

SRI International

Evaluation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program

Issue Brief 2: Implementation in Year 2

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WILDER RESEARCH, CHILD TRENDS, SRI INTERNATIONAL,
AND CENTER FOR EARLY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT,
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Overview

The evaluation of the pilot of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program includes both process and outcome components. This is the second issue brief; it covers the time period from July 2008 to June 2009, the second year of implementation.

The purpose of the brief is to describe how the model is being implemented and what is being learned about its effects on children, families, early care and education (ECE) programs, and the targeted community (districts 6 & 7 in Saint Paul, Minnesota) in the second year of the project. The brief begins with an overview of the scholarship model and the major evaluation questions, and then contains three sections of findings based on review of project documents; interactions between the evaluation team and the implementation team over the past year; interviews conducted in the summer of 2009 by SRI staff with the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) developers and funders, implementation team members, staff from agencies and programs who are implementing the scholarship program, members of the state legislature, and four focus groups with parents of children who have enrolled in the scholarship program. The sections of findings describe the following:

- Changes in the scholarship model in Year 2 and a summary of the numbers of participating children.
- The interview respondents' overall perceptions about how implementation has progressed in Year 2, and the goals, outcomes, and accomplishments of the project.
- The interview respondents' perceptions about the successes and challenges of the implementation in Year 2, as well as facilitators and barriers to implementation of the model; and lessons learned about implementation.
- Experience of the program by a subset of parents of children who have enrolled in the scholarship program.

The information in this brief summarizes the findings from the interviews and focus groups after 18 months of implementation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Pilot Program. The information from this process evaluation can be used to identify the following:

- Activities and strategies that have worked well in the past year.
- Changes in activities and strategies that could be improved in implementation in future replications.
- Issues or challenges that need further discussion and consideration for the scholarship model developers in meeting the goals of the pilot project.



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Introduction

The evaluation of the pilot of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program includes both process and outcome components. This is the second evaluation brief; it covers the time period from July 2008 to June 2009.

The purpose of the implementation brief is to describe how the scholarship model is being implemented and what has been learned thus far about its effects on children, families, early care and education (ECE) programs, and the targeted community (districts 6 & 7 in Saint Paul, Minnesota). This report reflects the second year of the Scholarship Program's implementation.

The first section describes the scholarship model to give context for understanding the implementation findings. It also describes changes to the original scholarship program model made in year 2 and the numbers of families and ECE programs participating in the scholarship program. The next section describes findings related to the scholarship model and progress of the implementation in Year 2. The section is based on reviews of documents, ongoing correspondence with the implementation team over the past year, and interviews conducted in the summer of 2009 with the developers and funders, key implementation staff, participating ECE program directors, and legislators. The interviews focused on respondents' perceptions about how the implementation is progressing (successes and challenges), the facilitators and barriers to implementation of the model, and lessons learned.

Finally, in the last section of 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 late May, June and early August 2009). The report ends with a summary section and next steps.

Evaluation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program Model

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

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>.

high-quality ECE programs, particularly for children from low-income families (who often lack access to high-quality ECE programs).

In 2008, the developers (Rolnick and Grunewald) and individuals representing MELF were asked about the impetus for the pilot of the scholarship program and their vision of the scholarship program addressing these early childhood issues. These respondents 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 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.

In short, the model contends that the market must provide incentives to ECE programs to achieve high-quality, programs must be accountable to parents and the public (who fund programs) for achieving positive child outcomes, and parent empowerment is predicted to drive up demand for high-quality ECE programs as well as promote sustainability. Additionally, several of the respondents stated that the model should be more cost effective at a systems level; that is, the market will support those programs that achieve positive results, but those programs that cannot do so, will not be sustained (or at the very least, will not participate in a market-driven approach, i.e., not solicit scholarship funds because they do not meet high-quality standards).

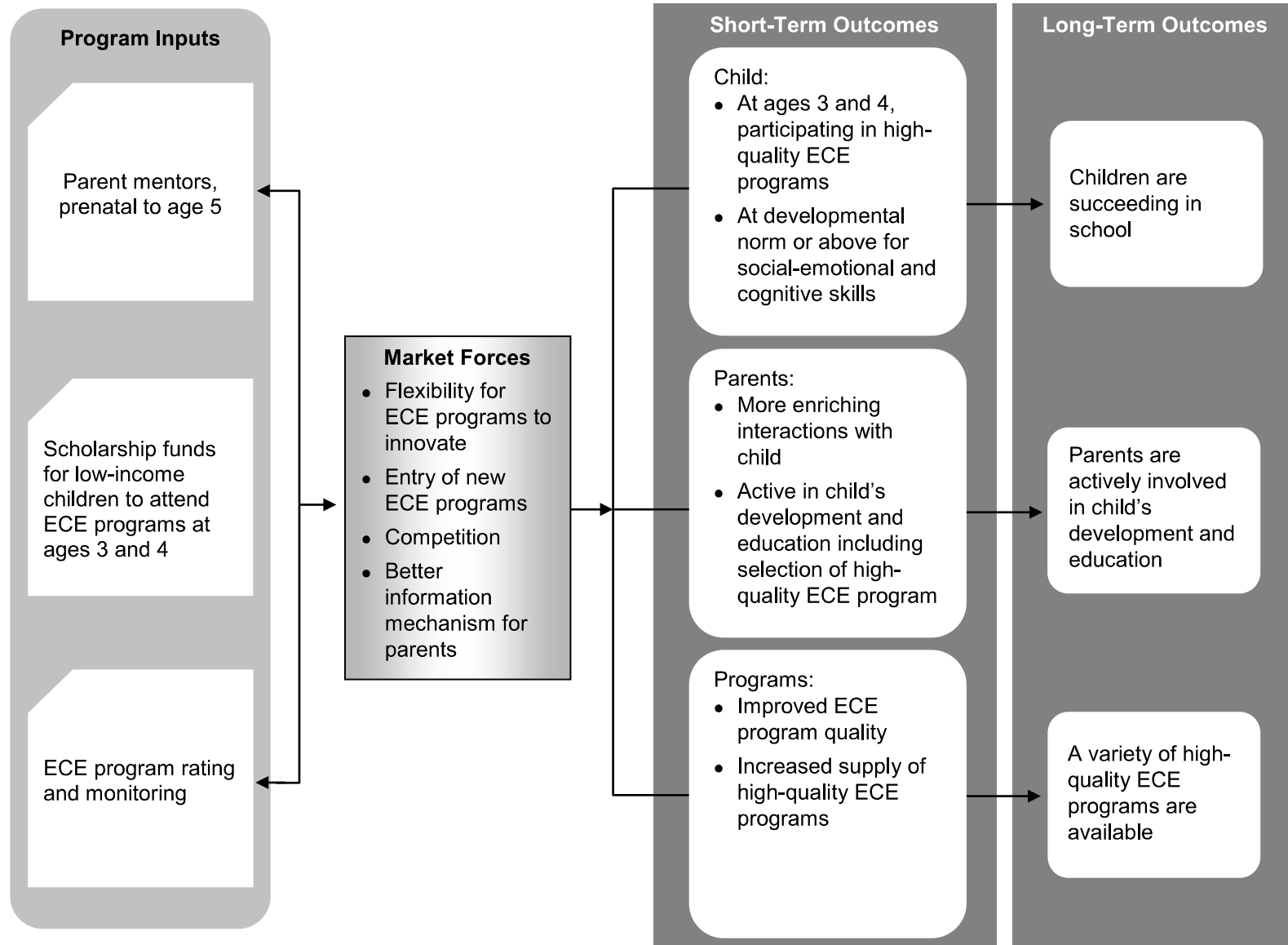
Figure 1 shows the logic model of the scholarship program from its developers. The model has three major interventions that map on to the three principles described above, shown as Program Inputs.

- **Parent mentoring** through home visiting to provide parents with information about the characteristics and benefits of high-quality 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 to enable 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**, Parent Aware,² to rate and monitor ECE program quality
 - A rating system leads to increased accountability–ECE programs are accountable for producing positive results (e.g., preparing children to be successful in school).

² For detailed information about Parent Aware, go to its website: <http://www.parentawareratings.org/>.

Figure 1. Logic Model of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program
Goal: Children from Low-Income Families Are Prepared to Succeed in School



ECE = Early Childhood Education

The findings to be presented draw on the scholarship logic model to show how the scholarship model is working and what has been learned about its components.

The data presented in this report address new questions about the logic model.

- How many families are participating in the three scholarship program interventions shown as Program Inputs in Year 2 (i.e., parent mentoring, receipt of scholarship funds and attendance in high-quality ECE programs, and participation in the Parent Aware program rating system)?³
 - How many families have been recruited to participate in the Scholarship Program?
 - How many families have consented to participate in the evaluation?
 - Who is participating in the parent mentoring, and how many visits are families receiving? What topics are discussed? Were families who have more contact with a parent mentor more likely to find an ECE program and enroll their children earlier in the year compared to families with less contact? (These findings will be presented in the Year 2 Annual Evaluation Report).
- How is the market forces component of the scholarship logic model working so far?
 - How are scholarship-eligible families choosing ECE programs for their children? Are parents using Parent Aware⁴ to inform their decisionmaking in selecting an ECE program for their child?
 - Will ECE programs locate in the targeted communities or expand their existing facilities or staff when there is no guarantee that the scholarship funds will continue beyond 2011?
 - Why have some ECE programs in and near the pilot areas chosen not to participate in Parent Aware and the scholarship program?
 - Is the timeline for the project sufficient to test the market model?
 - Is the planned 4 years for the pilot project long enough for supply to increase?
 - Is 4 years long enough for programs to attain high quality if they are not yet of high quality?
 - Is 4 years long enough for parents to create demand for the high-quality programs?

³ These questions also provide initial data on the Short-Term Outcomes components of the logic model (e.g., children participating in high-quality programs, improved program quality, and increased supply of high-quality programs).

⁴ 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.

- Is a pilot project of the scholarship model on a short time frame and in a limited geographic area a too conservative or limited test of a model that emphasizes the operation of market forces?⁵
- How are ECE program directors using scholarship funds in their programs?
- How is the scholarship program impacting how ECE programs operate?
- Which ECE programs have chosen to locate in the pilot areas of Saint Paul since the scholarship program began and why? How do the program directors see the scholarship program affecting such decisionmaking?

⁵ Another key question that is important to address in the evaluation is: How are ECE program directors using scholarship funds in their programs? This question will be addressed with information that will be collected more systematically as part of the cost study in 2009-2010.

Findings

Findings: Part 1—Implementation Progress for Year 2: Participating Families and ECE Programs

What changes to the scholarship program model occurred in Year 2?

To understand the second year of implementation, it is important to note that during 2009, MELF experienced a 36% reduction in funding due to difficulties in fundraising as a result of the larger economic context. In March 2009, the MELF board and staff made difficult decisions that altered the implementation of the Scholarship Program. The following changes were made as a result of the budget cuts:

- Parent mentoring services ended June 30, 2009. The decision was made to focus the limited amount of resources on the larger component of the Scholarship Program model, the enrollment of children in high-quality ECE programs. This change led to an increase in the role of Resources for Child Caring (RCC) and public health in recruiting and contacting families.
- Those ECE programs that do not charge parent fees (i.e., Head Start and Saint Paul Public Schools [SPPS]) will no longer receive the full amount of the scholarship funds beginning in fall 2009, but will be reimbursed a small amount for scholarship families who select these programs.
- The catchment area was expanded in summer 2009 to include the Payne/Phalen neighborhood (district 5) to increase the number of enrolled children with scholarships who begin ECE program attendance in fall 2009.
- MELF and the implementation team needed to cap cohort 3⁶ enrollment in July 2009 due to the fundraising shortfall.

How many families have been recruited to participate in the Scholarship Program and its evaluation?

During the second year of implementation, multiple cohorts of children were still recruited to participate in the Scholarship Program.

- As of August 2009, 403 children met eligibility requirements to receive scholarships in 2009.⁷
 - 134 children were eligible for a scholarship to enroll in programs beginning September 1, 2008. These children are considered the first group of children to receive the maximum amount of scholarship to enable them to attend 2 full years of a high-quality ECE program before entering kindergarten (cohort 2). By August 2009, 129 of these 134 eligible children (96%) had consented to participate in the

⁶ The original recruitment plan included cohort 1, a group of children enrolled in early 2008 (n = 87, with 56 enrolled in ECE programs) as part of initial ramping up of the scholarship program (not intended to be enrolled into the evaluation), and then two cohorts of 3-year-olds, referred to as cohort 2 (to begin ECE programming in fall 2008) and cohort 3 (to begin ECE programming in fall 2009). Two infant cohorts (less than 1-year-olds [n = 72] and 1-year-olds [n = 81]) were also enrolled in 2008.

