

SRI International



Evaluation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program

**Issue Brief 4—Findings from Focus Groups with Participating Parents
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Contents

Overview.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Evaluation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program Model: Overview	2
Evaluation Questions Addressed by Parent Focus Groups	4
Sample and Methods.....	5
Methods and Participants	5
Data Analysis	6
Findings	7
Conclusions	14
Appendix: Parent Focus Group Protocol	15

Overview

The evaluation of the pilot of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program includes both process and outcome components. This report is the fourth issue brief and it describes a subset of participating parents' perceptions of the Scholarship Program in the final year of the evaluation.

The brief begins with an overview of the scholarship model and the evaluation questions, and then contains findings from four focus groups with parents of children who have enrolled in the scholarship program for an average of two years.

The information from the focus groups helps to answer the following questions:

- How does the Scholarship Program empower parents?
- Because of the Scholarship Program, are parents able to make more informed decisions about the quality of early care and education for their children?



The scholarship model included three major interventions:

- Parent mentoring
- Scholarships
- ECE program quality rating system

Introduction

The evaluation of the pilot of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program includes both process and outcome components. This is the fourth and final issue brief and focuses on participating parents' perceptions of the Scholarship Program at the end of their children's participation in a high-quality early care and education (ECE) program.

The purpose of the brief is to describe how the scholarship model is being implemented and what has been learned thus far about its effects on children and families and the targeted community (districts 6 and 7 in Saint Paul, Minnesota). The first section describes the scholarship model to give context for understanding the focus group findings.

Information is presented from four focus groups with parents of children who have enrolled in the Scholarship Program about their experiences with the program so far (conducted in June and early August 2011).

Evaluation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program Model: Overview

The purpose of the evaluation is to test the effectiveness of a market-oriented early childhood scholarship model outlined by Rolnick and Grunewald.¹ This model, which views early childhood education as a wise investment in economic development terms, builds on the ever-growing early childhood research literature demonstrating the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality ECE programs, particularly for children from low-income families (who often lack access to high-quality ECE programs). The model developers have articulated key features of the model including the following:

- The model rests on the assumption that in a market-driven system, people behave in their best interests (i.e., parents are invested in the best interests of their children; the child care workforce and ECE program administrators want to make a living).
- In developing the scholarship model, the developers kept in mind three principles which guided the program and implementation:
 - **Provision of financial resources to families.** It is essential that parents from low-income families be 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.
 - **Increased accountability.** It is essential that ECE programs be held accountable to produce positive results (e.g., get children ready to be successful in school); programs that produce positive results will be

¹ Rolnick, A., & Grunewald, R. (2003, December). Early childhood development: Economic development with a high public return. Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, *The Region (Supplement)*, 17(4), 6-12.

Grunewald R., & Rolnick, A. (2006). *A proposal for achieving high returns on early childhood development*. Minneapolis, MN: Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Available at http://www.minneapolisfed.org/pubs/cd/07_4/melf.cfm.

eligible to receive higher payments, in the form of scholarships, for the children they serve, thus incentivizing ongoing performance. If programs are provided with incentives to produce positive results, they will respond to produce positive results.

- **Parent empowerment.** It is essential that low-income parents be given information that can help them make good choices about how best to support their children's early learning and school readiness. If parents are given the information about the characteristics and benefits of high-quality ECE programs for their children's learning and school readiness and the monetary resources needed to access these programs, the empowerment will create demand, which in turn will promote long-term sustainability of the supply of high-quality ECE programs.

The scholarship model included three major interventions.

- **Parent mentoring**, which uses home visiting to provide 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., get children ready to be successful in school because they have attended high-quality ECE programs).

Eligible families and children in the Thomas-Dale and North End (and beginning in fall 2009, 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.²

² More detailed information about the scholarship model, including its logic model, and the Parent Aware evaluation can be found in earlier reports available on the MELF website: www.melf.us

Evaluation Questions Addressed by Parent Focus Groups

The information from the parent focus groups helps to answer questions about how the scholarship model and its components are working from the perspective of participating parents.

