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# Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program Evaluation

## Summary of Year 4 Final Report (2008–2011)

This fact sheet summarizes the final report about the evaluation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program. The summary includes what was learned about the program's effects on children, families, early care and education (ECE) programs, and the targeted communities in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

### 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 used scholarships for their children to attend ECE programs rated as high-quality by Parent Aware.

### Who enrolled in the Scholarship Program?

- Approximately 650 children participated in parent mentoring and/or received scholarships.
  - 449 children were eligible to use their scholarship funds between 2008 and 2011, and 348 of them enrolled in an ECE program using their scholarship funds.
  - The evaluation included 257 of the 449 children who attended 2 years of a high-quality ECE program, entered kindergarten in 2010 or 2011, and had consent to participate in the evaluation.

### What were the child and family characteristics of scholarship participants in the outcome evaluation?

- Many children were English language learners. A little over half of the families had a primary home language of English (56%), with Karen (13%) and Hmong (9%) being the next most common home languages.
- The children who participated in the Scholarship Program were an ethnically diverse group. On the application forms, 21% of parents identified their children as African-American, and 18% of parents identified their children as Asian.
- About three-fourths of the families (72%) had household incomes below 100% of Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG); the incomes of the remainder were between 100 and 185% FPG.
- About half of the families (48%) received financial assistance from Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), and almost one-fifth (17%) received assistance from Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) at the time the application form was completed.

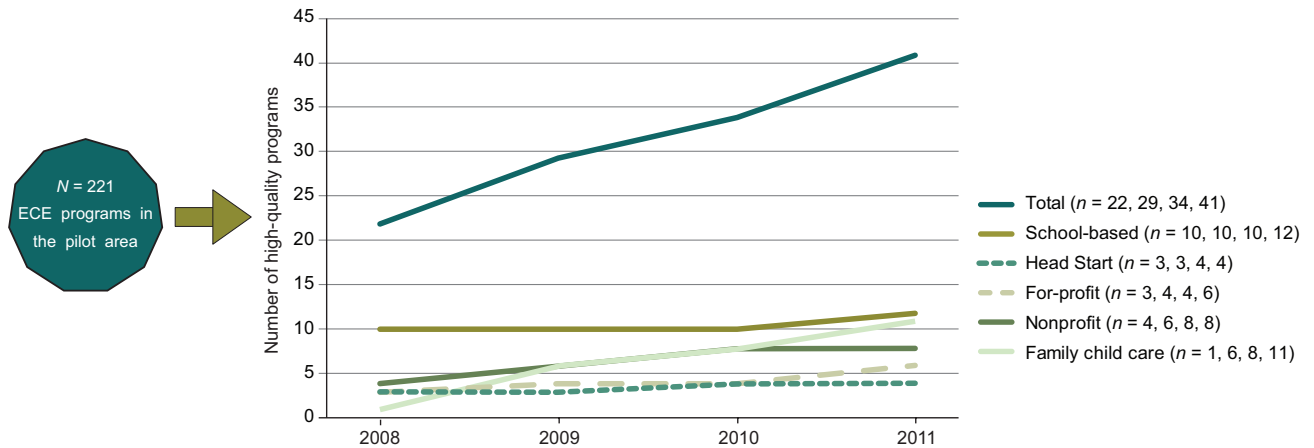




## How did ECE program supply and quality change from 2008 to 2011?

- At baseline in 2008, 221 programs were licensed to provide care in and near the pilot areas, the only indicator of quality available prior to the Parent Aware Rating system. This number was a proxy for available programs that were eligible to participate in Parent Aware and could subsequently enroll children with scholarship funds if the program met high quality standards by Parent Aware.
  - Approximately 10% to 20% of possible ECE programs ( $N = 221$ ) in and near the pilot areas participated in Parent Aware.
  - The number of high-quality ECE programs in and near the pilot area increased more than 86%, from 22 programs to 41 (Figure 1).