⁷ These data were obtained from RCC's database as an export on August 27, 2009.

evaluation and 113 of these eligible children (84%) were enrolled in a Parent-Aware rated program using their scholarship funds.

- Children in cohort 3 are eligible to enroll in an ECE program using their scholarship funds beginning September 1, 2009. They also will receive the maximum amount of scholarship and ECE program attendance (i.e., 2 years). As of July 2009, 269 children were in this group and eligible to receive scholarships in fall 2009. Approximately 132 children are scheduled to enroll in an ECE program beginning in September 2009. As of August 2009, 121 of the 132 (92%) parents of these children had signed consent forms to participate in the evaluation.

Table 1. Sample of Children and Families Enrolled into the Scholarship Program and the Evaluation

	Definition of Group	Projected Number	Actual Number	Number with Consent	Number Enrolled in ECE Program
Cohort 2	Eligible to receive scholarship from 9/1/08 for 2 years, enter kindergarten in 2010	300	134	129	113
Cohort 3	Eligible to receive scholarship from 9/1/09 for 2 years, enter kindergarten in 2011	325	269	242	132
Total		625	403	371	246

Note: The disparity between the actual number of children in cohort 3 and the number of those children enrolled in ECE programs is due to MELF's decisions to limit the number scholarships that could be supported with the reduced budget approved in March 2009.

How many ECE programs have participated in Parent Aware and are eligible to enroll children with scholarships?

- SRI evaluation staff also are tracking enrollment into Parent Aware and availability of slots to understand the third component of the Program Inputs—participation in the Parent Aware program rating system
- A total of 74 ECE providers in Saint Paul had enrolled in Parent Aware as of September 1, 2009 and are eligible to receive Scholarship Program children. This is an increase from 46 ECE programs listed on Parent Aware in the Saint Paul area in August 2008.⁸
- At least one ECE program (New Horizons) has located a branch in the pilot area, opening its doors in the fall of 2008 and enrolling many of the scholarship children into their preschool-age classrooms.

⁸ Head Start is only counted once in this estimate. However, there are approximately three Head Start sites in the pilot area zip codes (defined as 55101, 55103, 55104, and 55117). The estimate of rated ECE programs comes from communication with the implementation team at regular team meetings.

Findings: Part 2 — Implementation Progress for Year 2: Interviews with Key Stakeholders, Implementation Staff, and Participating ECE Programs

This second implementation brief in 2009 provides answers to some of the evaluation questions about implementation successes and challenges, whether the model has been implemented as intended, and the lessons learned about the scholarship program model in the second year of implementation.⁹

Methods and Respondents

SRI staff conducted 34 semistructured qualitative interviews in-person and over the phone from May 28 until August 4, 2009, with key staff from MELF (funders and scholarship model developers) and from programs and agencies involved in implementation of the scholarship pilot model program. The group of respondents included almost every individual who had a significant role in designing the scholarship model and/or working extensively as part of the model's implementation team to administer and manage the daily activities of the program. The group also included representatives from the MELF board, who are the funders for the project, ECE program directors with programs in districts 6 and 7, staff from the parent mentoring agencies, and members of the state legislature.¹⁰ Finally, seven ECE program directors were also interviewed (six with children with scholarships enrolled in their programs, and one with no enrolled children with scholarships).

The interview questions were designed to gather information about how the model is being implemented and effects on children, families, early care and education (ECE) programs, and the targeted community (districts 6 and 7 in Saint Paul, Minnesota). All interviews were recorded digitally and notes were taken during the interviews. Appendix C includes the interview protocol used for the different groups of interviewees.¹¹

Data Analysis of Interviews

SRI staff supplemented the notes taken during the interviews with additional notes taken while listening to the recordings at a later date. All available notes were then coded by two team members to identify themes and issues associated with each interview question. The two team members then met and collated and discussed the themes, and generated potential lessons learned and recommendations.

The interview findings are organized into two major sections. The first section focuses on four major questions that were asked of all 34 interview respondents about how implementation has gone in the past year. These questions are as follows:

⁹ The first implementation brief in 2008 provided formative evaluation information that was intended to guide implementation and make midcourse corrections if relevant or appropriate.

¹⁰ Appendix B contains a list of the individuals who were interviewed and their roles.

¹¹ Information from parents who participated in the focus groups is presented below in a separate section.

- Overall, how would you say implementation has gone?
- How do you think the recruitment and outreach to families has gone?
- How do you think outreach to and participation of ECE programs has gone?
- How do you think the parent mentoring component of the model has gone?

The analysis team was able to summarize these questions about respondents' perceptions of the implementation of the scholarship program model into quantitative statements. For these questions, we use the phrase "majority of respondents" to mean 67% or more, "some respondents" is the equivalent of 10 to 40%, and "a few" is less than 10%.

The next section of interview findings focuses on respondents' perceptions of the implementation of the scholarship model in Year 2—accomplishments, successes, and challenges to date. The responses are not summarized quantitatively because respondents tended to provide information about these issues throughout the entire interview in response to several different questions and probes. Additionally, respondents varied considerably in their first hand knowledge and experience with specific aspects of the implementation, with some respondents reporting about their own first-hand experiences with a particular issue, while others could not comment on implementation issues that they had not dealt with (e.g., parent mentor staff may know more about family's experiences of the application process, ECE program directors may know more about ECE program experiences with the Parent Aware rating process). Therefore, the evaluation staff identified themes across all responses regardless of respondent.

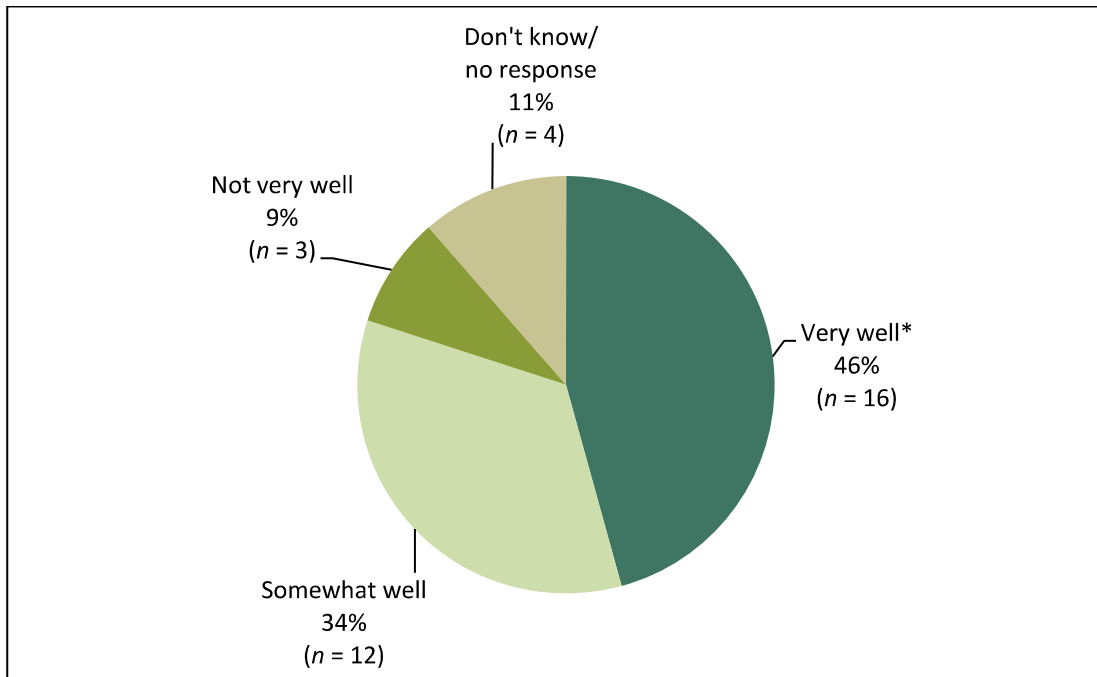
Interview Respondents' Perceptions of the Scholarship Program Implementation

Respondents focused their comments particularly on the second year of implementation (since June 2008).

Overall, how would you say implementation has gone?

As shown in Figure 2, the majority of respondents (80%) thought that the implementation of the scholarship program was going very well (46%) or somewhat well (34%). The majority of respondents also stated that the early months of the start-up and implementation in 2008 had been challenging, but in the past year, implementation processes had gone more smoothly because earlier challenges had been addressed and/or procedures had been modified.

Figure 2. Interview Respondents Overall Perception of Scholarship Model Implementation, Year 2 (n = 34)



The majority of respondents made a number of comments that reflect two overall implementation challenges:

- **Complexity of the scholarship model.** Those respondents actively involved in implementation activities noted that the scholarship model was difficult to explain to ECE programs and families. Others noted that implementation procedures were not well defined and established in the early months of implementation, and that the Scholarship Program as designed seemed to require a great deal of paperwork and establishment of mechanisms to connect multiple agencies and staff. These issues were seen as barriers that may have been confusing and cumbersome for many of the families. As one respondent said: “Why not just get them in?” Other respondents commented that the implementation procedures and requirements put into place may have also prevented some types of programs that do not charge fees to parents from initially participating in the scholarship program (e.g., public school programs determining how they would accommodate enrolling children with scholarships into their ECE programs).
- **Implementing and developing the model at the same time.** Many respondents noted a concern which was also raised in the first year of implementation—the procedures and policies guiding implementation of the scholarship model were being developed as the model was being rolled out (e.g., eligibility, outreach strategies, application process, activities of parent mentors). Confusion and communication problems arise that might have been avoided if all procedures and policies had been defined and communicated in advance of beginning the project with the families, programs, agencies, and communities.

As will be described more fully below, the implementation of the scholarship model has aspects of both a pilot study and an experiment, which in retrospect can be incompatible and create confusion among program implementers. That is, in a pilot study, it is expected that policies, procedures, and roles are being tried out, modified, and are in flux for a period of time. In a pilot study, feasibility of implementing interventions are being evaluated and modified as needed. In contrast, in an experiment, these implementation details are defined a priori and changes are kept to a minimum in order to test the efficacy of a well-defined intervention or set of interventions.

Throughout Year 2, it appeared that a majority of respondents felt that implementation has been more of a pilot study (i.e., working out how to implement the scholarship program in a target community), but the vision of the program has remained more of an experiment (i.e., testing effects of receipt of high-quality ECE programs on child outcomes and school readiness). Some respondents who were interviewed also noted that, at times, the evaluation was driving implementation decisions, or at least that the relationship between the evaluation team and the implementation team needed to be better defined. A comment by one respondent summarizes the issue well: “It’s been helpful to have the evaluation team participate in implementation calls to clarify data collection, describe how decisions may impact evaluation, and so on. However, it has not been clear always what is driving decisions. For example, should the implementation team always ask how does this impact the evaluation or should the implementation team ask how does this impact families and children? Because we really want to test the model, we continue to ask how do these decisions impact the evaluation (i.e., do decisions go against the model?).”

To learn more about the actual implementation of the program inputs in the logic model (i.e., how families accessed the scholarship program, chose ECE programs, and were empowered by the information and assistance provided by the parent mentors to access and enroll their children into high-quality ECE programs), respondents were asked to provide their perceptions on recruitment and participation of families, recruitment and participation of ECE programs (both center-based and family-based), and implementation of the parent mentoring component of the scholarship model. However, as will be seen in some of the findings below, many respondents’ comments reflect this tension between seeing the project as a pilot study where changes in procedures, expected activities, policies, and roles of staff are expected versus seeing it as an experimental study in which all procedures, activities, policies, and roles are well defined.¹²

How do you think the recruitment and outreach to families has gone?

