



WILDER RESEARCH, CHILD TRENDS, SRI INTERNATIONAL,
AND CENTER FOR EARLY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT,
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA.

Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program: Uses and Benefits of Scholarship Funds

What is the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program model?

The model has three major interventions:

- Parent Mentoring through home visiting to provide parents with information and resources
- Scholarships for low-income, 3- to 4-year-old children to attend high-quality ECE programs
- ECE program quality rating system (called Parent Aware) to rate and monitor ECE program quality



Eligible families in the Thomas-Dale and North End (and beginning in Fall 2009, Payne-Phalen) neighborhoods apply for scholarships to use for their children to attend ECE programs rated as high quality by Parent Aware. Parents may use the scholarship funds at any full- or part-day high-quality ECE program. ECE programs must have received either a three- or four-star rating in the Parent Aware quality rating system. Head Start, accredited child care programs, and school-based pre-k programs received an automatic four-star rating based on meeting high-quality performance standards.

What is contained in this fact sheet?

This fact sheet summarizes responses to a program survey about how scholarship funds impacted participating programs. Survey questions included the following:

- Did the program serve more children because the scholarship funds were available and/or did the program serve more children who were at risk (i.e., children with special needs, children from low-income families, or children from new immigrant groups)?
- Did programs use the scholarship funds to improve the quality of programming provided?
- How did programs perceive the payment amounts and process of payments compared to CCAP and private payments?



Who responded to the survey?

Program directors and administrators completed a short survey by e-mail, by fax, by phone, or in person. The survey was distributed to 33 programs (which provide ECE services for scholarship children at 47 sites).¹ Most programs returned the survey (27 programs—82%; 41 sites—87%). The programs that responded to the survey reflected different types of programs that provide ECE and include Head Start (both full day and part day) (7%), for profit center-based programs (26%), nonprofit center-based programs (48%), school-based pre-k programs (4%), and family child care programs (15%).

¹ Head Start programs are included as two programs (full day and part day) and represent 10 sites (2 full day and 8 part day). One center-based program included 7 participating sites. Saint Paul Public Schools represent one currently participating school.

Survey Results

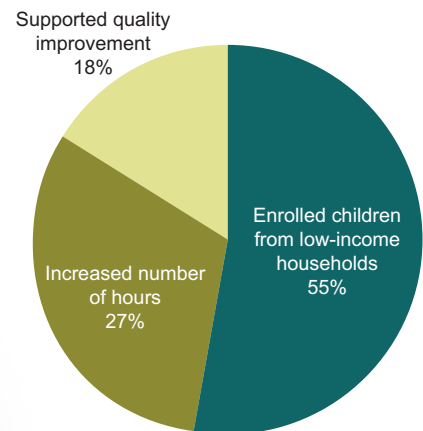
Overall, how did the scholarship funds impact ECE programs?

- 78% of the programs used scholarship funds to enroll children from low-income households.
- 74% of the programs used scholarship funds to support quality improvements.
- 63% of the programs used scholarship funds to serve more children.
- 56% of the programs used scholarship funds to serve children with different demographic characteristics (e.g., children whose families had recently immigrated).
- 48% of the programs used scholarship funds to increase the number of hours children could attend.
- 26% of programs noted in an open-ended comment section of the survey that the scholarship funds supported children being able to stay enrolled in high-quality programs even as family circumstances or income change.

What was the primary way the scholarship funds were used? (Figure 1)

- Half of the programs (55%) used the scholarship funds primarily to enroll children from low-income households.
- One-third of programs (27%) used the funds primarily to increase the number of hours children attended.
- 18% used the funds primarily to support quality improvement efforts.

Figure 1. Primary Uses of the Scholarship Funds by ECE Programs (n = 22)



“The program enabled us to serve immigrant and low-income families who wanted their children in our program but could not afford even the low cost of our early childhood program.”

“We were able to serve children that were not eligible for CCAP, but were eligible for scholarship.”

“Scholarship children are able to attend the program full-time, consistently until they graduate.”

“We have been able to provide quality services to some families that without the scholarship would not have been able to afford to attend our center.”