- How does the Scholarship Program empower parents?
- Because of the Scholarship Program, are parents able to make more informed decisions about quality of early care and education for their children?
- What can we learn about the implementation and effectiveness of the Scholarship Program from participating parents?
 - How have the three scholarship program interventions been implemented (i.e., parent mentoring, receipt of scholarship funds and attendance in high-quality ECE programs, and program participation in the Parent Aware program rating system)?
 - How are scholarship-eligible families choosing ECE programs for their children? Are parents using Parent Aware³ to inform their decisionmaking in selecting an ECE program for their child?
 - What factors do families identify that facilitate enrollment and participation in the scholarship program?
 - What factors do families identify that serve as barriers to enrollment and participation in the scholarship program?
 - Who participated in the parent mentoring component of the Scholarship Program? How many visits did children and families receive? What activities occurred during the visits and what topics were discussed?
 - What gains occurred in children's development after participating in the Scholarship Program and attending a high-quality ECE program?
 - Do children who participated in the Scholarship Program enter kindergarten better prepared to be successful in school?



³ Some parents may know the name of the rating system as Parent Aware, or may use the Parent Aware website, while other parents may know about the rating or stars associated with ECE programs more generally, but not know that the system is called Parent Aware.

Four focus groups were held with parents

- *Parents of all ethnicities and home language groups were invited to attend*
- *Group size ranged from 3 to 9 parents, with a total of 19 parents representing 18 families*

Sample and Methods

Methods and Participants

Four focus groups were held with parents who were asked to comment about their experiences in learning about and participating in the Scholarship Program (i.e., experiences with their parent mentors and in choosing an ECE program). The purpose of the parent focus groups was to collect qualitative data about parents' perceptions of the Scholarship Program and its perceived impact on children and families to date.

Between June and August 2011, evaluation staff conducted four focus groups with parents who had enrolled their children in the Scholarship Program. All parents who had participated in the Scholarship Program in the past 2 years (Cohort 2 and Cohort 3) were mailed a letter that explained the purpose of the focus groups and invited them to voluntarily participate.

Evaluation staff made logistical arrangements for the focus groups that took place in a local public library. Child care was provided and each participating parent received a \$20 gift certificate as a token of appreciation for their participation. One staff member served as the focus group moderator and a second staff person took notes and did a digital recording. The set of questions used is included in Appendix A.

Each focus group lasted about 1 hour and included a range of parents whose children had used scholarship funds to attend an ECE program. Two focus groups were with parents whose children had participated in the Scholarship Program, attended a high-quality ECE program for an average of 2 years, and had completed their first year of kindergarten in spring 2011 (i.e., Cohort 2 who began their program participation in September 2008 and will be referred to as kindergarten families/children throughout the findings). Two other focus groups were with parents currently using scholarships to attend an ECE program and scheduled to enroll in kindergarten in September 2011 (i.e., Cohort 3 who began their program participation in September 2009 and will be referred to as ECE families/children).

- Parents of all ethnicities and home language groups were invited to attend. However, all final participants were comfortable speaking English and did not require interpreters.
- Group size ranged from 3 to 9 parents, with a total of 19 parents across the four focus groups representing 18 families.
- Participants included 7 parents of children who had completed kindergarten in spring 2011 (kindergarten parents) and 12 parents of children who will be starting kindergarten in fall 2011 (ECE parents).



Data Analysis

SRI staff supplemented the notes taken during the focus group with additional notes taken while listening to the digital recordings at a later date. All available notes were reviewed by two team members to identify themes and issues associated with each question.

Findings

The focus group findings are organized around the questions that parents answered. As noted below, some questions were asked of all parents, others were asked only of parents whose children had recently attended an ECE program, and others were asked only of parents whose children had completed kindergarten.

How did you hear about the Scholarship Program? [ECE parents only]

- Parents learned about the Scholarship Program in several different ways.
 - The most common source of information about the program was a letter from the mayor's office describing the program.
 - Another common source of information was through staff at county offices, including public health and human service departments.
 - Many parents heard about the program from a staff member at their child's preschool program.
 - Many parents mentioned seeing fliers or advertisements for the Scholarship Program at the WIC office.
 - Some parents heard about the program while taking classes through the Saint Paul Public School's Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program.
 - One parent reported that someone came to her door to tell her about the program, and another parent said she received a phone call.