Over the course of the second year of the scholarship program, program staff became better able to identify and implement successful strategies to engage families and recruit them to participate in the scholarship program. However, many respondents noted that more planning and strategic consideration of how outreach to families was going to occur would have been helpful in the beginning of the recruitment period. Respondents raised a number of observations and opinions about the outreach activities, including the following:

- There are many agencies which have daily contact with at-risk families in the targeted neighborhoods, but their expertise and the relationships they have already established

¹² Another way to construe this tension is that the left half of the scholarship logic model (Figure 1) is a pilot study of implementation, but the right half of the model is an experimental study (i.e., children receive 2 years of high-quality ECE programming and school readiness outcomes are studied)

were not utilized to the full extent possible. These agencies included public health staff, ECE program staff, faith-based organizations, and others.¹³

- The ECE program directors who were interviewed uniformly noted that their experiences working with families had not been utilized to the full extent possible. They reported that they had a great deal of knowledge and experience to contribute that was underutilized with regard to recruiting families, working with high risk families, suggesting ways to blend scholarship funds with existing public funding (e.g., Child Care Assistance Program [CCAP], Head Start, public school funding), coordinating Parent Aware with existing accreditation processes, and outreach to ECE programs.
- The most recent recruitment efforts (in summer 2009) demonstrated that working door-to-door with experienced and trusted individuals has yielded the majority, if not all, of the latest wave of eligible participants enrolled in the scholarship program. As noted by one respondent, “Handing out literature doesn’t work. Talking face-to-face, not over the phone, that works.” Some respondents believed that more eligible children and families were residing in the targeted communities, but that the way the program was administered probably prevented intensive outreach to families from occurring.
- Respondents noted that the scholarship model needs to consider how to tailor activities of outreach staff to families with different needs. The families who are more at-risk appear to need more support and help in completing the application and navigating the system, including in selecting an ECE program. Some respondents expressed the concern that the “most needy” families may not have been reached and served by the scholarship program.¹⁴
- A number of challenges in recruitment of families were related to language and cultural barriers.
 - Respondents noted that each step in the outreach and enrollment/engagement process of the scholarship program takes longer when families do not speak English.
 - For instance, some outreach staff commented about the difficulty of placing children from Hmong families in programs, and many Hmong families have requested program staff to help them with registration and enrollment, and requested wanting to have Hmong families in the program that their child attends.
 - It was also hard to know what information was being conveyed about the requirements of the scholarship program when parent mentors and outreach staff needed to rely on interpreters.
 - Trust also was an issue for many of the culturally and linguistically diverse families. Many respondents commented that gaining the trust of the culturally and

¹³ In the planning stages of the project beginning in 2007, an advisory group that included mayor’s office staff, Head Start and Saint Paul Public Schools directors, other community agency staff including Ramsey County Department of Public Health and Lifetrack Resources. The advisory group met regularly throughout 2008-2009 to consider a variety of implementation processes.

¹⁴ In the development of the scholarship logic model, the intended types and extent of interventions by outreach and recruitment staff to inform families about the scholarship program and to assist them in enrolling in the program and selecting an ECE program were not explicitly defined. Thus, staff did not have a clear idea about what activities were consistent or not with the scholarship model.

linguistically diverse families was a challenge. For example, recruitment was especially effective in some of these groups once credible, trusted community members were enlisted to help with recruitment.

- It appeared that the easiest way to “recruit” families was through Head Start and other ECE programs; many respondents noted that ECE programs recruited children and families to receive scholarships who already were connected to or enrolled in their program.
 - Some respondents noted that it was difficult to reach families who were not already enrolled in ECE programs. In addition, once they completed the application, it was often difficult to find parent mentors who could work with these families in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner.
 - When the New Horizons program opened in the catchment area, this program had no trouble enrolling families with scholarships in a period of 2 to 3 months, largely from word of mouth.
- Some respondents felt that the restricted geographic boundaries made it hard to recruit. For example, often families who lived across the street or down the block from eligible families were told they could not participate because of the geographic boundaries. Many respondents noted that these boundaries may have caused negative feelings toward the scholarship program, making it harder to recruit in the neighborhoods.
- Another challenge to recruitment that was not anticipated was how the weak economy affected the neighborhoods and families. One respondent noted that “whole neighborhoods” were “turning over” (significant mobility), and it changed the makeup of the targeted population.

Related to outreach of families has been the process of enrolling children into ECE programs. A key feature of the scholarship model is that parent mentors will inform parents about the features and benefits of high-quality ECE programs.¹⁵ Armed with this information and the resources (i.e., scholarship funds) to access high-quality programs, the model hypothesizes that parents will create demand (i.e., seek out and choose a high-quality ECE program for their child to attend using their scholarship funds).

- Based on interview responses, it appears that the parent choice/demand aspect of the scholarship model (how parents selected an ECE program for their child) may not be implemented as intended, or at least is being implemented differently across participants. Thus, there are several key questions about the scholarship model: (1) how much was the choice of an ECE program a deliberate and volitional choice by parents? and (2) how independently did parents locate and choose the ECE program? Staff engaged in a variety of activities to assist families to identify and choose eligible ECE programs in which they could use the scholarship funds.¹⁶

¹⁵ The scholarship program implementation manual (Appendix A) describes the parent mentoring component and the role of parents mentors in general terms, but does not prescribe specific activities that the parent mentors must or can do with families.

¹⁶ As mentioned above, in explanations of the scholarship logic model, it is not clear the types and extent of interventions by outreach and recruitment staff that are consistent with the model.

- Many of the respondents mentioned that many families were given a list of available ECE programs that had Parent Aware quality ratings of 3 or 4 and had available slots (e.g., RCC created lists of ECE program for families).
- Interviewees believed that many of the families did not seem to use or know about Parent Aware or its website, especially since the parent mentors provided parents with a list of eligible ECE programs.
- In a number of cases, outreach staff at RCC did a great deal of follow up to contact eligible families with completed scholarship program applications to help them find an ECE program with open slots. This occurred mainly in cases when it was clear that the family had not yet enrolled the child into an ECE program because no payment requests were coming from any ECE program for the child.
- In some cases, parent mentors and/or outreach staff provided parents with a partial list of ECE programs based on information about the families’ unique needs and resources.
- As mentioned earlier, some ECE program staff assisted families already enrolled in their ECE program to apply for scholarship funds (e.g., Head Start programs).
- Several respondents stated that they were uncertain about whether parents were learning about the features and benefits of high-quality ECE programs from parent mentors or from Parent Aware. Rather, it was noted that many parents seemed to be learning about ECE program quality from ECE program staff once the child was enrolled in an ECE program, a suggestion supported by comments made by parents in the parent focus groups (to be discussed below).

How do you think outreach to and participation of ECE programs has gone?

- The majority of respondents generally felt that participation of center-based programs had been going well. In contrast, the majority of respondents either felt that participation of family-based programs had not gone well or they were not aware of how it was going. Most respondents noted that center-based programs participated in greater numbers than family-based programs because it was easier for them, especially if they were already accredited or could earn three or four stars in the full Parent Aware rating process the first time they signed up to be rated without having to do major improvements to their ECE program.
- Some respondents, noted, however, that “some aspects of Parent Aware may be daunting for programs” such as having to have a curriculum, and that these programs may need to be given extra support in order to participate in the rating system. Some of the Parent Aware requirements may have been unattainable for many family-based programs without support, technical assistance, and additional resources aimed at assisting programs to meet various quality requirements.¹⁷

¹⁷ Parent Aware does provide support to ECE programs to upgrade their quality, but comments described below indicated that some ECE programs were either not aware of the availability of their support or felt it was not sufficient to fully meet their needs to improve quality.

- Some respondents also noted that center-based programs were more likely to be connected to other providers and agencies like RCC, and therefore, to have known about the scholarship program and how to access the scholarship funds.
- Many respondents noted that very few parents in the scholarship program requested or sought out a family-based ECE program.
- For both family-based and center-based programs, respondents viewed the possibility of being rated 1 or 2 and being required to publish the rating on the website and in their windows as possible barriers to participation.
- Many respondents reported that the entry of the New Horizons program into the scholarship catchment area was a direct result of the scholarship program.
 - Several respondents noted, however, that they felt that more for-profit or not-for-profit ECE programs would have located a program in the pilot communities if the scholarship program was not scheduled to sunset in 2011, seeing such a move as too risky fiscally.
- Many respondents commented that the scholarship model does not fit well with ECE programs for which parents do not pay fees, and suggested that a thorough review and discussion of how the scholarship model, seen as child-based or fee-based funding, can be accommodated with existing programs that use a program-based funding model.
 - Other respondents commented that ECE programs for which parents do not pay fees or non-profit preschool programs may need to reevaluate how they can accommodate the schedules of many families who need full-day and full-year programming for their children.
 - Several ECE program directors suggested that during the start-up phase of the scholarship model, developers could have done a better job at engaging the ECE providers and communicating clearly with them about the requirements, goals, and benefits of the scholarship program and use of the funding model with all types of ECE programs.

How do you think the parent mentoring component of the model has gone?

The majority of respondents expressed strong support for the importance of the parent mentoring component of the scholarship model, but also mentioned several issues and concerns about the implementation of this component of the model.

- The majority of respondents were clear that the role of the parent mentors to support enrollment with high risk families in the scholarship program was an essential component of the scholarship model.¹⁸ That is, respondents commented that without parent mentoring, the cohort of children and families participating in the scholarship program would (will) look very different.
 - One respondent commented, “without parent mentoring, the program would have only recruited the cream of the crop who can navigate the system, take advantage of the scholarship funds, speak English, etc.”

¹⁸ As mentioned earlier, the scholarship program implementation manual describes the parent mentoring component in general terms, but does not prescribe specific activities that parent mentors must or can do with families.

- Many respondents felt that there were a number of specific and unique benefits of the parent mentoring component of the scholarship model for parents and children.
 - Respondents noted that often parent mentors helped address behavioral issues that parents had with their children or helped families get connected to other community services (e.g., WIC).
 - Some ECE program directors commented that the parent mentors play a critical role in giving parents information about parenting, supporting early literacy, and educating parents about the benefits of their child’s participation in a high-quality ECE program.
 - As will be discussed more fully below, many parents in the focus groups commented about how much they enjoyed the parent mentor visits and receiving materials to help their child become ready for school (e.g., backpacks, books).
- Many respondents also noted, however, that there has been a lack of clarity about the parent mentoring component, particularly what activities parent mentors are expected or required to engage in with families. That is, in the scholarship program logic model, the parent mentors are identified as the conduits between the scholarship program and the access to knowledge and a high-quality ECE program.¹⁹ In practice, implementation team staff noted that how parent mentoring was delivered, what information was shared, how decisionmaking by parents occurred, and what additional services were provided to parents varied considerably by agency, by parent mentor, and over time.²⁰
 - Many families did not seem to need the parent mentor to find a program (reported both by implementation team staff and by parent respondents).
 - Many respondents reported that they believed that some parents were not as involved in parent mentoring, and did not want the parent mentor to come into their home and talk about parenting skills.
 - In parent focus groups, some parents reported that they did not realize that parent mentoring was part of the scholarship program (discussed below).
- Because of the lack of clarity about the parent mentors’ role and the variety of ways and extent to which parent mentors could support parental decisionmaking in selection of an ECE program, parent mentor trainings reflected a wide range of possibilities. Some respondents reported the following:
 - While some parent mentors helped families call ECE programs and ask questions about available slots, many parent mentors were concerned about doing too much “hand-holding” to be true to the intent of the scholarship model.
 - The parent mentor trainings²¹ seemed to be either too vague, broad, or basic (e.g., “parent mentoring 101”) for more experienced home visitors.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that the scholarship model, as originally described, saw the parent mentors starting work with families when the children were infants, not around age 3, which is what happened in this project in order to enroll a sufficient sample into the evaluation to study kindergarten outcomes before the end of 2011, the sunset of the MELF.

²⁰ SRI is currently processing and analyzing the parent mentor data collection forms. Those analyses will describe differences in dosage and content of parent mentoring/home visiting services, and potential outcomes associated with parent mentoring.

²¹ There were two parent mentor trainings—one in December 2007 and one in December 2008.

- Many parent mentors realized, after the fact, that there were many additional steps that they needed to implement to get children enrolled in ECE programs (i.e., according to some respondents, the parent mentoring—if done well—included calling ECE programs for families, assisting families in visiting ECE programs, following up on the status and availability of slots, etc.).
- The complexity of the scholarship program was also hard to understand and then information about the requirements and policies/procedures had to trickle down from supervisors of all of the parent mentors, including new staff. Respondents noted that it would have been helpful to have more “booster” sessions for new (and old) staff and to clarify scholarship program policy changes.

Interview Respondents’ Perceptions of Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned in Year 2 of Implementation

Respondents were asked a set of general questions to reflect their perceptions of the successes, challenges, and lessons learned in Year 2 of implementation.

What are the accomplishments/successes so far? What factors have been contributing to achieving success so far? What worked well?

Several key successes in year 2 of implementation were identified by the respondents. Some perceived successes were related to **servicing at risk children and families**.

- Almost all respondents referred to the program’s ability to serve many children and families in the last year as the key success, enrolling and serving more than 200 children with scholarships in high-quality ECE programs.
- Most respondents stated that they believed that parents were positively influenced by empowering them to make different choices than they would have without the scholarship funds (mentioned by both implementers and parents).
 - According to respondents who communicated directly with parents of children receiving scholarships, parents seemed proud about being proactive and were eager to find an ECE program that they thought was right for their child and their family. The respondents highlighted the importance of family choice and the respect that parents were given as individuals with the power to make choices for their children, a major feature of the vision underlying the scholarship program model.
 - As one respondent noted, a large success of the program was demonstrated in the fact that “parents were learning how to navigate the ECE system, how to do research, advocate for themselves and their children.”
 - Other parent mentors and RCC staff mentioned that they gave parents a checklist which parents used to look for safe and high-quality ECE programs.
 - At least one ECE program director described hearing a change in the types of questions parents were asking about the program. These questions were more about what is going to happen in the child’s environment, what kinds of activities will the child be exposed to, and so on. Staff noted this subtle change and viewed

it as a positive effect of the scholarship program and the other community initiatives (e.g. Parent Aware).