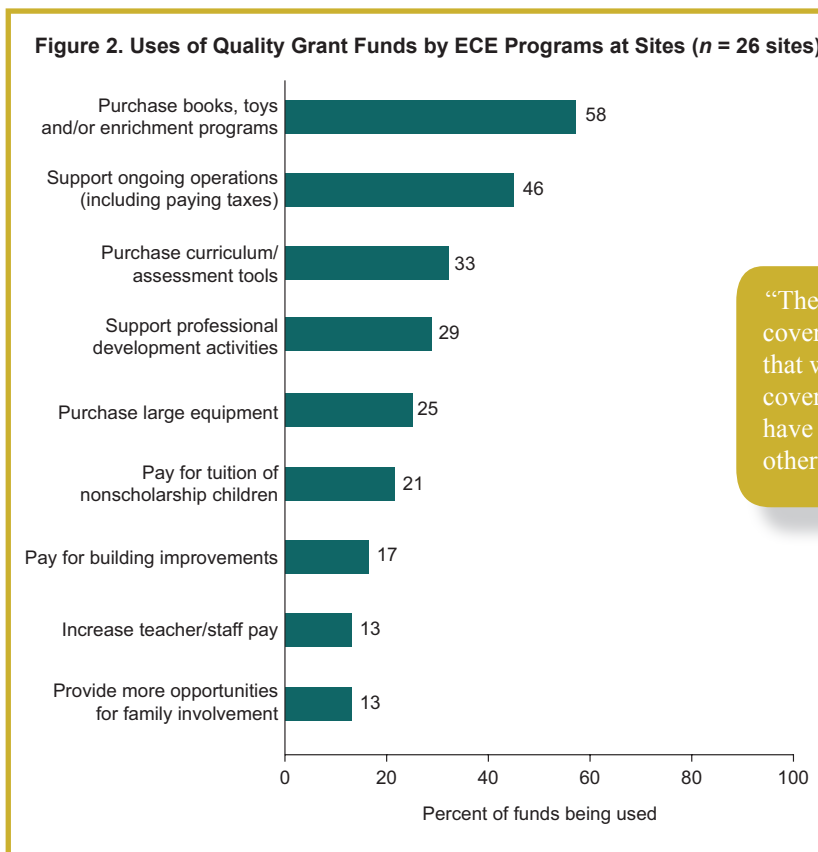
How did programs use quality grant funds?

The scholarship amount is based on the number of hours a child attends an ECE program (minimum of 12 hours up to 35 or more hours per week) and the type of program selected (center-based or licensed family child care) minus CCAP funds paid (as applicable). The annual scholarship amount for a center-based program ranges from about \$5,000 for 12 hours per week for a school-year (36 weeks) to \$13,000 for 35+ hours per week year-round. The annual scholarship amount for a family child care program is \$9,360 for 35+ hours per week.

The scholarship funds are divided into two main parts: tuition payment (equal to the amount private-pay families are charged) and quality grant. The amount of a quality grant fund is the difference between the scholarship amount and the tuition amount. No family co-payment was charged except in a relatively few cases where ECE programs charged tuition that is more than the scholarship amount. Publicly funded programs like Head Start and Saint Paul Public Schools did not receive quality grant funds, as tuition payments equaled the scholarship amount.² Thus, 26 of the 41 sites (62%) reported receiving quality grants during fiscal year 2009–10 (Figure 2).³



- Over half of the 26 sites (58%) used quality grant funds to purchase books and toys or provide enrichment activities (e.g., tutoring) to improve the learning environment.
- Another common use for quality grant funds was to support ongoing operations, including staff salaries, supplies, and taxes. Almost half of these sites (46%) used quality grant funds in this way.
- One-third of the sites (33%) used the funds to purchase curriculum and assessment tools.
- About one-fifth of the sites (21%) used quality grant funds to cover the tuition for nonscholarship children.



“The funds allowed us to cover quality improvements that would not have been covered by tuition and would have been fundraised through other sources.”

