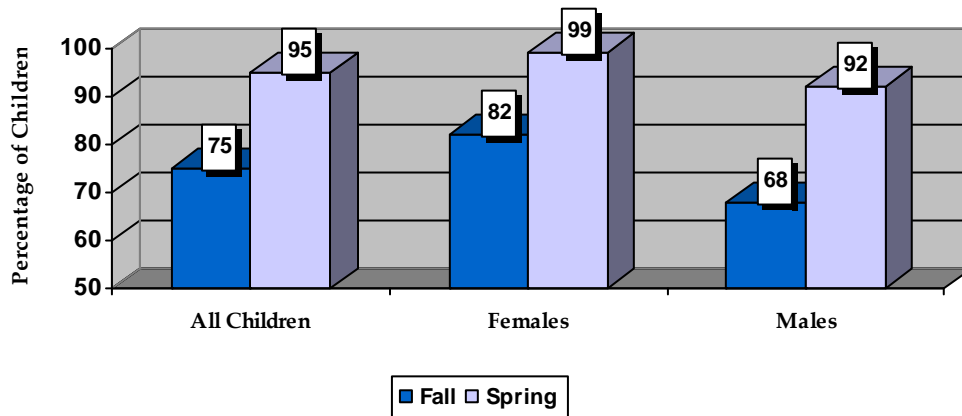
Comparison of Males and Females: CCDC

Language/Literacy Skills			Cognitive		
Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain	Fall Mean	Spring Mean	Total Gain
<i>Females n=163</i>					
3.40	4.25	.85	3.17	4.11	.96
<i>Males n=145</i>					
3.22	4.12	.91	2.96	3.91	.98

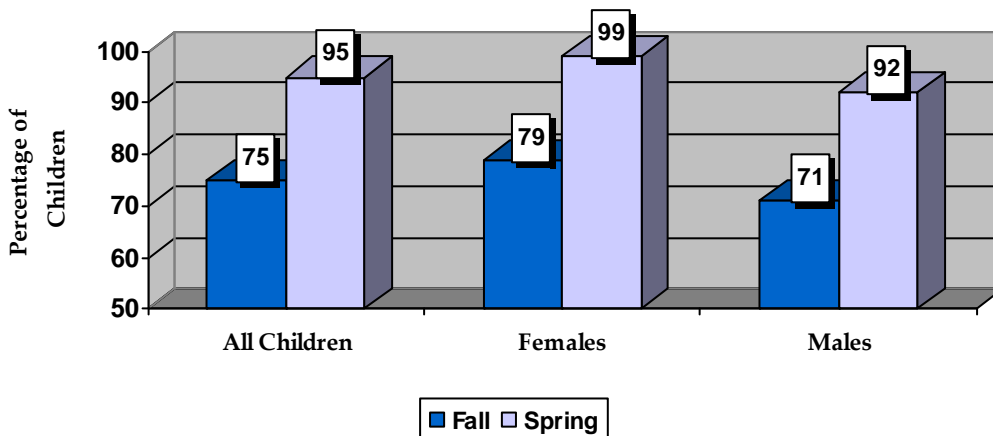
Analysis of Data Based on Criteria of Results Matter in Nebraska

Results Matter in Nebraska includes a child outcome system designed and implemented in 2005-2006 to improve programs and supports for all young children birth to age five, served by school districts, the Early Development Network, and their partners. It was initiated as part of the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requirement for reporting of child outcomes. Nebraska chose to include all state funded early childhood programs as part of this initiative. Analysis of the data for Results Matter is based on two functional outcomes: 1) children have positive social relationships and 2) children acquire and use knowledge and skills including early language/communication. Data was analyzed in three ways: a) the percentage of children at the 40th percentile; b) the percentage that stay at the same percentile ranking (which is considered typical progress); and c) the percentage of children in which there was more or less progress than typically expected. The 40th percentile and above represents children that are within the average range and have an approximate standard score of 95 (based on 100 as a mean). The figures below illustrate this data including the analyses of the sub-populations of gender.