- Parents who have been participating were enthusiastic about the scholarship program and reported how it benefited both their children and themselves. (Additional information from the parent focus groups, to be described below, show that many parents were directly and positively impacted because the scholarship allowed them to focus on their education, employment, job training opportunities, and in some cases, allowed them to maintain custody of their child and stay employed).

Some perceived successes were related to **increasing support for high-quality ECE programs** in a variety of key groups.

- Most respondents mentioned that the scholarship program increased community and legislative awareness about the importance and complexity of early childhood.
 - Respondents commented that the scholarship program created “a buzz around early childhood” across the state and across the nation, and MELF brought atypical partners (e.g., business community leaders, banks) into the dialogue about early childhood.
 - Respondents commented that the scholarship program was having an impact on how the discussion of the importance of early childhood was being framed by policymakers and stakeholders across Minnesota.
 - Some respondents noted that there was a realization that early childhood education is more like higher education than K–12. For example, in Minnesota there is a balance between public and private higher education. Both early childhood and higher education benefit from public funding, both students get scholarship funding through state and federal government. There needs to be a similarly cohesive vision for early childhood. In the scholarship model, both public and private providers can compete for scholarship funds. This model makes sense to Minnesota legislators.
 - Some respondents felt that it has helped to frame discussions of early childhood education as an educational and workforce issue, not as a “child care” issue.

Some perceived successes were related to **raising private funds** for high-quality ECE programs.

- A number of respondents felt that the fact that the scholarship program is supported by private funding offered two benefits: (1) allowed programs more flexibility in how they used the funds to improve quality and (2) encouraged programs to use the funds in creative and innovative ways.²²

²² Use of private funding, which declined in Year 2, was also seen as a major challenge and will be described more fully below.

What are the challenges so far? What factors influence the challenges? What did not work well?

Overall, the majority of respondents cited the problems with fundraising as a major challenge in the past year, and they also described additional continuing challenges that had been mentioned last year.

- The majority of respondents noted that the shortfall in the projected fundraising in the past year has been a major problem.
 - By summer 2009, it became evident that the scholarship program was not able to ensure adequate funding to complete the 4-year implementation plan. Additionally, it is important to note that the shortfall in funding affected the evaluation design and sampling. For example, several respondents raised concerns about the design of the outcome component of the evaluation including selection bias in the sample and sample size being too small to detect effects on the outcome measures, especially given the variation in implementation of the model.²³
 - Some respondents had strong opinions about the fundraising challenges and implications for the scholarship model.
 - Some respondents stated that they do not view the market model as implemented in the scholarship program as feasible or realistic. They believed that a true market would pool all public and private funding to let parents use to choose an ECE program but would require much more money than is available or sustainable to serve all children who need a high-quality ECE program. Further, a true market model would open eligibility to many more families (e.g., working poor families).
 - Some respondents stated that they believe that a funding model that combines and coordinates both public and private funds is essential to future success of the scholarship model and to providing high-quality ECE programs to as many high-risk children as possible.
- Many respondents' commented that the market-based scholarship model, as it was developed, is not well suited for implementation in ECE programs for which parents do not pay fees for a variety of reasons.
 - Many respondents noted that school-based ECE programs work with a different fiscal model than community-based ECE programs. In particular, it was noted that school-based programs need more guaranteed and sustainable funding open up new classrooms than the market-driven model allows for.
 - Respondents noted that parent mentors and other staff who worked directly with parents in choosing an ECE program may not have fully understood how school-based programs operate, or, in some cases, they were unaware that school-based programs were one option for parents to choose.

²³ Respondents also noted the need for a comparison group. SRI International revised the evaluation design in 2009 given the shortfall in enrollment and added an adequate comparison group of children who will be recruited and assessed in 2010 as they enter kindergarten.

- Head Start programs had relatively high participation rates, and at least one respondent attributed the difference in participation from school-based programs to the fact that Head Start programs could provide full-day programming.
- Respondents commented that programs like Head Start and the public schools already receive federal and/or state funding to serve low-income children. Respondents questioned whether this might mean that new or additional children were not being served (e.g., these programs could have served some or all of these children without the additional scholarship funds).
 - Some respondents raised a related issue. Because Head Start and Saint Paul Public School programs primarily (or mostly) serve children from low-income families with no cost to the families, some respondents suggested that a market-driven model is not the most appropriate for low-income families or families who meet these programs' eligibility requirements (i.e., these families would not be paying for their child's ECE program).
- Some respondents commented that within the community-based programs, for-profit ECE programs seem to be well positioned to participate in the scholarship program because they have other resources to support the program.
- Some respondents noted that many ECE programs struggled with the payment system of the scholarship program because the mechanism for blending funds, particularly CCAP funds, created difficulties.
 - For example, some ECE program directors described difficulties in managing costs when CCAP payments were delayed and/or not in the amount anticipated.
- The need for transportation to the ECE programs for many families continues to be a significant barrier to participation in the scholarship program.
 - Many respondents felt that transportation was the ultimate barrier to parents in making an informed choice about the ECE program they would really like to choose for their child.
 - For example, part-day Head Start programs have transportation, and outreach staff explained that many families are not comfortable and do not feel safe taking public transportation. Thus, the fact that a program provides transportation often trumps other reasons to choose (or at least consider and visit) a different ECE program.
- Throughout Year 2, administration of the scholarship program and tracking the status of children in their ECE programs continued to present challenges.
 - Many respondents noted that communicating families' ECE program choice to the right agencies to be able to track payments and to be able to follow children for the evaluation was made especially difficult without a comprehensive database.
 - The challenge of tracking was also mentioned by respondents when asked about the evaluation, commenting that the lack of database for evaluation purposes (i.e.,

tracking eligibility, consent, and enrollment into an ECE program) and relying on RCC's database was problematic.²⁴

What is a realistic timeline for full implementation? How long does it take for a consumer market respond? What percentage of parents in a community do you think need to be demanding high-quality for the consumer market to work?

These questions aimed to determine how respondents understand the market forces aspect of the scholarship program's logic model and their expectations about both the supply and demand aspects of the model. In general, this was a difficult question for respondents to answer, partly because respondents had differing perspectives on what was meant by "full implementation" of the scholarship model.

- Some respondents suggested that if the time frame is based on how soon the community of ECE programs respond to the availability of scholarship funds and begin to increase supply and quality, then 2 to 3 years is sufficient.
- Other respondents felt that full implementation of the scholarship model would take longer, 5, 6, or 7 years or even longer.²⁵ These longer-term timelines were based on the assumption that the scholarship model intended for children to begin the program as infants, receive parent mentoring for several years, then have 2 years of participation in high-quality ECE programs, culminating with entry into kindergarten with good school readiness skills.
- Respondents tended to note that the supply side (ECE programs) and the demand side (parents) may respond at different rates.
 - Several respondents suggested that there are probably two stages of the market response. That is, one set of consumers (meaning both ECE programs and parents) will respond very quickly and be able to participate right away. A second set of consumers may need more time, more resources, and more supports to participate in the scholarship program.
- Respondents had quite variable perspectives on what percentage of the parents in a community would need to "demand high-quality ECE programs" in order to influence the market, ranging from 10% to 80%.
 - Respondents who stated lower percentages felt that 10% to 20% may be enough to generate word of mouth throughout the community. Those who stated higher percentages felt that the concept of "parent demand" involves parents communicating their desire for high-quality programs to the ECE programs. They felt there may need to be a more substantial percentage to influence ECE programs.
 - A few respondents, however, felt that this question of how parents' "demand for high-quality ECE programs" will influence the supply or market was "not a good question." Instead, these respondents felt that different questions need to be addressed

²⁴ A few respondents who worked closely with the evaluation team noted that not having SRI nearby was a limitation. If SRI was closer, there might have been more buy-in by the parent mentors to collect the evaluation forms, staff could have worked more effectively with the implementation staff to monitor children's enrollment into programs and pursue more aggressively consent by families, etc.

²⁵ The longest timeline was 10 years, suggested by one respondent.

- including (1) how to raise enough funding to serve *all* needy children (or fully fund the ECE programs that already exist), including increasing public support and policies for availability of high-quality ECE programs, (2) how to increase and sustain high-quality in all ECE programs serving young children (including increasing funding and policy support for quality improvement of existing ECE programs).
- Many respondents (both implementers and ECE program directors) suggested that the start-up of the scholarship model might have gone more smoothly, particularly with regard to enrolling families, if the Parent Aware rating system had been implemented at least one year prior to awarding the scholarships to families.
 - Respondents noted that this staggered start-up of the scholarship model components, with Parent Aware starting ahead of the awarding of scholarships, would have given communities time to spread the word about the program, get ECE programs rated with the Parent Aware system, and establish a clearly identified supply of high-quality ECE programs for parents to choose from in their communities (i.e., as one respondent stated, leave enough time at the start-up to “help the supply to grow and to assist programs to improve quality”).
 - Most respondents noted that the scholarship model had led to an increase in the supply of high-quality slots in the targeted community with the opening of a New Horizons center.

What have been the lessons learned about implementing the scholarship program model for future replication?

All respondents were asked the following question: If the scholarship model were to be replicated in other communities, what are three things that you would tell the developers for successful implementation? The respondents reported about what had worked well and should be retained in future replications and those aspects of implementation that need to be changed or improved. The responses covered the following four categories of lessons learned: planning and funding, communication, logistics of implementation, and collaboration with the participating community.

Several lessons about **planning and funding** were described by respondents.

- Provide sufficient period of time for a planning phase to establish policies and procedures, and to communicate the goals, vision, and policies, and procedures of the program and the model. One respondent noted, “Design, then implement.”
 - Incorporate the policies and procedures into an implementation manual that is widely disseminated and used. Such a manual should include a description of roles and responsibilities of staff, including how parent mentors and ECE program staff, assist and support families in the enrollment process; leadership and decisionmaking processes; description of the program components; eligibility criteria (including geographic area targeted for the project) and the application and enrollment process; explanation of the payment structure and a description of how ECE programs will need to adapt and work with other funding sources and agencies).²⁶

²⁶ The manual, or a companion document, should explain the rationale for policy and procedural decisions.

- In the planning period, clarify roles and responsibilities for all agencies and organizations involved, and provide mechanisms for receiving questions and disseminating answers about roles and responsibilities.
- Because ECE programs for which there are no parent fees (Head Start and school-based programs) have Federal, state, and school district requirements and other considerations that may not fit well into a market-based funding model, conduct strategic planning with representatives from the ECE programs early in the planning process to establish procedures and policies that allow these types of existing programs to participate in the scholarship program.
- Provide sustainable and adequate funding to carry out the entire project as intended. Challenges in fund raising in Year 2 created uncertainty for the families and staff and may have affected morale in the community when staff found it hard to communicate changes in availability of funds to families and families were uncertain of the status of scholarships for their children.
 - Build on and coordinate with existing funding sources to pay for ECE programs was described by many respondents as the “only way to make this model affordable and sustainable.”
- Establish a sufficient timeline for the project during the planning period to allow for full implementation of the scholarship model before testing for child outcomes.
 - View early implementation of the program as a pilot study in which the developers and implementers are testing out the feasibility of implementation. The pilot phase should include trying out a variety of procedures; clarifying the parameters of the interventions (e.g., parent mentoring component), developing trainings that are needed, identifying considerations involving existing ECE programs that are free to families and for which parents do not pay fees, establishing policies on blending and coordinating funding streams), learning about the characteristics and needs of the local community (both the ECE programs and the families) and their perceived challenges in participating in the program, developing a tracking database, and other operational details about starting and running the program.
 - Consider whether to establish the quality rating system for the ECE programs prior to implementing the awarding of scholarship funds (perhaps from 1 to 4 years earlier) in order allow time for the rating system to become well implemented and also to ensure an adequate supply of high-quality ECE programs for parents to choose from in the community.

Several lessons about **communication** were described by respondents.