Why did you choose to participate in the Scholarship Program? [All parents]

- For the most part, parents chose to participate in the Scholarship Program because it allowed them to enroll their children in higher quality early care and education (ECE) programs than they could have afforded otherwise.
- Compared to Minnesota's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), parents described the Scholarship Program as simple to apply for, having broader eligibility criteria, requiring less ongoing paperwork to maintain their child's eligibility status, and as a result, provided more consistent and stable care for their child.
- In describing the simplicity of participating in the Scholarship Program, several parents contrasted it with aspects of the CCAP program that were difficult for them. Some examples of what parents said include the following:

- “If you’re looking for work, they [CCAP] cover fully. If you find a job, you get a transition year, but if you have a job and a low wage, there is a 2-year waiting list. How can you wait 2 years for assistance when you have a job?”
- “I hate it [CCAP] because it’s canceled monthly due to paper work. Caseworkers are always changing. The co-pay rocketed from \$40 to \$60. Then they said I made too much money even though my job never changed. It’s really hard because so much is not communicated back from the paperwork. When I got cut off, my kid couldn’t go to school.”
- “I don’t like that you have to turn in daily activity logs of 35 hours per week of activities or they [CCAP] shut you off. With the scholarship, you don’t have to worry about that, you can go peacefully without worry your kid will be cut off.”
- Some parents noted that because the scholarship funds are guaranteed, participation allowed them to pursue educational and employment opportunities they might not have been able to pursue otherwise. For example, parents said the following:
 - “[The scholarship] is really, really helpful. It helps me continue my education, and I don’t have any words to explain how beneficial it was for our family.”
 - “The scholarship was for me, too. I put my daughter in school and I was able to go to school to improve my English too.”
- Parents also reported that participation in the Scholarship Program relieved parental stress related to the financial pressures of paying for child care, paperwork, and concerns about child care quality. For example, parents said the following:
 - “[The Scholarship Program] helped me so I could go to work and not worry that my kids are at someone’s house and I don’t know what she’s doing. I am worry-free now and I can focus on working so that I can pay my bills.”
 - “[A benefit of the Scholarship Program] is peace of mind, not having to worry about stuff... just peace of mind, based on not having to deal with county assistance and CCAP; that’s critical. [I don’t have to] turn in all this paperwork. Nobody is hounding me.”
 - “[The Scholarship Program] is like an angel from heaven to help me. I just got divorced and had no way to send my little princess to day care. That letter somehow jumped on my doorstep and she got in the Program, no worries. I send her to daycare, well, not just to daycare. She is learning. She is ready for school.”

How has the Scholarship Program helped your child?

[All parents]

- All parents described benefits of participation in the program for their children, including exposure to school readiness skills such as reading,

“Our son is the only child at home and he didn’t know other kids his age. He learned a lot in preschool. Also helped him build a personality. He is now ready for kindergarten.”

“My kid developed a lot. I thought he was going to be slow because he was quiet. But now he’s one of the top on the assessments. He knows a lot.”

writing, counting, identifying colors and shapes, and learning manners and how to follow rules, as well how to interact with other adults and children and how to behave in social situations. For example, parents said the following:

- “If my son didn’t get this, he would be behind when he got to kindergarten. But he is very ready now.”
 - “Our child didn’t speak at 2 years old. We didn’t teach him how to speak because we were tired when we came home from work and didn’t pay attention to him. When he got into school, he still did not know any words, not even in our home language. But he then started getting words because friends at the [pre]school communicate and he talks a lot more. Without [the scholarship] he would watch Curious George and not talk.”
 - “Our son is the only child at home and he didn’t know other kids his age. He learned a lot in preschool. Also helped him build a personality. He is now ready for kindergarten.”
 - “My kid developed a lot. I thought he was going to be slow because he was quiet. But now he’s one of the top on the assessments. He knows a lot.”
 - “I can see the benefit when I compare my older and younger daughters. The first one didn’t get a scholarship. She cannot read at the same level as the younger daughter [who did get a scholarship]. My younger daughter learned more things.”
- When asked where their children would be during the day if they did not have the Scholarship Program, most parents said that the child would likely be at home (e.g., “home watching TV”) or with friends or relatives (e.g., “bounced around wherever we could find care”).
 - One parent said, “We are grateful for the opportunity and wish everyone could have a scholarship – so children won’t stay at home and watch soaps with mom all day.”

How did you choose an ECE program for your child?

[ECE parents]

- Nearly all parents described that the process of finding an ECE program was easy.
- Parents relied on a variety of sources of information to make informed choices in selecting an ECE program.
 - Parents described using “star ratings” to make informed choices. Most parents received a printed list of ECE programs with star ratings. Only 3 of 19 parents reported using a website to check the ECE program quality, and only one of the three recognized the site as Parent Aware.
 - Many parents knew which program they wanted their child to attend because the child’s sibling had attended previously, they had recommendations from other parents, or they had heard about the ECE program’s reputation.

