

# NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM

## Evaluation Progress Report

Executive Summary

July 1, 2007 - June 30, 2008

### Nebraska Support of Young Children

Since 1992 Nebraska Early Childhood Education (ECE) Grant Program has awarded 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 increased 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 and community early childhood partners. The purpose of the Nebraska ECE Grant Program was to provide high quality early childhood education program experiences that assisted children to reach their full potential and increased the likelihood of their later success in school.

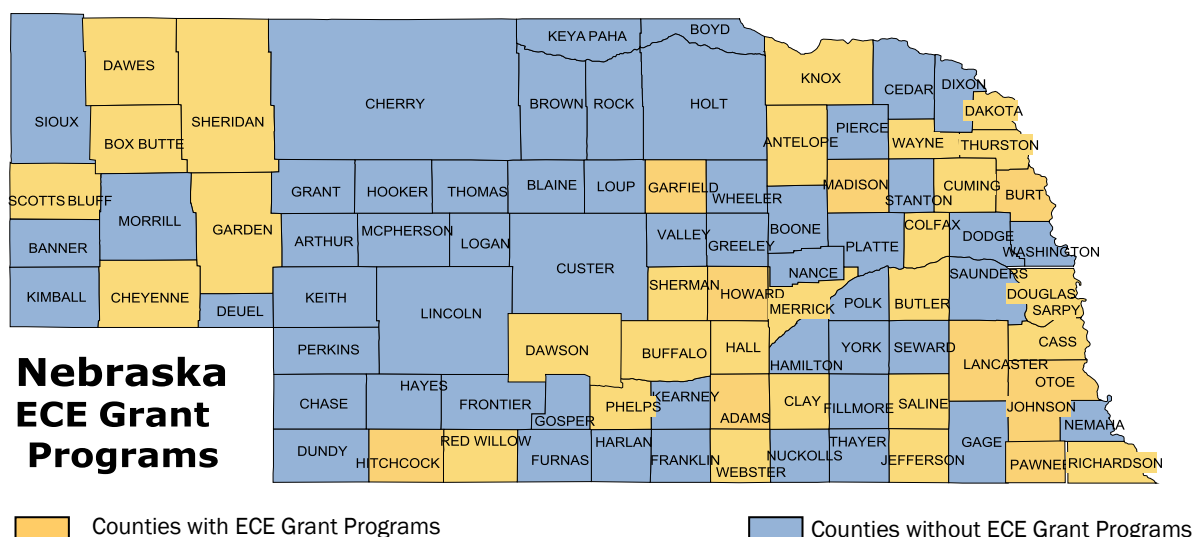
The ECE grant programs were required to serve children in inclusive classrooms that represented the range of abilities and disabilities of the children and the social, linguistic, and economic diversity of the community. The ECE grant programs target prekindergarten-age children:

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



## Who are the Grantees?

In the 2007-2008 program year, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) provided Nebraska ECE Grant Program funds to 52 school districts or Educational Service Units (ESUs) across the state to operate ECE grant programs. Programs were funded by a combination of sources including: early childhood grant funds, Equalization Aid, and federal and local sources. Equalization Aid allowed NDE to fund twenty-one additional preschool classrooms in the 2007-2008 school year.



## Funded Programs: 2007-2008

Alliance Public Schools	Hitchcock County Unified Schools	Papillion LaVista Public Schools
Bancroft-Rosalie Community Schools	Holdrege Public Schools	Pawnee City Public Schools
Burwell Public Schools	Humboldt Table Rock Steinauer Schools	Plattsmouth Community Schools
Central City Public Schools	Johnson County Central Public Schools	Santee Community Schools
Centura Public Schools	Kearney Public Schools	Schuyler Public Schools
Chadron Public Schools	Lexington Public Schools	Sidney Public Schools
Conestoga Public Schools	Lincoln Public Schools	South Central Unified #5
Creighton Public Schools	Loup City Public Schools	South Sioux City Community Schools
Crete Public Schools	Lyons-Decatur Northeast Schools	Southeast Nebraska Consolidated Schools
David City Public Schools	McCook Public Schools	Southwest Public Schools
Douglas County West Community Schools	Millard Public Schools	St Paul Public Schools
Elgin Public Schools	Mitchell Public Schools	Summer-Eddyville-Miller Schools
ESU 9	Morrill Public Schools	Umon'Hon' Nation Public Schools
Fairbury Public Schools	Newman Grove Public Schools	Wakefield Public School
Falls City Public Schools	Norfolk Public Schools	Walthill Public Schools
Garden County Schools	Omaha Public Schools	York Public Schools
Gering Public Schools	Overton Public Schools	
Grand Island Public Schools	Palmyra Public Schools	