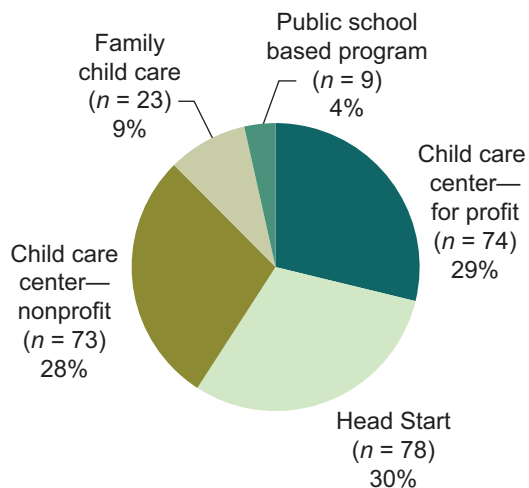
Figure 1. Changes in Number of High-Quality ECE Programs in the Pilot Area, from 2008 to 2011



## What ECE programs did children attend?

- Using the scholarships, all children attended high-quality ECE programs in or near the pilot area (Figure 2).
- The most common reason for selecting an ECE program reported by parents was quality (34%). Parents stated that the quality of the program was more important to them than either location or cost of the program.

Figure 2. ECE Programs in Which Participating Children Used Scholarship Funds ( $N = 257$ )

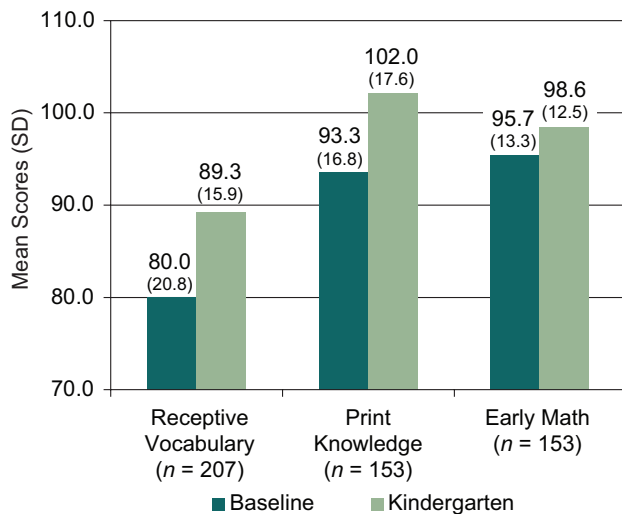


## What were the school readiness child outcomes of scholarship children at kindergarten entry?

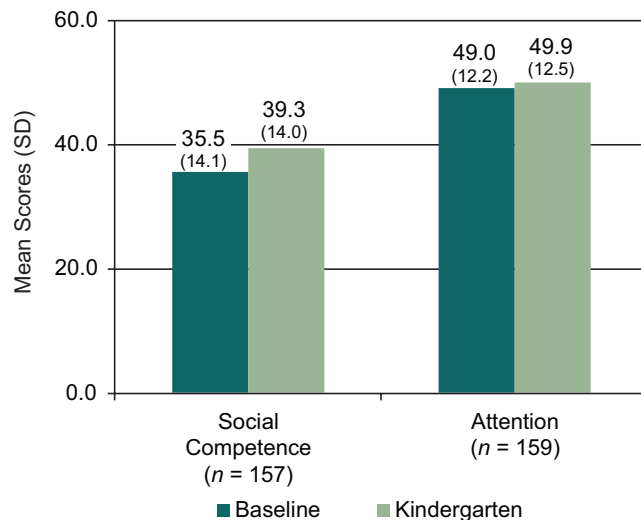
- Children who participated in the Scholarship Program showed significant improvements in many important school readiness skills, including early literacy and math skills. After two years of participation in a high-quality ECE program (Figure 3):
  - On the measure of receptive vocabulary, children’s scores increased significantly by 9 points ( $p < .0001$ ). Statisticians consider this to be a significant and large effect size (.59).
  - On the measure of print knowledge, children’s scores increased significantly by 9 points ( $p < .0001$ ). Statisticians consider this to be a significant and large effect size (.49).
  - On the measure of early math, children’s scores increased significantly by 3 points ( $p < .04$ ). Statisticians consider this to be a significant and small effect size (.23).
- Children also showed significant improvements in social skills and attention (Figure 4):
  - On the measure of social competence, children’s scores increased significantly by 4 points ( $p < .02$ ). Statisticians consider this to be a significant and small effect size (.27).
  - On the measure of attention, children’s scores increased significantly by 1 point ( $p < .04$ ). Statisticians consider this to be a significant and very small effect size (.07).
- Children in the Scholarship Program had behavior problems such as aggression or anxiety at rates similar to rates in the general population of young children.