- There is a strong need to develop a comprehensive communication strategy early on and make sure to continuously communicate progress about the project with a broad range of stakeholders. Communication should take many forms, with many audiences, including the following:

- Provide regular updates and communicate with all stakeholders (including frequent interactions between legislators, parents and ECE program staff, local community leaders, etc.) through a community awareness or marketing campaign.
- Provide clarity about how the evaluation questions addressed in the project are related to current early childhood policy discussions in the state.
- Develop a clear long-term vision of the program model and how messaging is done, including the following:
 - Commit to long-term investments and outcomes
 - Hold the community accountable for results achieved
 - Reward ECE providers who deliver positive outcomes at the lowest cost (i.e., cost effectiveness is valued)
- Maintain a well-functioning system of communication between parent mentors and scholarship implementation staff.
- Develop an outreach strategy to get information about the scholarship program to parents that includes a variety of activities tailored to the specific needs of the target communities that is simple, appropriate to the cultural and linguistic characteristic of the families served, and that uses the knowledge, experiences, and established relationships of community members, ECE program staff and others serving the community, with an emphasis on credible, trusted community members.

Several lessons about the **logistics of implementing** the scholarship model **with the entire range of agencies, ECE programs and families** were described by respondents.

- Build into the implementation explicit strategies to review implementation progress so that successes are being identified and supported, and challenges receive attention and effective problem solving aimed at overcoming them.
- Develop the payment structure so ECE programs can bill immediately for the scholarship funds (e.g., recommend the scholarship program work with the county/state subsidies to get reimbursed and leave the providers to do their job with the children).
- Include a transportation component in the scholarship model, many families need transportation in order for their child to participate in *any* ECE program and need it in order to have the child attend the ECE program they would choose.
- Develop clarity about the parent mentoring component of the scholarship model.
 - Parent mentors need to understand the ECE system and what their role is in helping families make decisions about ECE programs for their children (e.g, the specific types of activities they are expected to do (or not to do) with parents to inform them about ECE programs and to assist them in selecting an ECE program for their child).
 - A parent mentoring training process needs to be established and made available throughout the project so that new staff can be trained consistently and as needed.
- Develop the clarity about the Parent Aware quality ratings component of the scholarship model.

- The quality rating system is an essential component of the scholarship model and must be retained, with a strong recommendation by some respondents that all ECE providers are held to the same standard of quality.²⁷
- Many ECE programs, especially family-based programs, need more support, technical assistance, and/or resources to upgrade their quality than is currently available through Parent Aware.²⁸ Therefore, the availability of quality enhancement grants so that programs can invest in improving program quality would be a good addition to the model.

Several lessons about the benefits of **collaboration with the participating community** were described by respondents.

- Establish an ongoing collaborative partnership with the community and involving many community partners in the planning and ongoing implementation of the program.
 - Developers need to be open to hearing the thoughts, ideas, and experiences of program staff and community members because they will contribute strategies and resources that can be leveraged and built upon.
 - Partnering well with local child care resource and referral agencies can facilitate tracking the available ECE program slots.
 - It is important to have business community involvement to gain widespread support for the project.
- Develop of an effective and efficient outreach strategy by using the accumulated experience and knowledge of the community and families. Specific suggestions include the following:
 - Assess the community make-up as the project is starting up in order to know the characteristics of the families and community (do not rely on census data which can be outdated).
 - Develop intensive recruitment strategies for those families, who are faced with many challenges and stresses and who may need extra support and information.
 - Consider coordinating with an agency that serves eligible families or others who have contact with families with young children (e.g., health care providers) and use a targeted list to do one-on-one contact (e.g., going door-to-door to talk with families).
 - Translate the program materials and information into multiple languages and use trusted community members in order to reach new immigrant families and those speaking languages other than English.

²⁷ The rationale for automatic assignment of high Parent Aware quality ratings of 3 and 4 to Head Start and school based ECE programs and use of provisional ratings was confusing and needs to be better communicated and justified throughout the community.

²⁸ While the Parent Aware system does have such support, some ECE programs may not perceive it to be sufficient or easily accessible.

Findings: Part 3—Implementation Progress for Year 2: Focus Groups with Participating Parents

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).

Methods and Participants

Between late May and early August, SRI staff conducted four focus groups at three different ECE program sites in order to talk with parents who have enrolled their children in the scholarship program. The sites were chosen because they accounted for the majority of scholarship participants, and evaluation staff could more easily reach a large number of participating families. SRI staff worked closely with program staff to invite all parents in their program who had a child receiving a scholarship and to make logistical arrangements for the focus groups. One SRI staff member served as the group moderator and a second person²⁹ did a digital recording and took notes. Each participating parent received a \$20 gift certificate to Target as a token of appreciation for their participation.

The purpose of the parent focus groups was to collect qualitative data about parents' perceptions of the scholarship program and its perceived impact on their children and families to date.³⁰ Each focus group lasted about one hour and included a range of parents whose children were using scholarship funds to attend the ECE program.

- Parents of all ethnicities and language groups were invited to attend, though all final participants were comfortable speaking in English and did not require interpreters.
- Group size ranged from 5 to 9 parents, for a total of 27 parents or relatives representing 25 families.
- Most parents had 4-year-old children who had been in the program about a year.

Data Analysis of Focus Groups

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

²⁹ The second person was a staff member from Child Trends who work with SRI as part of the MELF Research Consortium or a second SRI staff member.

³⁰ Appendix D contains the parent focus group protocol.

Focus Group Findings

The focus group findings are organized around the following five questions to which parents responded:

- How did you hear about the scholarship program?
- Why did you choose to participate in the scholarship program?
- How many of you have a parent mentor, and how does your parent mentor help you?
- How did you choose an ECE program for your child?
- Have you heard of Parent Aware?

How did you hear about the scholarship program?³¹

- Parents learned about the scholarship program in several different ways.
 - A commonly mentioned source was through a staff member at their child’s preschool program.
 - Word of mouth was another way parents heard about the scholarship program. Several parents mentioned hearing about the program through friends, family, or coworkers.
 - Many parents also mentioned receiving brochures or seeing fliers or advertisements for the program at locations like the WIC office or their child’s preschool program.
 - A small number of parents mentioned learning about the scholarship program from a parent mentor, home visitor, or case manager.

Why did you choose to participate in the scholarship program?

- Most parents described that they were participating in the scholarship program because, as several parents simply stated, “it’s free” and “it’s worry-free.”
 - In describing the simplicity of participating in the scholarship program, several parents contrasted it with CCAP, describing the difficulty of participating in CCAP, including completing a lot of paperwork on a regular basis, having difficulty reaching the county worker, and having trouble consistently staying eligible (e.g., many parents describe the experience of “always getting cut-off” from CCAP).³²
- Some parents noted that because the scholarship funds are guaranteed, participation provided them with school and work opportunities.
 - For example, one parent described that she was in school and not working enough hours and so was not eligible for CCAP, but could now further her education and training. She noted how much she appreciated the scholarship program because it allowed her to stay in school and have her child attend a high-quality program at the

³¹ None of the parents knew what MELF was; the facilitator explained how MELF is a foundation that helps provide the funds for the scholarship, and that SRI is working with MELF to learn about how the program helps children and families.

³² Many parents stated that they often did not understand why they had lost their eligibility for CCAP or were denied subsidy assistance altogether.

same time, adding that “the county (referring to CCAP) is not as dedicated to helping parents and kids.”

- Many parents commented that the scholarship funds allowed them to access a full-day program for their child (although the sample may have been biased because all four programs offered full-day ECE programming.).
- Even with CCAP, many of the parents reported that they would not have been able to afford to send their child to a full-day, high-quality program.
 - In one group, two-thirds of the parents were either working and/or going to school during the day. They described the struggles of affording a high-quality ECE program and “making ends meet” at the same time.
- Many of the parents answered the question with how they chose the ECE program their child was attending rather than why they chose to participate in the scholarship program. When we asked where their children would be if they did not have the scholarship program, about half of the parents described a less desirable, alternative child care arrangement.
 - One parent said, “[my child would be] in someone’s basement, watching TV all day with 10 other children,” because that is what the parent could afford.
 - Other parents responded that the alternative was to find a half-day program like Head Start and use CCAP if they could manage it.

How many of you have a parent mentor, and how does your parent mentor help you?³³

- The vast majority (about 80%) of the families participating in the focus groups had a parent mentor.
- The number of home visits by parent mentors and how they helped families varied considerably.
- Regardless of the number of parent mentor home visits received, most of the parents expressed strong positive opinions about the parent mentors, noting that they were incredibly beneficial to their children and families. Further, all parents commented that they were saddened that the parent mentor component had been cut.
 - Many parents described the books and other materials (e.g., backpacks, crayons) that parent mentors provided that were helping their children “learn their letters,” “write their names,” and “be ready for school.”
 - Some parents described how parent mentors helped them at first with parenting concerns that were higher priorities than finding an ECE program.
 - One parent eloquently described how the parent mentor worked with her to help develop better interactions with her son and how his behavior had improved considerably.

³³ This question was somewhat difficult for the group and we think it was because many of the families did not label their parent mentor as such and/or had been connected to these services prior to participation. Therefore, we can not say with certainty that the person they are describing is the parent mentor assigned to them by the scholarship program.

- Some, though not all, parents, saw their parent mentors as helpful advocates in completing the scholarship program application forms, assisting them in finding a high-quality ECE program, and enrolling their child in the ECE program.
- Some parents, however, were confused about the purpose and role of the parent mentoring, stating that since they had already decided where to enroll their child they did not need the parent mentor.

How did you choose an ECE program for their child?

- Almost all of the parents described the process of finding an ECE program as easy.
 - Many of the parents knew which ECE program they wanted their child to attend either because of the ECE program’s reputation, word of mouth, and/or previous experience or because the child’s sibling had attended the ECE program.
 - Parents also secondarily described aspects of ECE programs that they needed to consider, mainly including location, transportation, and provision of full-day care.
- When parents were asked whether they received a list of eligible ECE programs from which to choose to use the scholarship funds, at least 30% described a list they received from their parent mentor or in the mail.
- All of the parents knew their children attended a high-quality, “star-rated” ECE program (although as seen below, many had not actually used Parent Aware).³⁴
- When asked to describe what they liked about their child’s ECE program, parents were animated and clear in describing 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 included the following:
 - **Curriculum and early learning environments.** Many parents noted that they liked the ECE program because it was “like a school” and it was preparing their children for kindergarten (e.g., “they teach him how to write his name”). Some parents liked the “curriculum” and others described the learning environment (which often included field trips) that helped achieve better outcomes for their children. One parent advocate³⁵ explained how the child’s parents were amazed by their child’s English language skills—their son had gone from one word to full sentences in 1 year. Another parent liked the different activity centers in her daughter’s classroom.
 - **Caring and compassionate teachers and staff whom their children like.** As one parent put it, “the child will let you know if this is a good place.” Many parents described how their children really liked their teachers, talked about them at home, and were often eager to return to school every day. Some parents also commented that the teachers and staff are really committed to their children and they could tell from their observations (e.g., all staff know all of the children’s names, give children individual attention, etc.).

³⁴ Many of the parents knew their program was rated highly. Interestingly, many parents said their program was five stars and that they thought this because it was like a hotel rating where five is the highest. “It’s like a five-star hotel . . . it’s homey, it’s carpeted . . . not like a high school.”

³⁵ The parent advocate was a representative for one family who did not speak English and attended the focus group on their behalf.

- **Parent involvement.** Parents appreciated that the ECE programs allowed them to come to the program and observe. One group of parents was impressed that all the children know their classmates’ parents. Another parent liked that the program provided after-school activities for the family. Communication from the program to parents was important.
- **Location and transportation.** One parent needed an ECE program with a bus that would allow her to continue to go to high school. Other parents described the fact that their child’s ECE program was within walking distance of their home or on a convenient bus line.
- Other aspects that were mentioned by parents, but with less excitement than those listed above, included nutrition and safety.
 - It seemed that many of the parents considered these aspects of the ECE program to be consistent with a minimum level of quality.
 - For example, parents spoke about the security of the facility, the fact that they can “pop in,” and the special policies and procedures that determine what kinds of foods are served and allowed in the food area.
- Across all four focus groups, parents were hesitant to describe any negative aspects of the ECE program. Parents did, however, identify activities they would like to have added to their child’s ECE program, including (1) foreign language, (2) more field trips, and (3) in two focus groups, transportation.

Have you heard of Parent Aware?

- Mirroring the results from the 2008 parent focus groups, none of the parents reported that they had heard of Parent Aware. After the facilitator then briefly described the Parent Aware rating system, some parents thought they used the website or a similar one (e.g., the program’s website), and many commented that their child’s program had “four or five stars” (see also footnote on page 33).
- Many parents were interested to learn more about the process of rating (i.e., what goes into it) and how to get more information. However, parents seem to know which ECE program they wanted to choose for their child a priori. Again, this seemed to be based on word of mouth, reputation, and familiarity. As one parent explained, “if I hadn’t had the experience, then the website would have been handy.”

Summary of Parent Focus Groups

Parents made a number of closing comments that suggested their universal support and gratitude for the scholarship program as well as their keen awareness of the importance of high-quality ECE programs in supporting their children’s learning and school readiness.

