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Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program

Summary of Issue Brief 3: *Summary of Implementation*

This fact sheet includes the summary of implementation and lessons learned described by the implementation team at the end of enrollment of all eligible children in high-quality ECE programs in December 2009. The summary describes lessons learned about implementation, particularly successful implementation, and challenges along the way. The findings are based on a focus group conducted with the implementation team in early February 2010.



What is the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program model?

The model includes three major interventions.

- **Parent mentoring**, in which home visiting provides parents with information about the characteristics and benefits of high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs.
 - Mentoring leads to parent empowerment—low-income parents are given information that can help them make good choices about how best to support their children's early learning and school readiness.
- **Scholarships** for low-income families to use to pay for high-quality ECE programs for their preschool children.
 - Scholarships lead to access to markets—low-income families are given the financial resources that will allow them to access high-quality ECE programs for their children. If incentives to programs are increased, the market will respond (i.e., with increases in program supply and quality).
- Implementation of an ECE **program quality rating system** (called Parent Aware) to rate and monitor ECE program quality.
 - A rating system leads to increased accountability—ECE programs are accountable to produce positive results (e.g., preparing children to be successful in school because they have attended high-quality ECE programs).

Eligible families and children in the Thomas-Dale, North End, and, beginning in fall 2009, the Payne-Phalen neighborhoods in Saint Paul, Minnesota, applied to receive scholarships for their children to use to attend high-quality ECE programs, rated as high quality by Parent Aware.

How many children and their families were served at the end of enrollment into the Scholarship Program?

- As of December 2009, over 650 children and their families participated in the Scholarship Program by receiving parent mentoring and/or a scholarship to attend a high-quality ECE program.
- Between January 2008 and December 2009, a total of 344 children had enrolled in a high-quality ECE program with 256 of the 344 participating in the evaluation.
 - One-third (30%) used their scholarship funds to attend a Head Start program, and over half (58%) used their scholarship funds to attend a center-based ECE program. A small percentage of children (8%) used their scholarship funds at a licensed family child care program, and 3% of the children attended a public school-based program.
 - About three-fourths (77%) of the children used their scholarship funds to attend an ECE program full-time.

How many ECE programs participated in the Scholarship Program by enrolling children with scholarships?

- By the end of enrollment (December 2009), 256 children in cohorts 2 and 3 had enrolled in 47 programs that were rated as high quality by Parent Aware.





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What did the focus group members say were lessons learned about implementation?¹

- The team identified four lessons learned overall about implementation.
 - Obtain adequate funding prior to implementation.
 - Be clear from the beginning of implementation what kinds of outreach, enrollment, and ECE program selection procedures and activities are consistent with the market-driven model.
 - Provide a sufficient period of time for a planning phase to establish policies and procedures, and communicate the goals, vision, policies, and procedures of the model.
 - Consider establishing the quality rating system for the ECE programs prior to implementing scholarship fund awards to allow time for the rating system to become well-implemented prior to the award of scholarships.
- The implementation team felt outreach to and participation of children and their families was successful. Outreach involved reaching out to the targeted families and their children, connecting them to needed services, and assisting them in navigating the ECE system to increase access to high-quality ECE programs for their children. In particular, effective outreach includes the following:
 - Adopt policies that leverage existing resources and accommodate different outreach needs (e.g., translating the materials, finding trusted individuals in the community who can help recruit families).
 - Consider using resource and referral staff to assist families in selecting ECE programs and use parent mentors to provide family support services.
- The focus group felt that outreach to and participation of ECE programs went well because families were able to select high-quality programs for their children. Key lessons learned included:
 - Consider using resource and referral staff to assist families in selecting ECE programs and use parent mentors to provide family support services.
 - Consider how the market-driven scholarship model will be implemented by ECE programs in which parents do not pay fees.
 - Develop clear policies and procedures to accommodate families who want to use multiple programs for their child's care and education.
- The team also described the important role parent mentors had in the lives of the children and families participating in the scholarship program.



What are the next steps?

- Child outcome data for participating children are being collected annually, with kindergarten outcomes collected in fall 2010 and 2011.
- The evaluation includes a cost study, the results of which will be available in January 2011 and on the MELF website. The cost study includes the following:
 1. Findings from a subset of ECE programs with scholarship children on the per-child costs and the sources and amounts of funds used to pay for child's care and education.
 2. Findings from a survey of all ECE programs with scholarship children in attendance during the 2009–10 fiscal year about how the scholarship funds were used to improve access, quality, and services.



¹ SRI staff conducted a focus group with 10 individuals who had significant roles in the development and implementation of the Scholarship Program. However, the focus group was missing representation from individuals who worked on the parent mentoring component.