- Some parents visited ECE programs before choosing a program for their child.
 - Parents wanted their children to attend high quality programs that offered a “school-like setting” that were staffed by “professionals trained to teach” academic and social skills.
 - Some parents looked for a program with a low staff to child ratio.
 - A few parents described characteristics related to the ECE programs’ philosophy as important in their decisionmaking (e.g., Montessori, Head Start, Christian, or inclusive).
 - Additional factors that parents took into consideration when choosing an ECE program included location, transportation, hours of operation (including the provision of full- or half-day programs) and a sense of safety.
- All of the parents knew that their children attended a high-quality “star-rated” ECE program, and understood that the scholarship program required that the ECE program selected was of high quality.

How is Parent Aware helpful to you?

[All parents]

- Only two parents had heard of Parent Aware, and only one of them had used the website. She said, “It was a great guide. The site did all the research for you, broke it down by stars. It’s less research that we [parents] have to do.”
- After the focus group moderator briefly explained that Parent Aware is the quality rating system website, some parents reported that they had been told to use it, but had not done so, while three others thought they might have used the site or a similar one.

Although name recognition for Parent Aware was low among the focus group participants, many parents provided comments about their child’s program’s star rating and thus were aware of the quality rating system. One said, “The stars were great. They made me sure that a school will make a child ready.”

How does your parent mentor help you?

[ECE parents only]

- About one-third of parents who were asked about parent mentoring reported that they had worked with a parent mentor at least once. Parents who received home visits described the mentoring as beneficial for them and their child.
- Parents described the books and materials that the mentors provided as helping their children learn. One parent said, “[The mentor] came to the house and brought gobs of books, brought copies of the alphabet and colors. We really enjoyed it. My child got introduced to reading. We didn’t have books at home and it’s hard to get to the

library. But with books at home, she can read.”

- One parent appreciated the positive affirmations she received from the mentors that she and her husband were “doing a good job.”

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What do you like/dislike about the ECE program your child attends?

[ECE parents]

...“very different from day care” in that he was “learning to read and will be totally prepared for kindergarten. Day care keeps them safe, meals, and play, that’s it. They are not trained to teach them.”

...“that’s what we want—to hear from the teacher about what we should do at home.”

- When asked to describe what they liked about their child’s ECE program, parents described ECE program features that they either learned about the program before enrolling or observed first-hand once their child began attending the ECE program. These features included the following:
 - **Curriculum and early learning environments.** Many parents said that they liked the ECE program because it was “like school” and was preparing their child for kindergarten (e.g., “wanted him to start to write, learn shapes and colors”). Parents liked both the academic (e.g., counting, writing, colors) and the social (e.g., getting along with others, positive behaviors) skill building; and several parents described the staff: child ratio as being important to them (e.g., “having two or more teachers in the room at the same time”). One parent explained that the preschool her son was attending was “very different from day care” in that he was “learning to read and will be totally prepared for kindergarten. Day care keeps them safe, meals, and play, that’s it. They are not trained to teach them.” One parent of a child with special needs commented that having the “scholarship put her in an inclusive classroom, at the starting line like everyone else, and I can’t believe she will be in mainstream kindergarten.”
 - **Caring, compassionate, and high quality teachers and staff who their children like.** When asked what they like about their child’s ECE program, parents most commonly reported qualities of the program’s staff, describing how their children liked their teachers and were eager to attend school each day. One parent said, “We just love it there. We’re close to the teachers and the director. They really put themselves out there for the children and they make sure they’re involved.” Another parent shared her appreciation for how the ECE program staff helped her child access speech therapy services and how her child was now in an inclusive classroom.
 - **Parent involvement.** Parents appreciated that ECE programs allowed them to visit the program and observe. Parents also appreciated that teachers provided feedback (including daily reports at some programs) about their children and offered suggestions for ways parents can support and be involved in their children’s education at home (e.g., “that’s what we want—to hear from the teacher about what we should do at home.”) One parent liked that her child’s ECE program offered evening and weekend parent education programs on a variety of topics including positive discipline, establishing routines, and promoting child independence.