## Who are the Children Served?



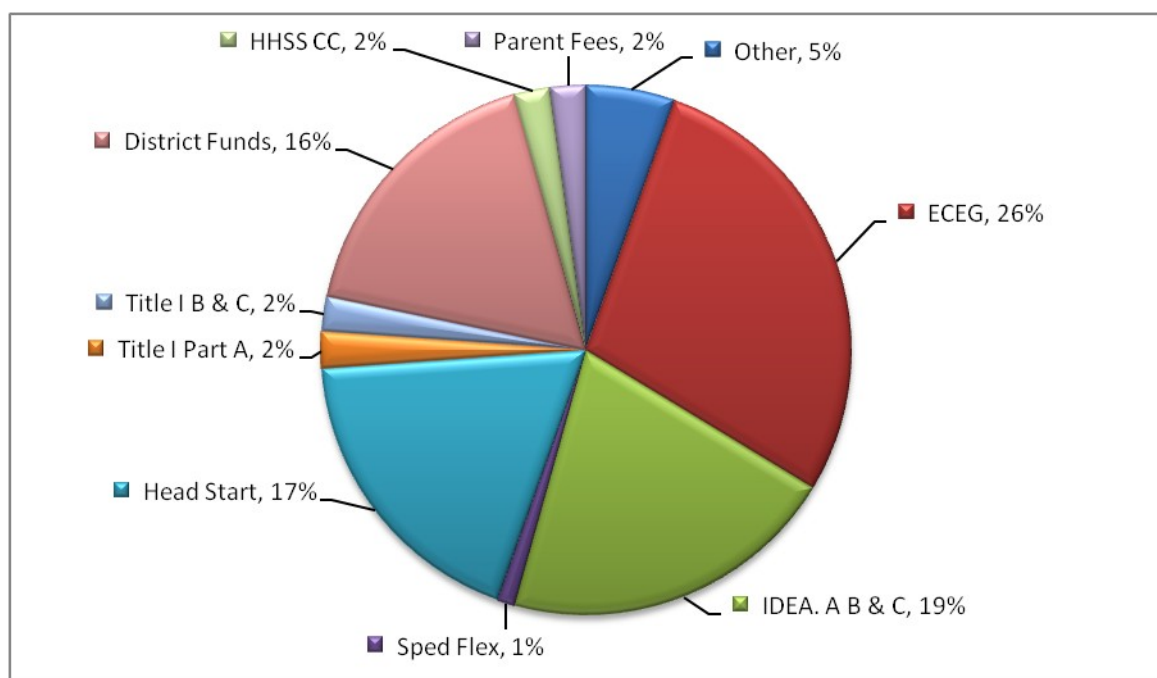
In 2007-08, a total of 2,299 children were served across the 52 state funded programs. This represents an increase of 681 children over the previous year. The majority of the programs served preschool children and their families. Four-year-old children were the largest age group represented, followed by three-year-olds. The single largest racial/ethnic group reported was White, not Hispanic (65%), followed by Hispanic (24%).

## How are the Programs Funded?

Overall operational budgets totaled \$12,148,996 in the 2007-2008 program year. This amount included grant funds plus the contributions of the district and their partners. Nebraska ECE grant funding represented approximately 26% of the overall operational expenditures. The largest categories of funding included:

- Nebraska ECE Grant Program (26%),
- local district funds (16%),
- special education funds (19%), and
- Head Start (17%).

## Distribution of Funding



## Results Matter in Nebraska.....A Comprehensive Accountability Program

**Results Matter in Nebraska** is a child, family, and program outcomes measurement system designed and implemented to improve programs and supports for all young children birth to age five, served through school districts, ESUs, the Early Development Network and community partners. Although initiated as part of the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requirement for reporting child outcomes, Nebraska chose to include all state funded early childhood programs as part of this initiative. The program uses child, family, and program outcomes data to impact early childhood program practices and policy.

The *purpose of the system* is to:

- improve experiences, learning, development and lives of young children and their families,
- inform program practices,
- demonstrate program effectiveness,
- guide the development of local and state policies and procedures, and
- provide data to demonstrate results,

Central Outcomes of Results Matter	Benefits of Results Matter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of ongoing assessment becomes standard practice in programs</li> <li>• Decisions regarding intervention are impacted by data</li> <li>• Accountability reporting requirements are met through embedded everyday practices</li> <li>• Widely used assessment systems are improved and refined over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased depth of understanding of child development</li> <li>• Increased awareness of the link between instruction and child outcomes</li> <li>• Improved communication with families</li> <li>• Increased use of technology</li> <li>• Increased quality of programs</li> </ul>

This report will provide a summary of the evaluation of the Early Childhood Education Grant Program related to each of these outcome areas.



### At a Glance: Results Matter System Components

#### Early Child Assessment

Programs serve from a menu of approved authentic assessment systems.

#### Longitudinal Analysis

Child assessment results are analyzed over time to study the long-term benefits of participating in early care and education opportunities. This includes school achievement on standardized assessment and STARS ratings.