Percent of Children at or above the 40th Percentile (Fall /Spring Comparison): Outcome 1- Social Relationships



Percent of Children at or above the 40th Percentile (Fall/Spring Comparison): Outcome 2 - Use of Knowledge



The results found that:

- ◆ The ECE grant program made a substantial impact on the children it served. By spring, 95% of the children were scoring at the 40th percentile and above in the area of “positive social relationships” (Outcome 1) and “acquire and use knowledge” (Outcome 2), which was a 20% increase from the fall.
- ◆ The majority of the children who were below the 40th percentile, made greater than expected gains (change in percentile rank groupings) across both functional areas of development. A larger percentage of girls were at or above the 40th percentile at the end of the year.

A Snapshot of the Short-Term Child Outcome Findings

The program made a difference for children

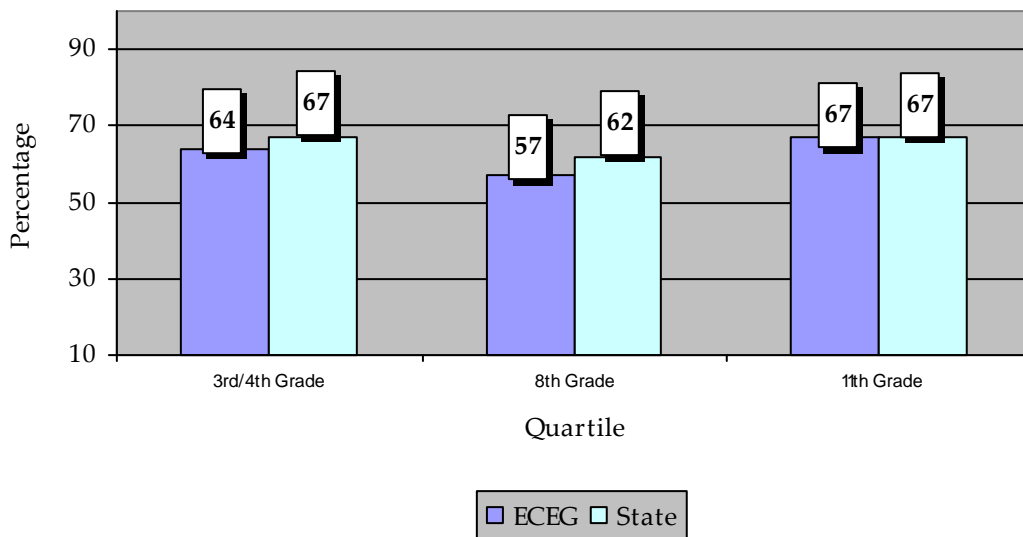
- ◆ Preschool children made significant gains across all areas of learning and development.
- ◆ Preschool children made the highest gains in the area of math/cognitive development.
- ◆ The 4-year-old children who were ELL made gains similar to or higher than their English speaking peers in both language/literacy and math/cognitive.
- ◆ By spring, 95% of the children were scoring at or above average in the areas of “positive social relationships” and “acquire and use knowledge”.
- ◆ Girls averaged higher scores than boys in all areas of learning and development in both fall and spring.
- ◆ Both girls and boys made significant gains in all areas of learning and development.

Preschool children made significant gains in both language/literacy and math/cognitive skills.