- **Safety, location, hours of operation, and extra services.** A few parents reported that they like qualities of the ECE structure itself including safety, cleanliness, and availability of sunlight (“e.g., it’s close to home and a safe place”). Other qualities parents reported liking included that the ECE program was close to their home or on their regular commute route, and that it offers hours of care that match their schedules. A parent whose child attended a Head Start program appreciated the additional services provided and specifically liked that her daughter received dental services through the program.
- In general, parents were hesitant to describe any negative aspects of their child’s ECE program. Three parents mentioned that they would like transportation services to be provided. Additionally, each the following features of the ECE programs were identified by one parent as qualities they would like to see changed □ (1) add more services, like Head Start, (2) remove the mandate that children must go outside every day regardless of weather, (3) spend more hours on school readiness skills and less in play, and (4) add additional staff that speak a language other than English.

How did you choose an elementary school for your child?

[K parents only]

- Parents used multiple sources of information to choose an elementary school for their child.
 - Many parents knew the school they wanted their child to attend because the child’s sibling or other family relatives had attended previously.
 - Many parents based their decision on the school’s reputation for having high quality teachers or for having the same teacher for pre-K and kindergarten.
 - A few parents asked for recommendations from other parents.
 - One parent reported that the parent mentor helped her make the choice.
 - Parents also considered other factors in making their decisions including location, the provision of a half-day (or full-day) kindergarten class, size of the school, and the language of instruction.
 - One parent reported, “I closed my eyes and picked.”

What do you like/dislike about the elementary school your child attends?

[K parents only]

- Generally, parents liked the elementary school that their child attended. Qualities of schools specifically noted included that (1) a full range of subjects were taught, (2) a schedule similar to what the child will have in later years was followed, (3) children wear uniforms, and (4) the school had a strong reputation for teaching reading and had high student reading achievement.

- Nearly all parents commented that their child was well-prepared by the Scholarship Program and their child's ECE program to succeed in kindergarten. As a result, parents were able to describe multiple aspects of kindergarten that were easy for their child.
 - One parent said that "The scholarship was a great advantage. When I think of my daughter having no preschool, I think that going into kindergarten would have been difficult. She wouldn't have been ready and would have been behind. But she learned to count to 50, know colors, the alphabet and multiplication. Being in a [preschool] program at an early age was a great advantage."
 - When asked about her daughter's experience in kindergarten, one parent said, "She liked it. She made new friends. She likes her teacher and likes when the teacher teaches." Another parent said, "She is enjoying it. She is learning a lot. Toward the end of the year, she could read and write."
- When asked about other areas of their child's development, parents were more likely to describe social and behavioral aspects of kindergarten that were difficult for their child than they were to identify academic skills. Some children who had difficulties with social-emotional or behavioral issues in preschool or who had other special needs continued to experience those difficulties in kindergarten. But as described above, nearly all parents felt their child was well-prepared for school.
- Parents provided only a few examples of aspects of their child's school that they would like to see improved. For example,
 - One parent wanted more help from the teacher on how to support her child's learning at home.
 - One parent worried about the child losing the manners she learned in preschool because the school was less structured.
 - One parent said that she would prefer that her child attend a school that offers K–12 rather than only K–8.
 - One parent felt that the culture of the teaching staff, and thus the teaching and disciplinary practices used, did not match that of the student and family population. She said, "kids of color are different from suburban white kids. People at the school don't know how to handle their problems."

What else would you like to tell us?

[All parents]

Parents made a number of closing statements that suggested their universal support and gratitude for the Scholarship Program. Parents' comments also indicated that they were aware of the importance of high-quality early education programs in supporting their children's learning and school readiness.

- "[The Scholarship Program] helped my child a lot. I hope they don't end it because it could help other kids. When my daughter starts kindergarten, she will be so ready. I couldn't have asked for a better program."

- “I would recommend the Scholarship Program to anyone.”
- “I think a lot of parents out there really need [a scholarship] and are looking for that kind of help. They don’t want their kids to be home all day watching TV and doing nothing.”
- “I think it’s crazy [the Scholarship Program] got cut. They’re cutting so much school stuff. What happened to No Child Left Behind? Think of how many are getting left behind—like kids with language barriers, kids who can’t move on because they don’t speak English.”

Conclusions

The qualitative data from parent focus groups provide important information about how parents perceive the scholarship model and its effects on their children and families. Overall, the participating parents’ comments show their enthusiastic support for the scholarship program and how easy it was to use, their keen understanding of the value of high-quality ECE programs for their children’s school readiness, and their grateful appreciation of the scholarship funds that allowed their children to attend high-quality ECE programs that might not have been available to them otherwise.