**Figure 3. Change in Early Literacy and Math Skills of Participating Scholarship Children**



**Figure 4. Change in Social Skills and Attention of Participating Scholarship Children**



- Analyses comparing the scholarship children with a comparison group of entering kindergarten children on the same school readiness outcomes showed more similarities than differences between the two groups.
  - For 7 of the 9 child outcome measures, the average scores for comparison and scholarship group children were similar.
  - For the measures of social competence and anxiety, scholarship children had significantly better outcomes compared with children in the comparison group (both  $p < .0001$ ).

### What parents said about the Scholarship Program...

“These kinds of Scholarship Programs are a godsend.”

“I am so grateful for the opportunity. I wish everyone could use it.”

“When she starts kindergarten she will be so ready. I couldn’t have asked for a better program.”

“It helped me so I could go to work and not worry that my child is at someone’s house and I don’t know what she’s doing.”

## How did the Scholarship Program impact parents and families?

- Parents described the Scholarship Program as simple to use: simple to apply for; having broader eligibility criteria; requiring less ongoing paperwork to maintain their child's eligibility status; and, as a result, providing more consistent and stable care for their child.
- Parents reported that the Scholarship Program allowed them to enroll their children in higher-quality early care and education (ECE) programs than they could have afforded otherwise.
- Parents had strong positive impressions of the quality of the ECE program their children attended, almost universally mentioning four features: early learning environments that promote school readiness; caring and compassionate staff; strong parent involvement activities; and other factors such as location, hours of operation, and extra services (e.g., dental services, speech therapy).
- Parents described many benefits of participation in the program for their children, including exposure to school readiness skills such as reading, writing, counting, identifying colors and shapes, and learning manners and how to follow rules, as well as how to interact with other adults and children and how to behave in social situations.
- Parents universally expressed gratitude for the Scholarship Program and had strong support for continuing the Scholarship Program for other families.

## Implications of implementation findings

Data from the evaluation suggest that:

- The scholarship model was implemented successfully in the pilot community and that the model could be replicated in other communities.
- The Scholarship Program was well received in the pilot community and program participants (e.g., funders, administrators, ECE program directors, parent mentors, and parents) had positive experiences and outcomes. Such support bodes well for the scholarship model if replications are implemented.
- The scholarship model worked well across a variety of ECE program types (e.g., for-profit and not-for-profit community-based ECE programs, Head Start and school-based ECE programs, family child care programs). However, future replications should consider more explicitly how the market-driven scholarship model can be best used by nontuition programs such as Head Start and school-based programs and how strategies to increase participation of family-based programs can be better implemented.

## Summary of child outcome findings

- The Scholarship Program was successful in increasing the school readiness of the participating children from low-income families.
- Participating children's developmental trajectories on important language, early literacy, early math, and social and behavioral skills improved significantly from age 3 to kindergarten entry.
- The kindergarten outcomes data showed that the scholarship children's development and skills were at or near age level, giving them the boost from ECE program participation that will help them to be successful in school.
- The positive child outcomes at kindergarten entry for the scholarship children found in the evaluation adds to the considerable data showing that attending a high-quality ECE program can promote young children's school readiness outcomes, particularly for children from low income families. These are important gains in early childhood that are predictive of later school achievement.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.melf.us> and <http://policyweb.sri.com/cehs/>



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