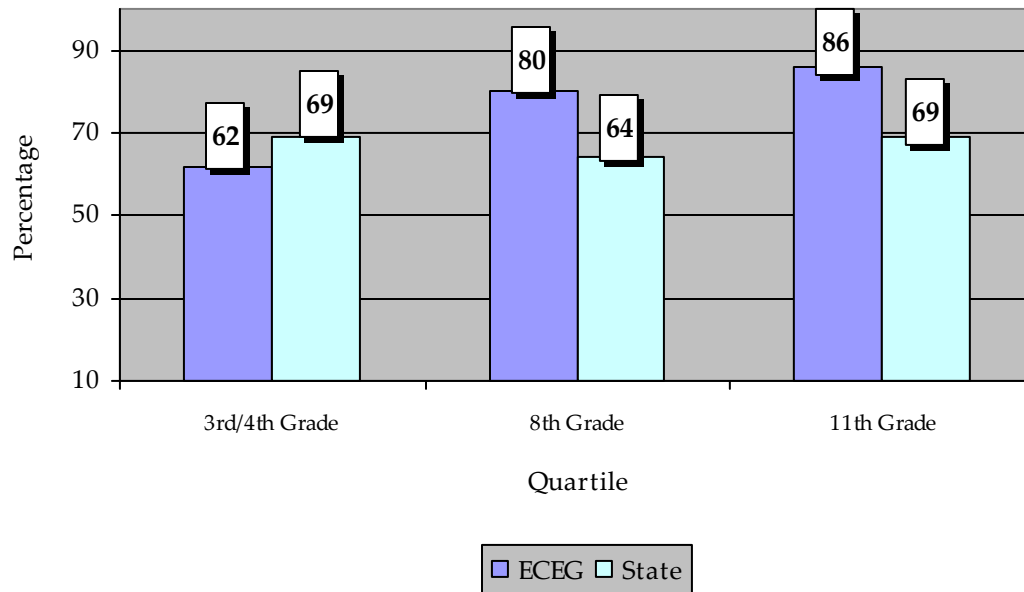
Long-Term Educational Outcomes

Standardized Achievement Outcomes. The long-term impact of an ECE grant program experience was evaluated by collecting mathematics and reading achievement scores from a sample of children who attended Nebraska’s ECE grant programs. The assessments included the Stanford Achievement Test, Terra Nova, California Achievement Test, and Measures of Academic Progress. Results for 3rd or 4th, 8th, and 11th grade students were aggregated from 14 programs. Of the 228 children included in this sample, 22% were identified as special education students. The results are summarized in the following figures.

**Summary of Percentage of Children Scoring Above the National Average in Reading:
A Comparison of Students with ECE Grant Experience with State Averages**



**Summary of Percentage of Children Scoring Above the National Average in Math:
A Comparison of Students with ECE Grant Experience with State Averages**



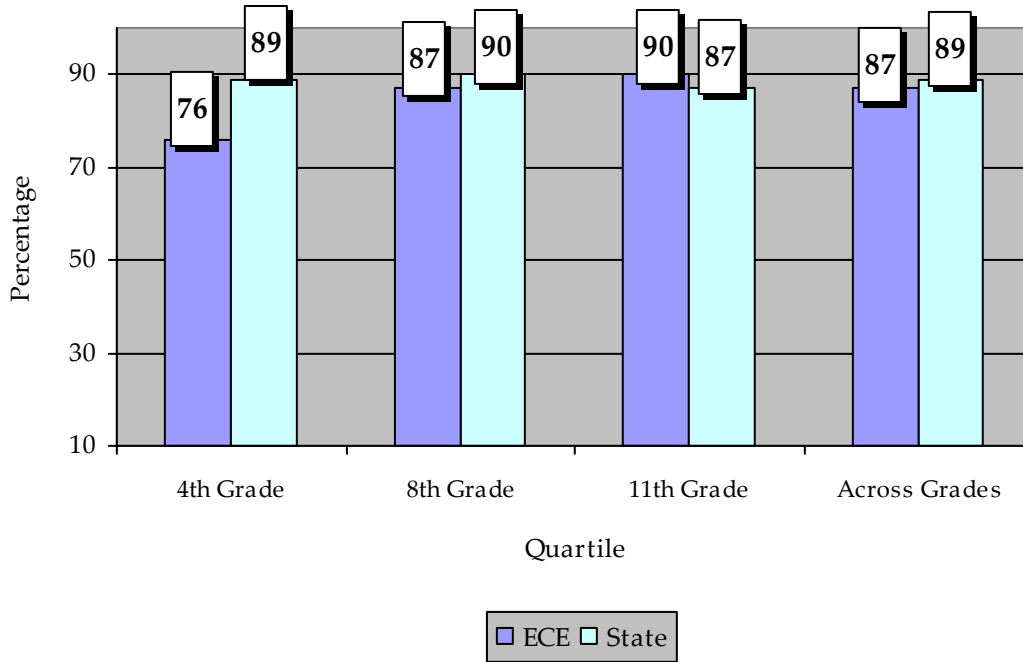
The standardized achievement results indicate:

- ◆ ECE grant children scored above the national average (50th percentile or greater) on achievement tests (63% reading and 58% math) based on data summarized across age groups.
- ◆ ECE grant children scored the lowest percentage on the 8th grade reading scores (57%) and the highest percentage was the 11th grade math scores (86%).
- ◆ The ECE grant program had slightly fewer children scoring above the national average than Nebraska children as a whole in reading in 3rd or 4th and 8th grades.
- ◆ In 11th grade the ECE grant and Nebraska children reading scores were similar.
- ◆ In the area of math, the children with ECE grant program experience were scoring above the national average at a greater proportion than Nebraska children on whole in the 8th and 11th grades.