#### Family Outcomes

Specially designed family surveys inform program administrators about how well the system assists families in effectively supporting their child's early development.

#### Program Quality Measures

Child outcomes data is linked with existing program quality information such as NAEYC accreditation and environmental rating scale results.

## Creating Quality Programs

**High quality early childhood settings were demonstrated in the majority of Nebraska's preschool 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, & Clifford, 2000; Ramey & Ramey, 1998). The quality of the early childhood education grant programs was measured using the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006), or the Early Childhood Environment Ratings Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998) and the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) (Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge & Anastasopoulos, 2002).

The ITERS-R was used for classrooms serving infants and toddlers, the ECERS-R and the ELLCO were used for classrooms serving 3 and 4-year-old children. Due to the few numbers of programs rated with the ITERS-R scores were not reported. Environmental rating scales were completed in at least one classroom per program. The results found that:

- 90% of the 68 classrooms met the state set quality standard on the ECERS.
- 97% of the classrooms met the State set quality standard on the ELLCO.
- 17 programs were accredited by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

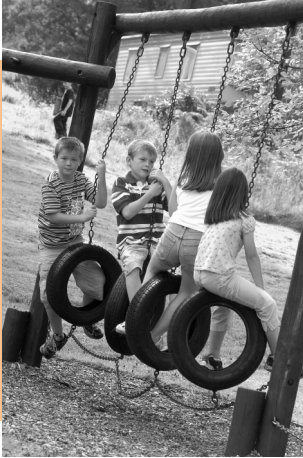
Technical assistance was provided for those programs not meeting the state standards.



**"One of the primary interventions at our school to close the achievement gap, is the high quality, comprehensive preschool program we have within our school."**

**.....An Elementary Principal-Lincoln Public Schools.**

## Building the Foundation for Future Learning

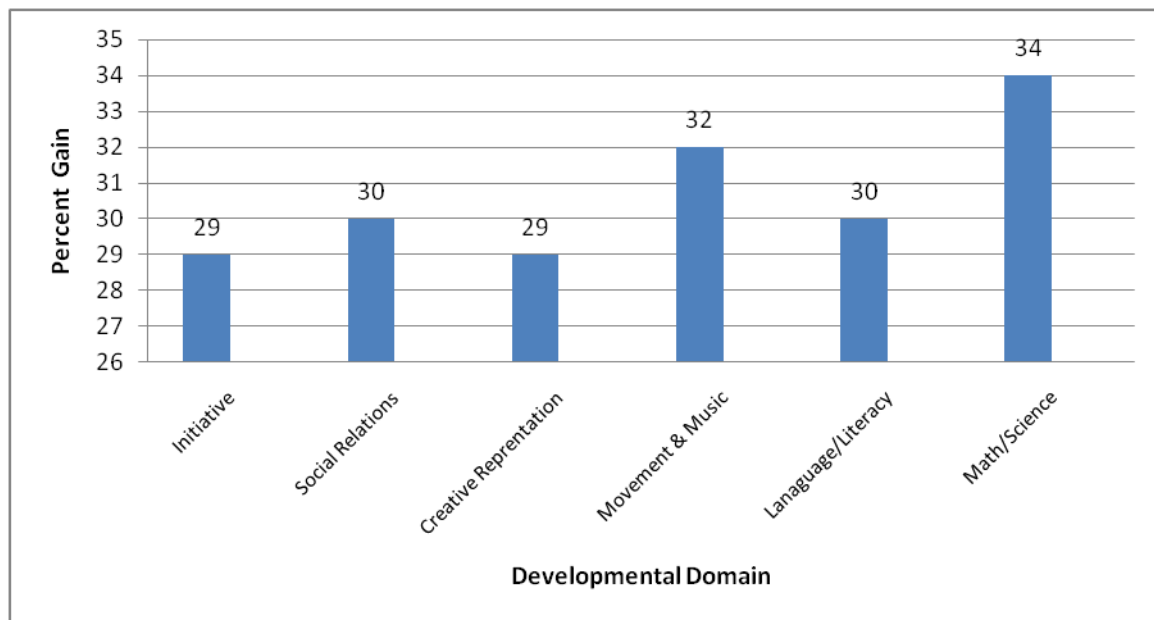


Both short-term and long-term developmental outcomes were assessed to determine the extent that children's learning and development was positively associated with participation in the program. Programs used one of three state approved observational assessments to evaluate child progress: High/Scope Child Observation Record (COR) for Infants and Toddlers (2004) or Preschoolers (Brinkman, Barton, and Taylor, 2005), Assessment, Evaluation, Programming System (AEPS) (Bricker, 2003) or Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (CCDC) (Dodge, et al, 2005). Long-term data were collected for those children who had participated in ECE grant programs and remained within the same school district. These analyses were based on math and reading scores on standardized achievement tests used by local school districts at 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades and the STARS assessment at 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades.