- One parent was adamant that children need 2 years of an ECE program, and many parents noted the need for more full-day ECE programs. Parents described themselves as lucky to have made it into an ECE program that meets their needs, but knew other families who could benefit.

- It has made a big difference in the lives of children and families, especially by addressing the gaps in coverage available from CCAP. It has meant more consistent attendance for their children and they are grateful for this consistency.
- Many parents recommended making the scholarship program more widely available and doing a better job at advertising it to families
- Parents made many comments about how much they value their participation in the scholarship program and understand the importance of high-quality ECE programs in supporting their children’s learning and development (both pre-academic and social) and school readiness.
- When asked about their messages to the legislators, the comments are best summed up in the comment of one parent: “Tell them we’re old . . . we want the next generation to be well-educated.” “They [the children] are the next legislators . . . decisionmakers . . . we want them to be good leaders.”

Finally, it is worth noting that in one focus group, the discussion centered around and continued to return to the topic of the quality of the public school system available to their children. The parents in this focus group stated opinions and expressed concerns that the quality of the public schools that their children would be likely to enroll in when they reach kindergarten and beyond would be poor. For instance, one parent stated that he had already looked up the rankings of the public schools in his neighborhood, saw many schools with low rankings, and he was worried that he would not be able to enroll his child in a high-quality elementary school. Another parent seconded these concerns that the quality and dedication of the K–12 teachers in their neighborhood schools is poor, that teachers are “not as devoted to educating their children” as they should be. Such comments suggest that the parents understand how the child’s early learning experiences set the stage for school success, but that the quality of the elementary schools that the child attends can either serve to sustain early learning gains from attending a high-quality ECE program or erode them. Thus these parents understand the concept of children’s school readiness, the benefits of high-quality ECE programs, as well as the concept of “ready schools,” all embodied in the widely accepted National Education Goals Panel definition of school readiness.

Summary and Next Steps

The information in this brief summarizes the findings from the second year of implementation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Pilot Program. The SRI evaluation team will have discussions about the information in this report with MELF staff and representatives from the Board, the implementation team, and the CEED research staff. The outcome of such discussions will be to determine how the information from this process evaluation can be used to identify the following:

- Activities and strategies that have worked well in the past year.
- Changes in activities and strategies that could be improved in implementation in future replications.
- Issues or challenges that need further discussion with the scholarship model developers, including the following:

- How has the funding shortfall in the past year affected full implementation of the scholarship model?
- How have the changes in the implementation of the model in the past year impacted the outcome evaluation?
- How has the time-limited nature of MELF, the scholarship program, and the evaluation been affecting MELF’s ability to adequately test the scholarship model?
- As implemented over the past 2 years, has the parent empowerment feature of the scholarship model been implemented as intended? Are parents really “choosing” a high-quality ECE program? Has the parent mentoring component of the scholarship model been implemented as intended?
- In disseminating information about the program, how can information be communicated so that it is clear that the program included both a pilot study of implementation and an outcome evaluation?

The evaluation team will produce the following additional reports through December 2011:

- Scholarship Program Annual Report 2010 (due March 15, 2010) summarizing data collected through fall 2009
- Implementation Brief #3 (due September 15, 2010) describing implementation findings between June 2009 and July 2010³⁶
- Scholarship Program Annual Report 2011 (due March 15, 2011) summarizing data collected through fall 2010
- Implementation Brief #4 (due September 15, 2011) describing implementation findings between June 2010 and July 2011³⁷
- Scholarship Program Final Evaluation Report (draft due on November 15, 2011, for review with a technical work group, final report due on December 31, 2011) summarizing final results from the final evaluation report, including all outcome data through kindergarten entry for the entire sample of children with scholarships

³⁶ A one- to two-page fact sheet based on findings from this brief will also be prepared.

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Appendix A

Scholarship Program Model Implementation Manual

Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program Pilot Manual

2008



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Background Information

The Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) was established as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization in 2005. MELF was created through a partnership of leaders from the foundation, corporate, and civic sectors to address growing concerns about the lack of school readiness among many children entering kindergarten, and the significant impact this was having now, and would have in the future, on Minnesota's economy and quality of life.

While early childhood research shows that well-focused early childhood development (ECE) investments can produce high public returns, particularly for children living in families with low income levels, questions remain about the mechanism(s) that will most effectively bring ECE to a larger scale.

As part of its strategy, MELF has designed a pilot project to test the effectiveness of a market-oriented scholarship model based on a model proposed by Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. The **Scholarship Program** provides scholarships to low-income families in Saint Paul's Planning Districts 6 & 7 (see map of pilot area in Appendices B & C) to allow children to attend a high-quality **Early Childhood Education (ECE) program** at ages 3 and 4. Families select from area public and private ECE programs that meet quality standards set by MELF's pilot Parent Aware rating system and program approval at the Minnesota Department of Education, or provisional rating set forth by the Minnesota legislation.

The Scholarship Program also includes a parent mentoring component beginning as early as prenatal that provides families guidance on selecting an ECE program, skills and knowledge necessary to promote school readiness throughout their child's early years, and information about health, child development, and community resources to support their family's needs. The **City of Saint Paul** has included the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program as part of its larger education initiative and will provide leadership and coordination. Through this pilot, MELF's goal is to provide parent mentoring and/or scholarships for approximately 1,100 low-income children by 2011.

Program Development Process

A working group named the Scholarship Pilot Implementation Team (Implementation Team - see Appendix A for membership) met regularly for the year prior to program implementation to develop the guidelines outlined in the Scholarship Program Manual. The Implementation Team met with the Scholarship Advisory Group (see Appendix A for membership) and various other organizations, including **Resources for Child Caring (RCC)**, **Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health (Public Health)**, and the **Parent Aware** development team to solicit input and guidance.

The following decision values were applied in making determinations regarding policy and administration for the Scholarship Program:

- Ease of use for families
- Administrative simplicity
- Consistency with early childhood development theory
- Consistency with economic theory

The primary content of Scholarship Program Manual is presented in the following three sections. *Eligibility and Recruitment* discusses the requirements families must meet in order to participate in the program and the outreach strategies recommended for informing and recruiting families into the program. *Parent Mentoring* presents the goals and content of parent mentoring and how to use and coordinate existing home visiting programs. *Scholarships* discusses ECE program eligibility, the dosage and price of scholarships, and the timing of payments made to ECE programs. Each section begins with a description of policies and activities followed by the administrative duties required to carry them out. Words in **bold** are included in a Definition of Terms section at the end.

Family Eligibility and Recruitment

Family Eligibility

Family eligibility for parent mentoring and scholarships is based on child age, residence, and income. The parent mentoring component provides home visits from prenatal through kindergarten entry. Scholarships are available from age 3 until kindergarten entry. Families' roles and responsibilities are outlined in the application.

Families that apply are required to meet the eligibility requirements discussed below. The eligibility requirements are verified once at program entry; families are not required to re-verify later in the program. Once a family is accepted, they are in the program until the child reaches kindergarten.

Child age

Age cut-offs for both parent mentoring and scholarship eligibility occur on September 1 of the scholarship intake year. Families eligible for parent mentoring must have a pregnant mother or child less than 1 year old on September 1 of the intake year. Parent mentoring starts on a rolling enrollment basis; once families are deemed eligible, parent mentoring will begin shortly thereafter. (See Appendices I and J for details on annual cohorts.)

Families eligible for scholarships must have a child 3 years old on September 1 of the intake year. Only in the first year of the Scholarship Program do children age 3 on September 1, 2007, enroll in a program on a rolling enrollment basis. That is, once a child is deemed eligible, he or she can be enrolled in an ECE program. In subsequent years, the scholarship is applied as of Sept. 1 of that year, not on the day the child turns 3.

Families must show proof of child's age at intake. Pregnant mothers entering their child in the prenatal-age 1 cohort are excluded from this requirement.

Proof of age

The following documents can be used to verify child age

- Birth certificate
- Crib Card
- Passport
- Consulate registration card (Matricula Consular)
- I-94 Card
- Immunization record
- Baptismal record
- Health Insurance card

Eligible children must enroll in an ECE program by either Aug. 31, 2008 during the Ramp-up Year, or by January 15th in subsequent years. See Appendix J for clarification.

Address

Families must reside in Saint Paul Planning Districts 6 or 7 at enrollment of program. The following methods may be used to verify residence:

- Driver’s license
- State identification card
- Passport
- School identification card
- Birth certificate
- Shelter Verification form
- Rental lease
- Mortgage document
- Recent utility bill

If families move from Districts 6 or 7, they are still eligible to receive parent mentoring and scholarships provided they remain in Ramsey or Hennepin County. However, a family move from Districts 6 or 7 may result in an interruption in service if parent mentoring services and/or a scholarship-eligible ECE program are not available in the family’s new location.

Income

Families living at up to 185% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) are eligible to apply for the program. Table 1 shows the Federal Poverty Guidelines for 100% FPG and 185% FPG.

Table 1. Federal Poverty Guidelines*

Family Income		Family Size
100%FPG	185% FPG	
\$14,000	\$25,900	2
\$17,600	\$32,560	3
\$21,200	\$39,220	4
\$24,800	\$45,880	5
\$28,400	\$52,540	6
\$32,000	\$59,200	7
\$35,600	\$65,860	8
Add \$3,600 for each additional family member		
Federal Register, Jan. 2008		

* Updated annually

Proof of Income

The following methods can be used to verify income:

- Tax Form
- W-2 Form
- Pay Stub
- Statement from Employer

Income verification will also include:

- Child Support Payments/Letter
- Deductions including medical, dental, and visual insurance premiums, court-ordered child support paid for children not living in the home, and court-ordered spousal support

Families who are currently enrolled in MFIP (Minnesota Family Investment Program) or the Minnesota Child Care Assistance Program may have RCC verify the child age, address through Ramsey County in lieu of sending in above documents.

Children in foster care

Children in the foster care system are eligible to receive allowances if the child's foster care family is located within a pilot area.

If the child's biological parent or parents are actively working in partnership with the foster care family to provide for the child's well-being, the application should be completed by the child's biological parent or parents in partnership with the foster care family and county worker.

If the child's biological parent or parents are not working in partnership with the foster care family, the county may apply on behalf of the child.

The income of the child's biological parent or parents should be used to determine income eligibility. If the child's parent is unwilling, unable or unavailable to provide proof of income, the county may be able to share this information with you as part of the welfare system, similar to the way data is shared for purposes of CCAP and MFIP.

Use the number of family members in the child's biological family to determine household size, not the foster care family.

If the parent has abandoned the child and the county has no information about the family's income level, the child's family income should be considered \$0.

Service agreement

Parents accepted into the program will be required to complete an application to receive parent mentoring and scholarships. The application includes expectations that a family must follow in order to participate in the program. Note that families will only be allowed to receive a maximum of two years of scholarship. If families choose to wait an extra

year to send their child to kindergarten (i.e., the child would enter kindergarten at age 6), the Scholarship Program will not pay for the additional year of scholarship. The Implementation Team reviewed service agreements from Invest Early in Itasca County and a number of Head Start centers.

By completing and signing the application, families agree to the following:

- Enroll their children in a program that provides child care/early education for at least 12 hours per week.
- Select a child care/early education program that has achieved 3 or 4 stars or a provisional rating through Parent Aware, or provisional approval through the Minnesota Department of Education or Minnesota Department of Human Services.
- Give the child care/early education program a two week notice if they move or decide to transfer my child to another program.
- Meet with their assigned parent mentor on a regular basis.

Population Statistics

Table 2 shows the estimated number of eligible children in Districts 6 & 7 in a given year based on 2000 Census data. Note that according to recent research by Social Compact (www.socialcompact.org), the Census often underestimates the population count in urban areas.

Table 2. Approximate Number of Eligible Children in Planning Districts 6 & 7

% FPG (1999 Income)	Annual Total # of Eligible 3 and 4 Year Old Children
100 %	498
125%	604
175%	870
185%	924

Table 3 includes Ramsey County data from December 2006 showing a total of 467 families in the two ZIP codes encompassing most of Planning Districts 6 & 7 were receiving some form of child care assistance.

Table 3. Ramsey County Child Care Assistance Data by ZIP Code*

Zip Code	Basic Sliding Fee	MFIP	Transition Year
55103	42	100	14
55117	111	145	55
TOTAL	153	245	69

*not all families include child of 3 or 4 years.

Family Recruitment

Eligible families will be identified through a number of channels. Parent mentors will serve as one of the frontline organizations for recruiting. In addition, families will be identified by hospitals, social service agencies, and WIC offices, and medical clinics. In addition, information on parent mentoring and scholarships will be placed in neighborhood newspapers, community centers, and faith-based organizations.