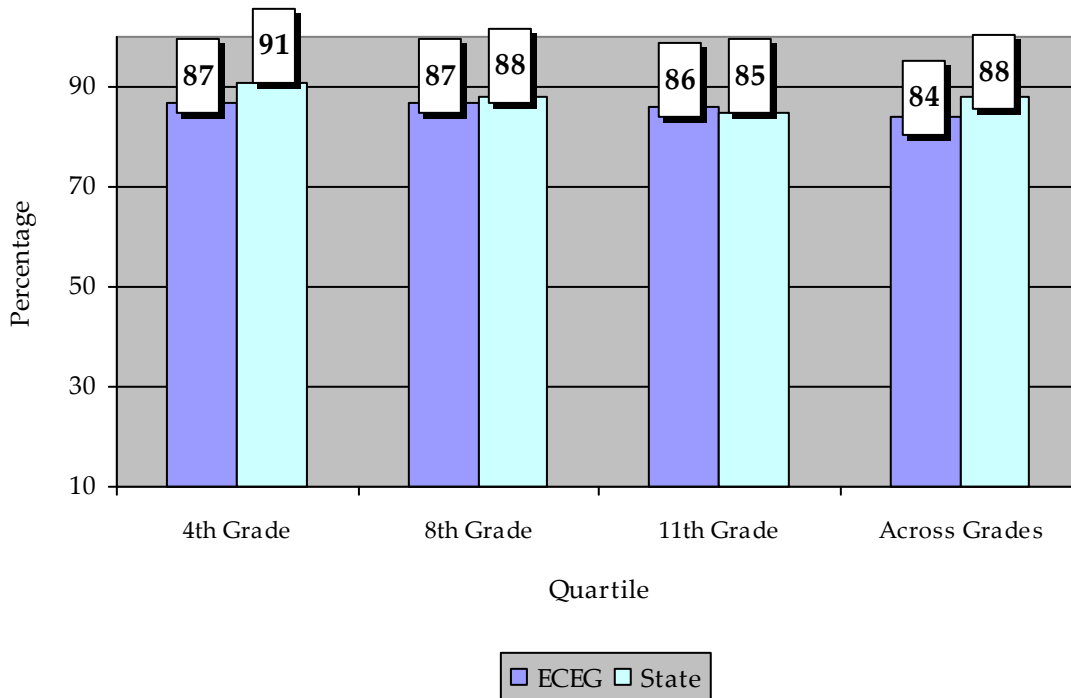
The majority of ECE grant children scored above the national average on achievement tests in reading and math.

Nebraska Student-Based, Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) Outcomes. Four programs provided STARS outcome data for children who had an ECE grant program experience. There were fewer elementary (57) than secondary (77) students for the STARS scores reported. Fourteen percent (14%) of the students were identified as receiving special education services.