### Young Children Learning New Skills – A Summary of Short-Term Outcomes

*High/Scope Child Observation Record (COR).* Progress data from the COR provided scores for children on a 5-point scale, with 5 being the most advanced. Twenty-six (26) programs provided fall and spring observational data. Data was available on 952 children who were enrolled in the program and had assessment data available both in the fall and spring. Twenty-five (25%) percent were children with an Individual Education Program (IEP). Gain was determined by the difference from fall to spring ratings. The figure below summarizes results.

#### COR Preschool Findings: Age 3 – 5

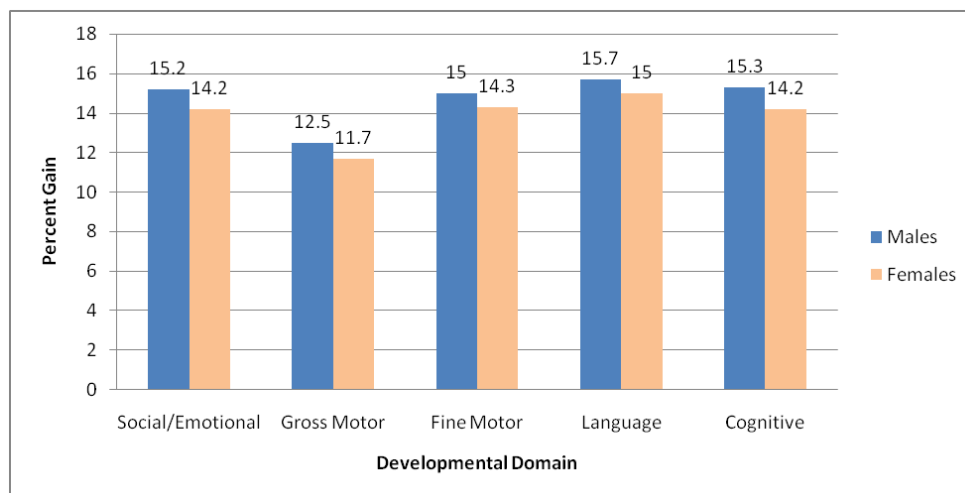
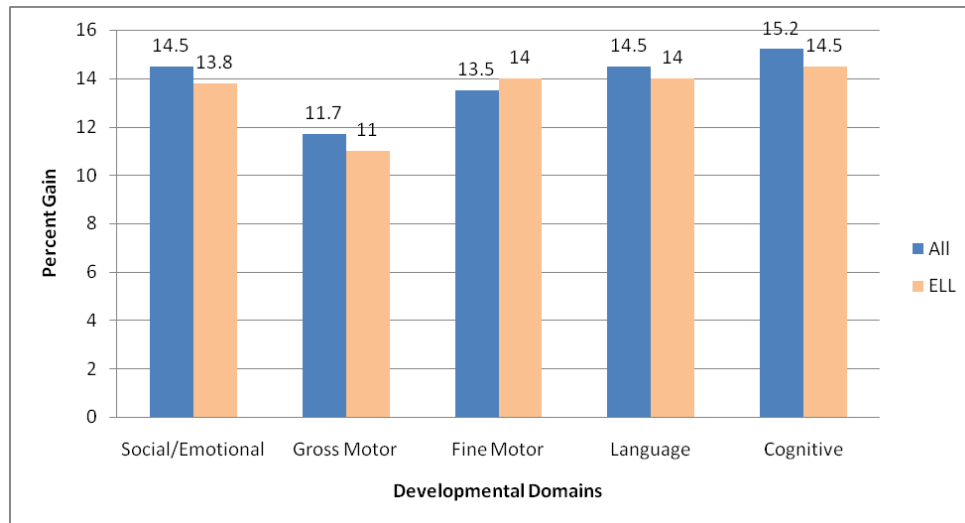


The results indicated that preschoolers across ages made substantial gains across all areas with slightly higher gains in math/science. Slightly fewer gains were made in initiative and creative representation skills.

“What I like about the COR is that at parent teacher conferences, we can give the parents a family report so they can see all the things that we’ve been working on with their child” .....a Teacher from ESU #9

*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 477 children. Twenty-one (21%) percent were children with an IEP. The CCDC ratings are based on a 6 point scale with a range from 0 to 5. The figures below summarize the data including results based on the sub-population of gender and English Language Learners (ELL).