Head Start and Public schools will also be likely recruiting partners, as will Resources for Child Caring (RCC). The children currently enrolled in each of these programs, as well as the children on any of their waiting lists, could all be screened to determine their eligibility for the Scholarship Program.

The Implementation Team will create relationships with other recruiting partners (hospitals, prenatal care providers, FFN providers, pediatricians, social workers, ECE programs, faith-based organizations, and other community-based organizations in and serving the target areas). These partners will be informed about eligibility requirements, application procedures, and program components of the Scholarship Program. Once identified, a family will complete the necessary paperwork and will be screened for eligibility into the Scholarship Program.

Family Eligibility and Recruitment Administration

The City of Saint Paul will implement a system for ongoing marketing of the program to families, and work with the Implementation Team to create and revise the parent brochure, scholarship application, and program policies and procedures. RCC will process applications, determine eligibility, and manage waiting lists (if needed). Below are considerations for each of these administrative tasks.

Marketing

The City of Saint Paul will oversee a broad ongoing strategy to make information available to parents. The Scholarship Implementation Team initially developed marketing materials to be used in each partnering organization. These materials are translated into languages most appropriate for the community.

Receiving applications and determining eligibility

RCC will send out applications to interested families and receive and review completed applications. If eligible, RCC will notify the family of eligibility via a letter from Mayor Coleman and communicate the next steps for the family. If a family's eligibility is unclear or incomplete RCC will follow-up with the family to collect missing information.

Waiting lists

RCC will create a waiting list if needed. If a waiting list develops, families will be prioritized on a first come first served basis. A slot that opens is filled as long as the child who left wasn't going to be 5 years old on Sept. 1 of the current year.

Brochure for parents

A parent brochure explains the parent mentoring and scholarship components of the

Scholarship Program, program eligibility guidelines, and the application process.

When Family Ends Scholarship Program

- Family moves outside of Ramsey or Hennepin County.
- Continual non-response from family enrolled in parent mentoring. See page 17.
- Continual absence from ECE program. ECE program and parent mentor will work with the family to improve attendance, but at some point, on a case by case basis, RCC will determine the date when a child is no longer part of the Scholarship Program.
- Family chooses to exit the Scholarship Program.

In each of these cases RCC will inform the family that they are no longer eligible or enrolled in the Scholarship Program.

Parent Mentoring

Parent mentors visit the homes of enrolled families beginning prenatally until children enter kindergarten. The primary goal of parent mentoring is that each participating parent is provided with information necessary to select a high quality ECE program and be involved in the program's activities and child's education. Secondary goals of parent mentoring include the following: 1) parents have skills and knowledge necessary to promote school readiness throughout their child's early years (birth to 5); and 2) parents have access to community resources to support their family's education and health needs. In summary, parent mentoring will provide a continuum of contact and service prenatal-age 5 to help keep parents engaged in their children's development and education prior to their children reaching age eligibility for scholarships (age 3) and beyond.

The primary goal requires fewer financial resources to accomplish than the secondary goals; nevertheless, providing parents with information to select a high quality ECE program is central to the Scholarship Program's logic model (see Appendices F and G). That is, without information on selecting a high quality ECE program, parents will likely be less able to select the best setting for their child, and parents will less likely be as involved in their child's educational experience.¹

The secondary goals of building and enhancing parent skills to promote school readiness and access to community resources address two fundamental reasons for establishing the Parent Mentoring and Scholarship Program. First, the early years of life are essential to child brain development prior to the age of 3 when children are eligible for scholarships. The parent mentoring component is designed to improve early health, nutrition, bonding and interactions between child and parents. Because of the connection to parent mentors, families who start parent mentoring prenatally or up to the child's first birthday will hopefully be more likely to have their children enter the scholarship phase at an appropriate developmental level. Second, low-income families face barriers to participating in opportunities for their children. These barriers include unemployment, lack of transportation, chemical dependency, mental health issues, among others. The mentoring component is not expected to address these barriers directly, but to connect the family to resources to alleviate these problems.

Content

Parent mentoring involves home visitors trained to work with parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Parent mentoring employs a strengths-based approach, building on family assets and involving parents in the decision-making and planning process.

Mentoring services will focus on various family needs, including:

- Assistance with choosing a quality ECE program, including family friend and neighbor (FFN) care, for children younger than age 3;
- Encouraging preventative health, including check-ups, immunizations, and early

¹ Families eligible for scholarships can only choose among high quality ECE programs; nevertheless, parent mentors can help families make choices based on the characteristics of the ECE programs.

- screenings
- Education about child development, including health, nutrition and early literacy
- Assisting families in accessing other community resources necessary to meet basic needs (financial, food, etc.)

Dosage

The mentoring relationship includes more frequent visits during the first few months and years of a child's life and less frequent visits as the child grows older, particularly at ages 3 and 4. In addition, an intake screening by Public Health of the family will be used to determine the necessary amount of parent mentoring. After Public Health assigns a family to a home visiting agency, the home visiting agency should meet with the family within four weeks of receiving the assignment. A family with relatively more challenges would receive more frequent visits relative to a family with fewer challenges. Ideally, a parent mentor will develop a relatively long-term relationship with a family, but when parent mentors change, a smooth transition will be planned to minimize disruption. A more detailed discussion of dosage levels for each age cohort is listed below.

Cultural Diversity

Mentoring will be culturally appropriate, language-appropriate, and responsive to the unique needs of families.

Eligible home visiting programs

As part of the MELF's commitment to building capacity and leveraging existing resources rather than creating new programs, the Scholarship Program will use existing home visiting programs to deliver mentoring services to participating families. Home visiting programs submitted a response to an RFP released by Saint Paul-Ramsey County Department of Public Health (Public Health) and will enter into a contract relationship. A number of children eligible for parent mentoring in Districts 6 & 7 currently receive home visits from these organizations. The Scholarship Program will harness the resources these programs provide.

Parent Mentor Training

General

Home visitors are trained to work with parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers on issues including health, nutrition, child development, and education. Home visitors include early childhood professionals and public health nurses. The Scholarship Program does not provide general training on parent mentoring. The Program does, however, provide training on the Scholarship Program components, the Selecting Quality Early Education and Care Module (see below). Home visiting programs that provide parent mentoring for the Scholarship Program should staff accordingly. Participating programs are expected to provide families with experienced, well-trained mentors.

Selecting Quality Early Education and Care Module²

The Scholarship Program does provide training to parent mentors on how to select a high-quality ECE program when their children are eligible for scholarships at ages 3 and high-quality ECE settings prior to age 3. The training includes the following elements:

- Providing parents with information about the importance of quality early care and education.
- Guiding parents on how to select quality child care using Parent Aware ratings. If parents select family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care or an informal ECE program prior to age 3, providing guidance on elements that are important to consider.
- For families with children less than age 1 born between Sept. 2, 2006 and Sept. 1, 2007, informing parents about the scholarships that will be available when their children turn 3.
- Informing about and assisting parents in enrolling in CDBG programs/CCAP.
- For parents with children ages 3 and 4, informing parents about the ECE programs available for their children and helping parents select an ECE program.
- Collecting data from home visits for Scholarship Program evaluation.
- Recruiting families into the Scholarship Program based on contacts developed through home visits. That is, parent mentors serve as on-the-ground recruiters in District 6 & 7 neighborhoods.

Staff from home visiting agencies received training on the Module and include it in their curriculum. Home visiting organizations will be compensated for delivering the Module (see Contracts section below).

Foundational Mentoring

Funds for Foundational Mentoring are available to home visiting agencies that provide services to eligible families not already enrolled in a home visiting agency's program. When such a child is enrolled in the Scholarship Program, the home visiting agency serving the family will receive Foundational Mentoring funds, as listed below. The level of service (number of visits, length of visits, etc.) the home visiting agency provides for families receiving Foundational Mentoring in the Scholarship Program can differ from the level of service the home visiting agency provides as part of its program.

Administration

Public Health will administer the parent mentoring component, including the following tasks:

Family recruitment and start time

Family recruitment is outlined in the previous section of the manual. Public Health will play a strong role in recruiting families with pregnant mothers and children younger than

² Training module developed by RCC and Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network

age 1. About half of eligible families in Districts 6 & 7 would have likely come into contact with Public Health's home visiting program without the presence of the Scholarship Program. Parent mentors will play an on-the-ground role in recruiting families into the program for both age cohorts.

An intensive recruitment process will start in the fall of each year (beginning in 2007). Some families will already be receiving home visiting. Families with children less than age 1 born between Sept. 2, 2006, and Sept. 1, 2007, will be eligible for scholarships when their children turn 3 in 2010. Therefore recruiting this particular group is a priority because the children will receive the entire continuum of services – parent mentoring and one year of a scholarship. Additional families could begin receiving home visiting during the fall. Children born after Sept. 1, 2007, will not receive scholarships unless the Scholarship Program is extended.

Assigning parent mentors to families

Once a family is enrolled in the Scholarship Program program, a parent mentor will be assigned to the family. Public Health developed a system to determine which home visiting organization is the best match for the families entering the Scholarship Program with children prenatal to age 1 and at age 3. For all families, an intake visit will occur to assess the best match for a parent mentor, and determine the initial level of the intensity of parent mentoring required. After Public Health assigns a family to a home visiting agency, the home visiting agency should meet with the family within four weeks of receiving the assignment. For families entering the Scholarship Program with children age 3, parent mentoring will be less frequent and focus on maintaining stability and engagement with their child's ECE program.

Contracts with and payments to home visiting organizations

Public Health will administer contracts with area home visiting agencies. Home visiting agencies will sign contracts to deliver the following services:

- Provide the Selecting Quality Early Education and Care Module for families currently receiving their home visiting services.
- Provide Foundational Mentoring to additional families; also deliver the Module.

The payment amounts listed below will be provided on a per family basis. A home visiting agency has discretion regarding how they spread payments out over the families they provide services. That is, some families may require more resources than the given payment amount while other families may require less.

Payment Amounts

Selecting Quality Early Education and Care Module

\$400 per family annually, or \$100 quarterly

Frequency of visits: Either including content in the home visiting agency's current schedule of foundational parent mentoring visits (see below) and/or adding visits to cover the content. On average, it should take the equivalent of three to four home visits to

deliver the Module.

Prenatal-Age 1

- Provide parents with information about the importance of quality care. This information will likely be more pertinent when the child is closer to age 1.
- Guide parents on how to select quality child care using Parent Aware ratings. If parents select FFN care prior to scholarship age, provide guidance on elements that are important to consider.
- For families with children less than age 1 born between Sept. 2, 2006 and Sept. 1, 2007, inform parents the child will be eligible for a scholarship at age 3.
- Inform about and assist parents in enrolling in MFIP/CCAP. (For all age groups)
- Collect data from home visits for Scholarship Program evaluation. (For all age groups)

Age 1-Age 2

- Reinforce the importance of quality care.
- Guide parents on how to select quality child care using Parent Aware ratings. If parents select FFN care prior to scholarship age, provide guidance on elements that are important to consider.

Age 2-Age 3

- Same information as above and begin helping parents enroll in ECE program:
 - Provide parents a list of ECE programs.
 - Possibly make site visits with parents.
 - Parents select program for their child.

Age 3-Age 4

- Help families when they move to ensure they stay connected with current ECE program or move to another program.
- Encourage parent involvement in ECE program.

Age 4-Age 5

- Help families when they move to ensure they stay connected with current ECE program or move to another program.
- Encourage parent involvement in ECE program.
- Around the time of kindergarten enrollment, check with family to ensure they are involved in the process.

Foundational Mentoring

Home visiting agencies identify children who are funded through their regular program and children who are not and therefore are eligible for Foundational Mentoring funds. Home visiting agencies will receive the following payments on a per child basis.

Table 4. Budget for Foundational Parent Mentoring by Child Age

Less than one	\$1,900
1-year-olds	\$1,400
2-year-olds	\$900
3-year-olds	\$400
4-year-olds	\$400

For each age group, visits should include the information that the home visiting agencies already provide to families. The topics listed below serve as guidelines.

Prenatal-Age 1: \$1,900 per family annually, or \$475 quarterly

Frequency of visits: Every other week to once per month

Topics:

- Maternal and child health and nutrition
- Child/parent bonding and interactions
- Information on community resources (For all age groups)

Age 1-Age 2: \$1,400 per family annually, or \$350 quarterly

Frequency of visits: Every other week to once per month

Topics:

- Maternal and child health and nutrition
- Child/parent bonding and interactions

Age 2-Age 3: \$900 per family annually, or \$225 quarterly

Frequency of visits: Once per month to every 6 or 7 weeks

Topics:

- Maternal and child health and nutrition
- Child/parent bonding and interactions

Age 3-Age 4: \$400 per family annually, or \$100 quarterly

Frequency of visits: For some families check in every 3 to 5 months, while others more frequently, especially when child attendance slips or if the family moves.