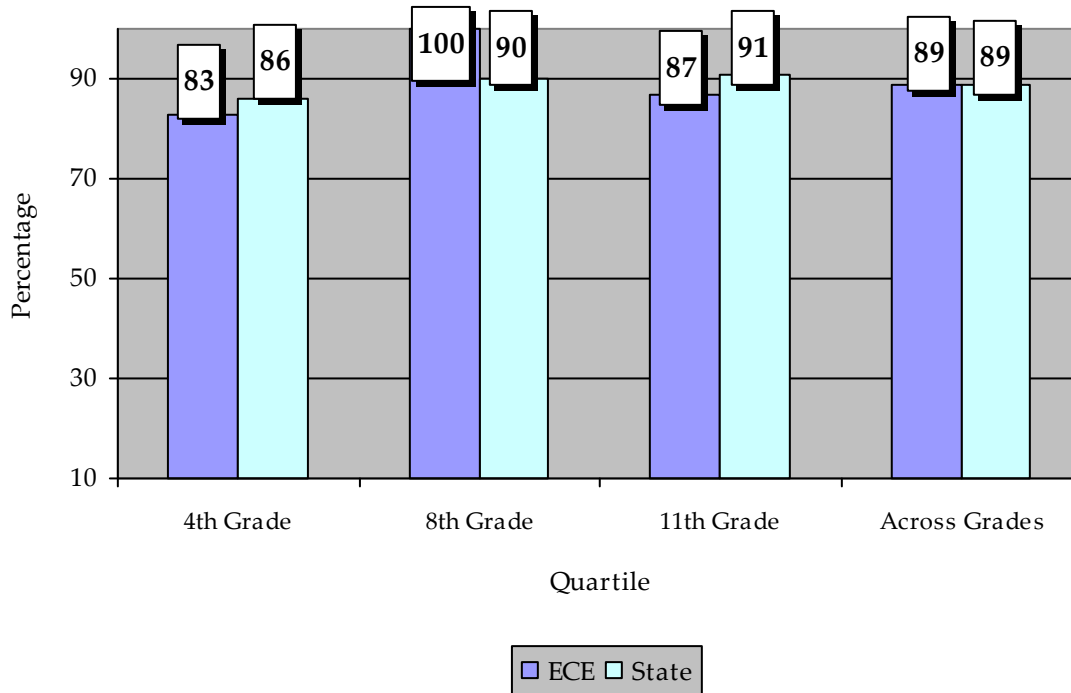
**Summary of Percentage of Children Scoring Above the National Average in Math:
A Comparison of Students with ECE Grant Experience with State Averages**



**Summary of Percentage of Children that Met or Exceeded Standards in Math:
A Comparison of Students with ECE Grant Experience with NE Children**



**Summary of Percentage of Children that Met or Exceeded Standards in *Writing*:
A Comparison of Students with ECE Grant Experience with State Averages**



The STARS results indicated that:

- ◆ There are slightly fewer ECE grant program students who met or exceeded standards in the area of Reading (2% less) and Math (4% less) based on cross age analysis.
- ◆ The results were equivalent for both groups in Writing.
- ◆ In 4th grade, there was a greater discrepancy between ECE grant program students and students at large, with a lower percentage of ECE students meeting the standards.

Overall, these results are very favorable considering the Nebraska State Composite results were based on a lower percentage of students from low income families. Sixty-seven (67%) percent of the children in ECE grant programs were eligible for free and reduced lunch, compared to the state average of 36%. The number of children receiving special education services was a similar percentage across both groups.

SUMMARY

In 2006-2007, the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program served a total of 1,618 young children and their families in 38 funded districts or ESU programs. This reflected an increase of approximately 130 children enrolled from the previous year. The majority of the children were four-year-olds from families that were eligible for free and/or reduced lunch.

Quality early childhood education environments are being provided through the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program. This is reflected in good to excellent average ratings across programs on environment rating scales, indicating a trend toward exemplary language and literacy practices.

Participation in high quality experiences for young children resulted in immediate short-term benefits as reflected in the significant gains in development and learning outcomes and with many children making greater than expected progress. Positive long-term academic outcomes were demonstrated. Most ECE grant children were in the 50th percentile or greater on achievement tests. The majority met or exceeded district standards in reading, writing and math. When comparisons were made to Nebraska State Composite scores, ECE grant children were slightly below the state percentages. These results are very favorable when considering that the Nebraska State Composite results were based on approximately 36% low income students, in comparison with 67% low income students in the ECE grant programs.

The results of this evaluation clearly indicate that Nebraska's investment in early childhood education grant programs yields positive outcomes for the young children served. Immediate short-term outcomes are realized as reflected in documented substantial learning and developmental gains over the course of the year. Longitudinal data suggest continued positive long-term outcomes as the children served in these programs experienced academic success.

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

For more information contact:

Nebraska Department of Education

Office of Early Childhood

P.O. Box 94987

301 Centennial Mall South

Lincoln, NE 68509-4987

Phone: (402) 471-3184

<http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ECH/ECH.html>

Submitted by:

Barbara Jackson, Ph.D. & Lisa St. Clair, Ed. D.

Munroe-Meyer Institute/University of Nebraska Medical Center

University Center of Excellence for Developmental Disabilities