### CCDC Preschool Findings

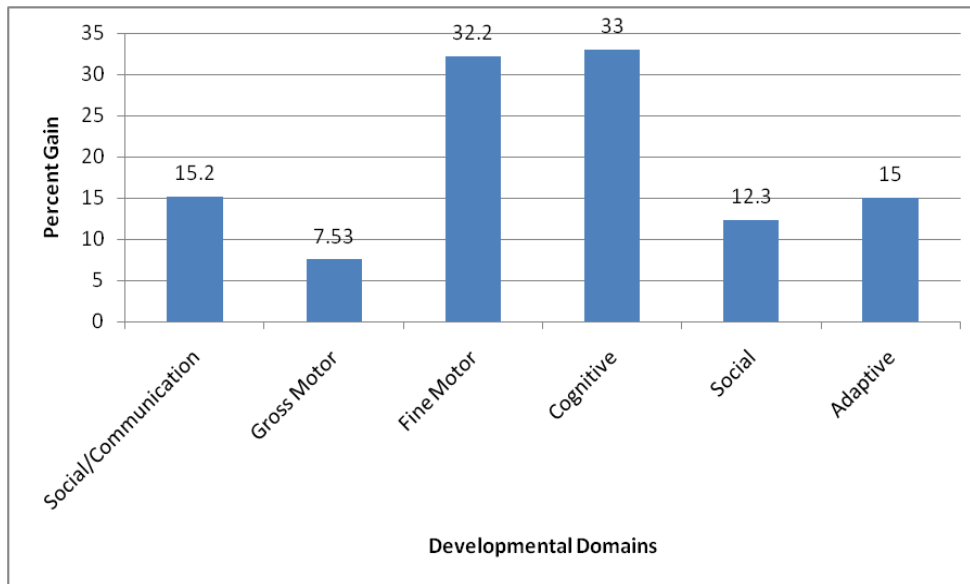


### The results indicated that:

- preschoolers across ages made substantial gains in all areas, with slightly higher gains in cognitive skills.
- despite having higher gain scores than females (average score=3.33), males (average score=3.20) had lower scores in the spring.
- children who were English Language Learners (ELL) scored lower (average score= 3.20) than their English speaking peers (average score=3.31), with the greatest discrepancy in the area of language skills.

Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System (AEPS). AEPS outcome data provided scores for children based on a sequence of items with increasing difficulty. Analysis was completed by calculating the AEPS ratings on a percent of items completed. Six (6) programs provided fall and spring observational data for a total of 59 children. As a result, this outcome data is reported differently from the CCDC or COR. The gain scores are based on the percent gained across time. The gain scores are summarized in the following figure.

AEPS Preschool Findings



“Living in a remote rural area, the impact of the Early Childhood Grant upon our children has been ‘huge’. For many children it is their first and only exposure to social/ learning experiences.”

.....a Grant Administrator from Sumner-Eddyville-Miller Schools



#### The results found that:

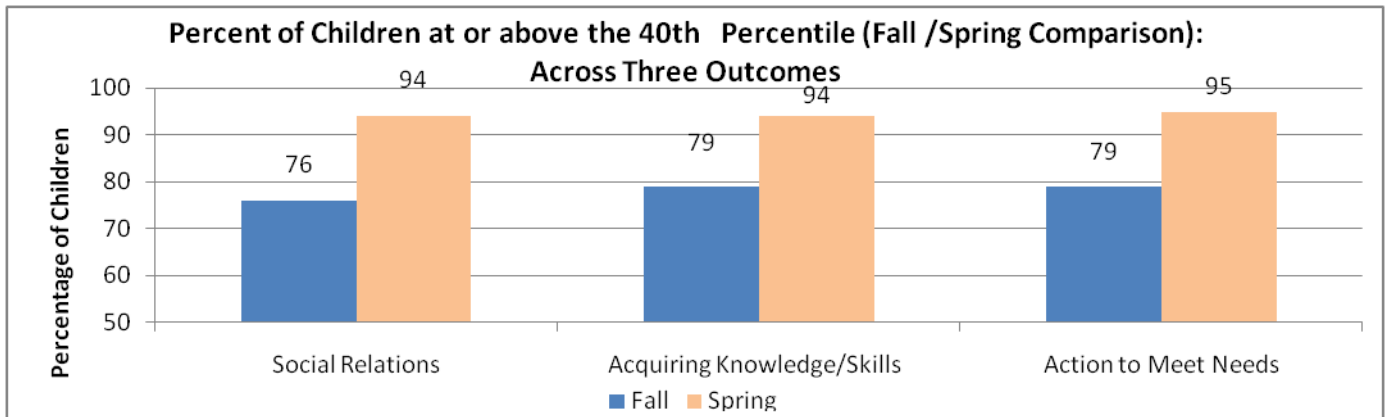
- children made the most gains in the area of fine motor and cognitive development, areas in which children scored lowest in the fall.
- by spring the highest level of achievement was in the areas of fine motor (95.42%) and social/communication (95.66%) skills and lowest achievement was in cognitive (84.45%) and social (87.25%) skills.