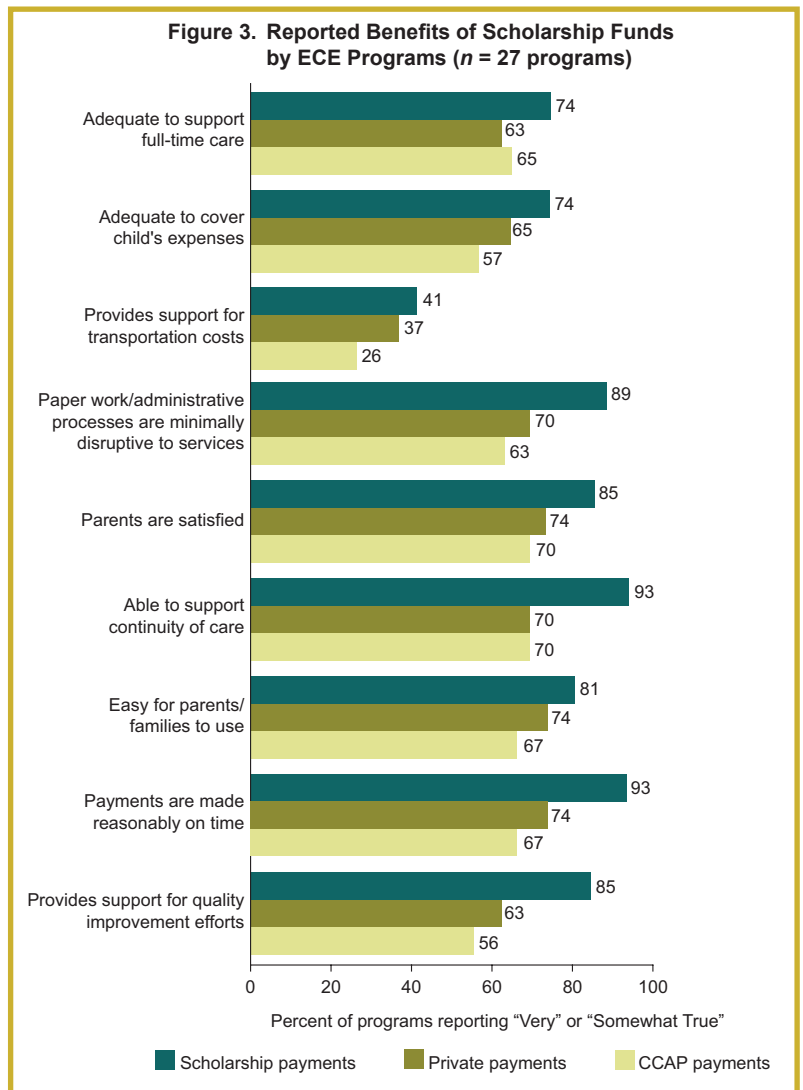
² Head Start used scholarship funds to support full day, year-round services and programming for children attending their full day sites. Head Start also used scholarship funds to provide a summer school program for children attending their part day sites. Saint Paul Public Schools used scholarship funds to support professional development efforts (e.g., early childhood coach to support teachers in implementing developmentally appropriate curricula).

³ One program had not spent the quality grant funds yet.

How did programs perceive the benefits of the scholarship payment process?

Programs provided ratings that show perceptions of the relative benefits of scholarships, private payments, and CCAP payments as funding methods (Figure 3).

- All programs view the scholarship payment method more favorably than CCAP.
 - Almost all programs (89%) viewed the scholarship payment method as minimally disruptive to services compared to only 70% for private payments and 63% CCAP payments.
 - The scholarship payment method was also seen as a better way to support continuity of care (i.e., allow children to stay enrolled in high-quality programs even as family circumstances or income change).
 - The CCAP payment method was viewed by programs as a challenging system for both their families and for program administrators to navigate. It was less likely to support full-time care (65%) compared to scholarship (74%); and it was the least likely to cover child’s expenses (57%) compared to scholarship (74%) and private payments (65%).
 - Respondents also were less likely to report that payments were made on-time for CCAP (67%) compared to scholarship (93%) and private payments (74%).
- Only a small percentage of programs (11%) reported that the scholarship payment amount was not enough to cover the costs for the children who had scholarships.



ECE programs reported few challenges in participation of the Scholarship Program. However, there were challenges related to the annual Parent Aware re-rating process, the limited amount of scholarship funds for a limited period of time (i.e., eligible families can no longer participate), and initial communication of program eligibility, especially around eligibility for CCAP, scholarship, and Pre-K Allowances, and Parent Aware, that were ultimately resolved.

“It has enriched my program and the changes in my care have been tremendous. Thank you!”

CONTACT INFORMATION



SRI International
 Donna Spiker, Ph.D.
 Program Manager
 donna.spiker@sri.com
 Tel: 650.859.6184 ♦ Fax: 650.859.2861

Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF)
 Duane Benson
 Executive Director
 benson@melf.us
 Tel: 651.287.9005 x1 ♦ Fax: 612.355.2235