Appendix: Parent Focus Group Protocol

Questions for Cohort 3: ECE Parents

1. Let's start off by introducing ourselves. Please tell us a little bit about you and your family including the child (or children) who are participating in the scholarship program [name/age].
2. How did you hear about the Scholarship Program? [PROBES, IF NECESSARY] Who (agency/person) referred you to the Scholarship Program? Who helped you fill out the application?
3. Why did you choose to be a part of the Scholarship Program?
4. How many people have a parent mentor/home visitor with the Scholarship Program?
- 4a. If yes, tell us about what your parent mentor/home visitor does (did) when she or he comes to your house. What kinds of things does she or he talk to you about? What does she or he do?
 - i. Is your parent mentor someone that worked with your family for awhile or is this person new to your family?
 - ii. What activities and/or services offered by the Parent Mentor are most helpful to you?
 - iii. What information offered by the Parent Mentor is most helpful to you?
 - iv. Are there topics, information, activities, or services that you still need?
 - v. Is there anything else that you would like your visitor/mentor to help you with?
- 4b. For those of you that do not have a parent mentor, why don't you have a parent mentor?
5. Tell me how you chose the program to use the scholarship funds.
- 5a. How long did it take you to find a program to use your scholarship? Was it easy or did it take a long time? Tell me why it took a long time.
- 5b. How long has your child attended this program?
- 5c. What do you like about this program?
- 5d. If you did not have this scholarship for your child, where would your child have been cared for this past year?
- 5e. Are there some things about the program that you think could be improved (made better)? What? [We are talking about this specific program—Wilder or New Horizons]?
6. Do you currently receive government child care subsidies? You might know this as CCAP.

If you used to use a child care subsidy, can you tell us how you used it to pay for your child's care? Why are you no longer using it?

7a. Have you heard of Parent Aware?

IF YES: Is Parent Aware helpful to you? How? Give me some examples.

IF NO: It is a new system in Minnesota that rates the quality of child care and preschool programs and provides information to parents about quality.

Have you heard of it? Is it helpful to you? How? Give me some examples.

If you have other, younger children who attended a child care or preschool program last year, did you use Parent Aware to choose that program?

8. Most early childhood staff mainly speaks English. Has this been a problem for you?

8a. IF YES: What do you think program staff should do about this problem? What ideas do you have?

9. Would you change anything about the Scholarship Program?

10. Is there anything that we have not talked about that you'd like to share with us about the program? [PROBE: IF YOU WERE GOING TO TELL YOUR LEGISLATORS ABOUT THE PROGRAM, WHAT WOULD YOU WANT THEM TO KNOW THAT WE HAVE NOT ALREADY TALKED ABOUT?]

Questions for Cohort 2: Kindergarten Parents

1. Let's start off by introducing ourselves. Please tell us a little bit about you and your family including how many children you have and the name and age of your child (children) who participated in the scholarship program. [GET NAME OF KINDERGARTEN]

First, we want to hear about how you chose your child's school.

2. How did you choose your child's school? How did you learn about the school?

3. What things were really important to you?

4. What did you like about this school?

5. In what areas do you think your child's school can improve, could do better?

We also want to hear about your child's experience in kindergarten this past year. All children have some things that are easy for them and some things that are hard for them.

6. What are some of the things about kindergarten that were easy for your children?

- a. What do you think helped prepare your child for those things?
7. What were some of the things about kindergarten that were harder for your children?
 - a. What could have helped your child be better prepared to do those things in kindergarten?
8. To get an idea overall, in the past year, how would you describe how well your child liked kindergarten?
 - a. What did she or he like? [USE ONE PERSON'S COMMENT TO ASK ABOUT THE REST]
 - b. What didn't she or he like?
9. Thinking back, how do you think the scholarship has helped your child?
10. How do you think the scholarship has helped you and your family?
 - a. Did the scholarship help you do things you couldn't or wouldn't have done without it?
11. For those of you with younger children, did they attend a child care or preschool program in the last year?
 - a. How did you pay for the program? How was that payment process different from having the scholarship?
 - b. Did you use Parent Aware to choose that program?
12. Have you heard of Parent Aware? Have you heard of the star-rating system?
13. Is there anything that we have not talked about that you'd like to share with us about this program? [PROBE: IF YOU WERE GOING TO TELL YOUR LEGISLATORS ABOUT THE PROGRAM, WHAT WOULD YOU WANT THEM TO KNOW THAT WE HAVE NOT ALREADY TALKED ABOUT?]