### Evaluation of Functional Outcomes

Analysis of the data for Results Matter is based on three functional outcomes: 1) children have “positive social relationships”, 2) children “acquire and use knowledge and skills” including early language/communication, and 3) “children take actions to meet their needs”. Data was based on the results from CCDC assessment. (CCDC was the only online system who could provide this type of data analysis). Data was analyzed in three ways:

- percentage of children at the 40th percentile or higher;
- percentage that stay at the same percentile ranking (which is considered typical progress); and
- 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 across outcome areas.



**A Summary of the Percentage of Children who Made Greater or Lesser than Expected Gains:  
Measured by Change in Percentile Ranking**

Degree of Percentile Ranking Change	Outcome 1 Social Relationships	Outcome 2 Acquiring Knowledge and Skills	Outcome 3 Action to Meet Needs
+3 or more	5%	5%	3%
+2	5%	4%	5%
+1	13%	9%	11%
0	76%	81%	80%
-1	1%	1%	1%
-2	0%	0%	0%
-3 or less	0%	0%	0%

**The results found:**

- By spring, at least 94% of the children were scoring within the average range or above across all outcome areas.
- Nineteen (19%) percent of the children made more than expected change over time.
- At least 76% of the children maintained their percentile ranking, which suggested that they made adequate developmental gains to maintain the same level.

**A Snapshot of the Short-Term Child Outcome Findings**

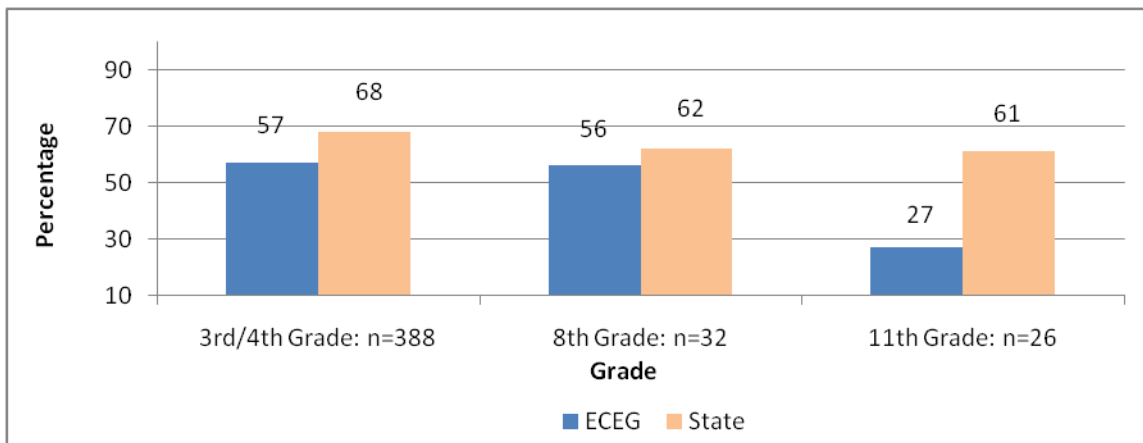
***The program made a difference for children***

- preschool age children made significant gains in all areas of learning and development
- preschool age children made the highest gains in the area of math/cognitive development
- children who were ELL scored lower than their English speaking peers and generally made slightly lower gains
- although males made greater gains than females, in the spring their overall scores were lower than the females across all area
- by spring, at least 94% of the children were scoring at or above average in all functional outcomes

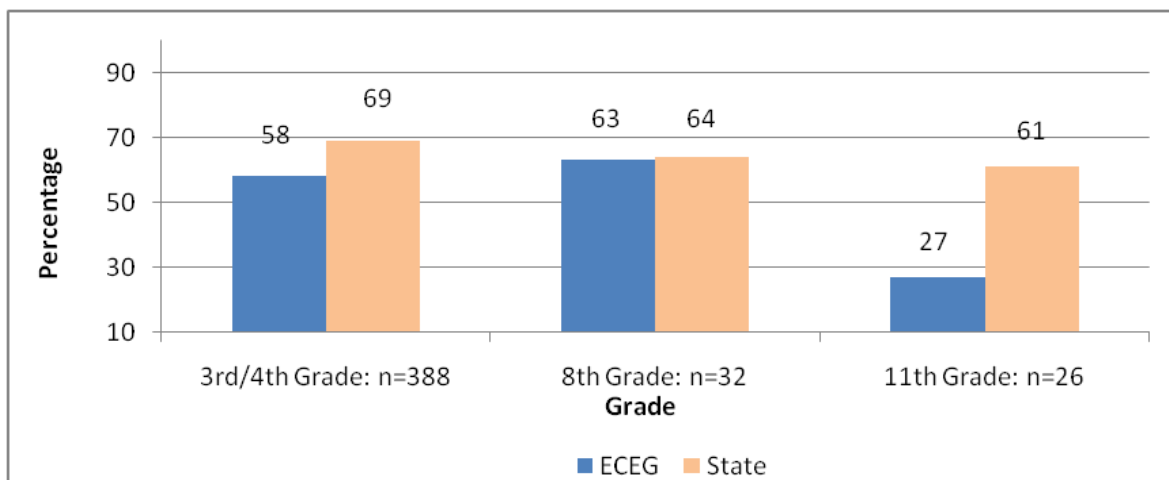
## Students Success in School: A Comparative Analysis

*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 students 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 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students were aggregated from 17 programs. Of the 446 students included in this sample, 17% were students with identified disabilities. The results are summarized in the following figures.

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



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

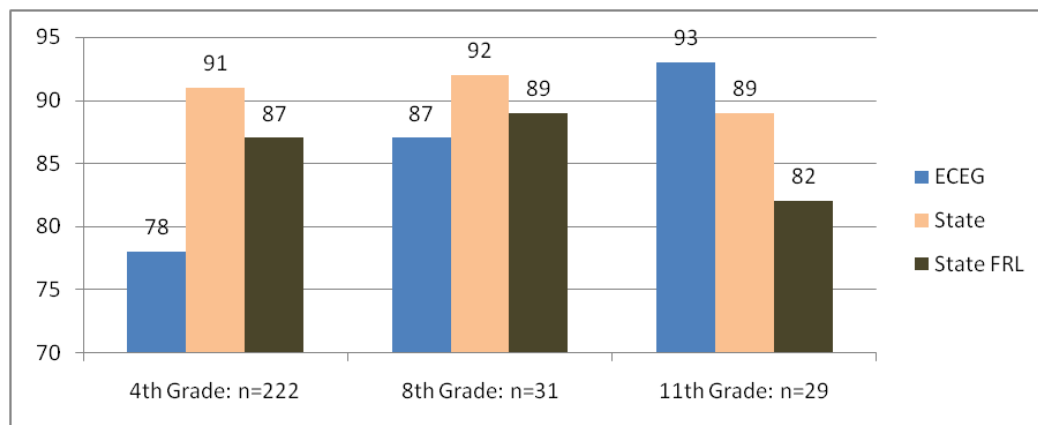


The standardized achievement results indicated:

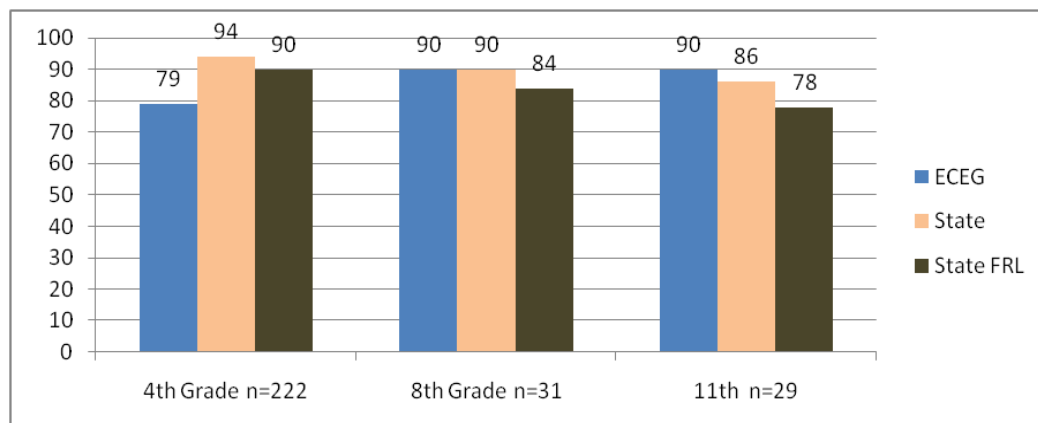
- The majority of students from an ECE grant program scored above the national average (the 50th percentile or greater) on achievement tests in both 4th and 8th grade.
- Students from ECE grant programs in 11th grade had the lowest percentage reaching the national average on both reading and math.
- The ECE grant program had fewer students scoring above the national average than Nebraska students as a whole in both reading and math.
- Students from ECE grant programs at 8th grade were comparable to their peers in math.

*Nebraska Student-Based, Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) Outcomes.* Fourteen (14) programs provided STARS outcome data for 282 students who had participated in an ECE grant program. Twenty percent (20%) of the students were identified as receiving special education services.

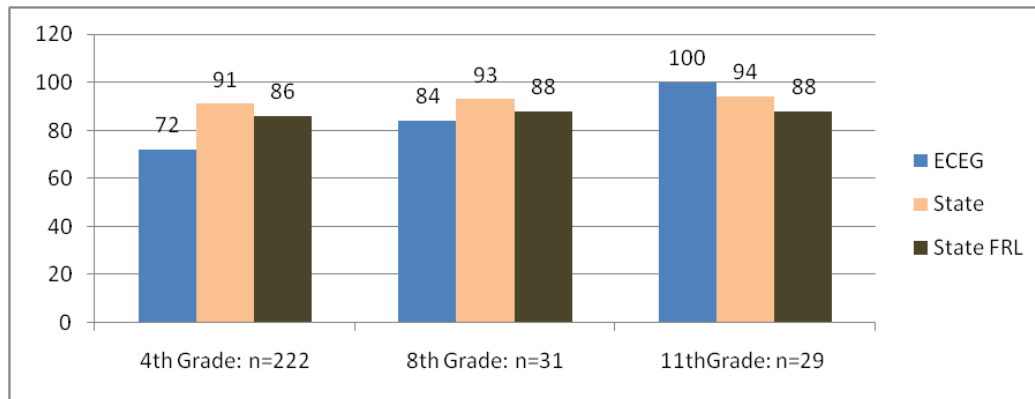
**Summary of Percentage of Students that Met or Exceeded Standards in *Reading*:**  
**A Comparison of Students from ECE Grant Programs with NE Students**



**Students that Met or Exceeded Standards in *Math*:**  
**A Comparison of Students from ECE Grant Programs with NE Students**



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



**The STARS results indicated:**

- the most discrepancy between students from ECE grant programs and the general population were in the area of reading for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, there was a greater discrepancy between students from ECE grant programs and the two other groups of children, with a lower percentage of students from ECE grant programs meeting the standards.
- in math, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students' scores were equivalent to all students and higher than students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL).
- students from ECE grant programs in 11<sup>th</sup> grade achieved higher scores across all areas than the comparison groups of students.

These results suggest that students who participated in an ECE program were doing better in math than in reading and were performing better in later grades than in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. In most areas, students from ECE grant programs underperformed their peers.



## Successfully Engaging Families

Research has shown that family involvement can result in positive results for young children in their school readiness (Redding, Langdon, Meyer and Sheley, 2004). The Early Childhood Outcome Family Survey (Early Childhood Outcome Center, 2007) was administered to assess the impact of the program on the families served. A total of eight (8) programs volunteered to participate in the pilot including school districts in two (2) urban and seven (6) rural communities. A total of 360 families participated in the survey. Families whose primary language was Spanish rated all areas lower than any of the other groups of parents. Overall the family outcomes were rated positively. Below is a sample of some of the questions and answers from the survey.

**“Our parents love spending time together and getting to know each other better. The bonds they build here help set a good example for their children in the future”**

**.... A Teacher from ESU #9.**

### **Families understand their child's strengths, abilities and special needs.**

*Your child is growing and learning. How much does your family understand about your child's development?*

- **85% of the families understood a good amount about their child's development.**

### **Families help their children develop and learn.**

*Families work with professionals to help their children learn and practice new skills at home or in their communities. How often does your family help your child learn and practice these new skills?*

- **82.4% of the families usually helped their child learn and practice these skills.**

### **Preschool program supports their child.**

*To what extent has your child's preschool program encouraged your family to be actively involved in your child's education level?*

- **90.5% of the families reported their child's preschool program has done a good job of encouraging us to be actively involved in our child's education**

*To what extent has your child's preschool program included your family as a full partner in making decisions about your child's education?*

- **86.8% of the families reported their child's preschool program has done a good job of including us as full partners in making decision about our child's education.**

## Evaluation Findings at a Glance

In 2007-2008, the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program served a total of 2,299 young children and their families in 52 funded school districts or ESU programs. This reflected an increase of 681 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 were provided through the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program. This was reflected in good to excellent average ratings across programs on the program evaluation measures, 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, with many children making greater than expected progress. Positive long-term academic outcomes were demonstrated. Most ECE grant children were in the 50<sup>th</sup> 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, 4th grade ECE grant children were below the state percentages for the total population or the students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL). In math, children who were served in the ECE grant program scored above both comparison groups of children in 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades.

Preliminary findings from the family outcome survey indicated that families had very high ratings. Parents rated their outcomes highest in understanding their child's strengths and helping their child learn. They also rated the quality of their programs high. Families whose primary language was Spanish rated all areas lower than any other groups of parents.

The results of this evaluation clearly indicated that Nebraska's investment in ECE grant programs yielded positive outcomes for the young children served. Immediate short-term outcomes were realized as reflected in documented substantial learning and developmental gains. Longitudinal data suggested continued positive long-term outcomes as the children served in these programs experienced academic success, yet many continued to underperform their peers. The evidence demonstrated that despite documented success during the preschool years, children who had participated in the ECE grant program did not achieve at the same rate as peers, indicating that the ECE Grant Program was a successful step, but not the only step necessary for Nebraska to take to ensure all children met their potential.





The full report can be found at: [www.nde.state.ne.us/ECH/ECGrantProg.htm](http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ECH/ECGrantProg.htm)



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