- Coach and encourage parent involvement in child's education at home, and perhaps reinforce activities child participated in at the ECE program.

Age 4-Age 5: \$400 per family annually, or \$100 quarterly

Frequency of visits: For some families check in every 3 to 5 months, while others more frequently during occasions when child attendance slips or if the family moves.

- Coach and encourage parent involvement in child’s education at home, and perhaps reinforce activities child participated in at the ECE program.

Payment schedule

Payments will be made on a quarterly basis beginning with an Advance payment to enable home visiting agencies to staff up. In order to calculate quarterly payments, the home visiting agency provides Public Health with the number of months X number of families received the Module (families that are enrolled in the home visiting agency’s program) and the number of months X number of families received Foundational Mentoring and the Module. Below is an example of a potential payment schedule.

February 2007	Advance payment
April 1, 2008	Payment for 1 st quarter depending on how many families are served
July 1, 2008	Payment for 2 nd quarter
October 1, 2008	Payment for 3 rd quarter
January 1, 2009	Payment for 4 th quarter

Evaluation

In working with **SRI**, the Implementation Team and Public Health may balance allowing flexibility in home visiting models and prescriptive elements to provide consistency for evaluation. The evaluation will look at child outcomes at age 3 to assess the effect of the parent mentoring program prior to children entering the scholarship component. Additional outcomes to measure include school readiness at kindergarten and parent involvement in selecting and participating in parent programs at an ECE program.

Budget

The enclosed spreadsheet allows for changing assumptions on the number of families currently served by home visiting agencies. Using conservative assumptions, the 4-year total would cost about \$3.1 million, not including administration costs incurred by Public Health.

Minimum number of visits for payment

Home visiting programs are reimbursed based on the number of families they are serving, not on a per visit basis. Therefore, home visiting programs allocate their resources over the balance of the families they serve based on family needs. That is, some families may require more visits than others. Home visiting programs are expected to generally follow the visit frequency guidelines in the manual. The lower limits presented below denote the base number of visits required to receive payment in the quarter. If visits are less than the limit, the home visiting program can't count the family for quarterly reimbursement. Also note that after Public Health assigns a family to a home visiting agency, the home visiting agency should meet with the family within four weeks of receiving the assignment. Home visiting agencies should contact Public Health with questions regarding required number of visits.

Prenatal-Age 1

Lower limit: Program meets with family 3 times per quarter.

Age 1-Age 2

Lower limit: Program meets with family 2 times per quarter.

Age 2-Age 3

Lower limit: Program attempts to meet with family at least 1 time per quarter. Succeeds in meeting with family 1 time in 6 month period.

Age 3-Age 5

Lower limit: Program meets with family 2 times per year.

Cessation of parent mentoring by parents

Parents originally sign a service agreement to participate in parent mentoring services. If a family decides to refuse parent mentoring services prior to their child turning 3 years of age, the child won't be guaranteed a scholarship at age 3. The family can apply for a scholarship when their child turns 3, but will receive one based on availability. However, if a family decides to refuse parent mentoring services after the child has enrolled in an ECE program at age 3, the refusal won't affect the child's scholarship.

Families who enter during pregnancy through age 1, but drop out prior to their child's first birthday, can be replaced with a family in the same cohort who's child is less than age 1 with permission by the MELF. Families that drop out of mentoring with a child older than age 1 are not replaced.

A parent mentoring agency should end service to a family if there has been no response after two months since the time of referral to the parent mentoring agency *or* three months after a parent mentoring agency's last contact with a family, *and* three documented attempts to contact/see client using options of phone, letter and drop in visit, with one of the three attempts being a drop in visit. Mentoring agencies must notify Public Health as soon as this service ends via e-mail to bill.jungwirth@co.ramsey.mn.us and cc. to sue.mitchell@co.ramsey.mn.us. Public Health will inform RCC through an e-mail and make a notation on the shared list when a family's parent mentoring case has been closed.

If the family has not enrolled in an ECE program, RCC then sends the family a letter explaining that their scholarship has been closed and that they would need to re-apply for the scholarship program. If the family has enrolled in an ECE program, scholarship funds continue to be paid to the ECE program.

Total number of children

See Appendices I and J for the annual number of children enrolled each year. 1,100 families will receive 1 to almost 4 years of parent mentoring.

Final consideration

Home visiting services often differ based on the unique training, funding, mission, and/or capacity of an organization. Because of this service variety, agencies may not have consistent contact or coordination with other home visiting organizations. A secondary goal of this pilot is to improve coordination and learning among home visiting agencies while increasing access to parent mentoring.

Scholarships

Scholarships are available to families living below 185% FPG in Saint Paul Planning Districts 6 & 7 when their children are 3 and 4 years old (see Family Eligibility and Recruitment for details). Parents may choose between a half-day and full-day ECE program for their child. Only ECE programs that meet eligibility standards can enroll children with scholarships. This section presents policies regarding ECE program eligibility, the scholarship dosage and amount, and administrative tasks.

ECE programs eligible for scholarships: To access a scholarship, the ECE program must have a Parent Aware rating of 3 or 4 or receive a provisional rating by either the Minnesota Department of Human Services or the Minnesota Department of Education. Programs must also sign a program agreement from with Resources for Child Caring (see Appendix L).

Eligible programs may include:

- Private or non-profit child care centers
- Licensed family child care programs
- Private or non-profit preschools
- Public school-based programs
- Head Start programs

Location

ECD program location is restricted to the Parent Aware pilot area: the City of Saint Paul, neighborhoods in North Minneapolis and Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties. However, accredited programs in the 7-county metropolitan area may apply to be a part of Parent Aware. Any of the above ECE programs may apply to participate in the Scholarship Program.

Maintaining approval status

ECE programs must maintain **approval status** via Parent Aware.

Scholarship Dosage and Amount

Research doesn't definitively set the specific amount of time per day and days per year that achieve school readiness outcomes for low-income children. Some therapeutic preschools offer intensive center-based experiences, but only a few hours per day and not all five days per week. Studies in Oklahoma, Michigan and New Jersey show that high-quality half-day programs 2 ½ to 3 hours per day, 4 or 5 days per week, demonstrate large effects on school readiness. In addition, high-quality child care programs that engage children 8 or more hours per day 5 days per week have shown positive school

readiness outcomes.

Research does point to the elements of a program that achieve school readiness outcomes, reflected in the Parent Aware rating too. Furthermore, high-quality ECE programs often cost more than lower quality ECE programs. For example, in order to attract and retain well-trained teachers, high-quality ECE programs may pay higher salaries.

Goals for scholarships:

- Remove financial barriers to families choosing high-quality child care and early education opportunities.
- Provide resources for ECE programs to provide high-quality services that produce improved school readiness outcomes for low-income children.
- Provide incentives to the ECE market to spur new entrants and expansion among current ECE programs.

Dosage and scholarship amounts

Half-day program

Eligible half-day ECE programs include private and publicly funded child care programs, Head Start and Saint Paul Public School programs that provide services 12 hours to 17 hours per week. Payment rates are tiered at two levels of service, 12 to 14 hours per week and 15 to 17 hours per week. When an ECE program applies to participate in the pilot, it declares which level(s) of service it provides.

Half-day ECE programs will be paid up to \$140 per week for a 12 to 14 hour program and \$160 per week for a 15 to 17 hour program. All programs will be paid on a 4-week reimbursement basis.

Example reimbursement set-up:

Hours per Week	Weekly Rate	Annual	4-week Reimbursement
12 to 14	\$140	\$7,280	\$560
15 to 17	\$160	\$8,320	\$640

Full-day program

Eligible full-day programs include center-based and family-based child care programs, as well as half-day programs listed above that provide wrap-around care. The minimum hours of service is 35, which mirrors the minimum number of hours a program needs to provide services in order to qualify for a CCAP weekly reimbursement rate.

Center-based programs will be paid up to \$250 per week and family-based programs will be paid up to \$180 per week. The difference in the two rates matches the difference in

Ramsey County’s child care subsidy reimbursement rates between a center-based and family-based program. As described in the Manual, programs will be paid on a 4-week reimbursement basis.

Example reimbursement set-up:

35 Hours	Weekly rate	Annual	4-week Reimbursement
Center-based	\$250	\$13,000	\$1,000
Family-based	\$180	\$9,360	\$720

ECE programs that offer 18 to 34 Hours

ECE programs that offer more than a half-day (12 to 17 hours per week) but less than a full-day (35 or more hours per week) will be reimbursed on the following scales for center-based and family-based programs. Fractional weekly hours are rounded down to the nearest hour (for example, 29.5 hours = 29 hours on the payment scale).

Center-based Programs, 18 to 34 Hours per Week			
Hours	Weekly rate	Annual	4-week Reimbursement
18	\$165	\$8,580	\$660
19	\$170	\$8,840	\$680
20	\$175	\$9,100	\$700
21	\$180	\$9,360	\$720
22	\$185	\$9,620	\$740
23	\$190	\$9,880	\$760
24	\$195	\$10,140	\$780
25	\$200	\$10,400	\$800
26	\$205	\$10,660	\$820
27	\$210	\$10,920	\$840
28	\$215	\$11,180	\$860
29	\$220	\$11,440	\$880
30	\$225	\$11,700	\$900
31	\$230	\$11,960	\$920

32	\$235	\$12,220	\$940
33	\$240	\$12,480	\$960
34	\$245	\$12,740	\$980

Family-based Programs, 18 to 34 Hours per Week			
Hours	Weekly rate	Annual	4-week Reimbursement
18 to 23	\$165	\$8,580	\$660
24 to 29	\$170	\$8,840	\$680
30 to 34	\$175	\$9,100	\$700

Scholarship Payment Schedule

This subsection presents the payment schedule first for private early childhood care and education programs and then separately for Head Start programs and public school pre-kindergarten programs.

Private early childhood care and education programs

Scholarship funds flow directly to ECE programs and include three parts: Advance, Tuition, and Quality Grant.

Advance: An upfront payment when child enrolls equal to 2 weeks of the program’s tuition. The Advance can be paid up to 2 weeks in advance of the start of a child’s participation in the ECE program. The Advance serves as a deposit to cover the last 2 weeks of a child’s tuition at the ECE program.³

Tuition: Every 4 weeks the Scholarship Program pays the ECE program the same tuition the ECE program charges private pay parents minus CCAP payments made on behalf of the family to the ECE program. For a child on CCAP, the Tuition payment covers the gap between the CCAP payments and full tuition (including family co-payment and absent day charges).⁴

Quality Grant: Every 12 weeks (and for the fourth payment period in the year 16 weeks) the Scholarship Program pays the ECE program a Quality Grant to enhance and maintain quality. Quality Grants are made based on the aggregate number of scholarship children enrolled at an ECE program. The formula used to calculate the Quality Grant is as follows.

$$\begin{aligned}
 & (4\text{-week reimbursement rate}) * (\# \text{ of } 4\text{-week blocks}^5 \text{ of scholarship children served}) \\
 & - \text{Tuition payments and CCAP payments received} \\
 & = \text{Quality Grant}
 \end{aligned}$$

³ If the child is eligible for CCAP payments, the final two weeks can’t be billed for CCAP reimbursement since it is paid for with the Advance.

⁴ For administrative simplicity, the Pilot would make payments every 4 weeks. If a child started during the previous 4 week period, the Tuition payment would be reduced accordingly.

⁵ If the program has weeks that do not divide evenly into four week blocks, then the fraction should be added on to the number of four week blocks (i.e., five weeks served = 1.25, 10 weeks served = 2.5, etc.).

Head Start and public school-based programs

Payments to Head Start centers and public school-based programs will follow the same schedule and rates as payments to private ECE programs. The Advance and Tuition payments to Head Start centers and public school-based programs will equal the maximum amount available minus CCAP payments since neither organization in general charges parents for services (although some School Readiness programs might charge a parent fee). This also means a Quality Grant will not be paid to these programs since the Advance and the 4-week reimbursement Tuition payment will equal the total scholarship amount.

Reporting requirements

Because Head Start centers and public school-based programs receive public funds to pay for operating costs and they are not backed out of the scholarship amount as they are for CCAP payments, both Head Start and public school-based programs are required to submit a Program Plan and a Year-End Report. (Private ECE programs are not required to submit these reports for the Scholarship Program.) The Program Plan is designed to show how these programs will use scholarship funds received that are above private pay tuition based on the number of children enrolled. The Program Plan deadline can be set after ECE programs begin providing services to children with scholarships.

1. Program Plan

Head Start and Public School-Based programs are required to complete a Program Plan based on different levels of potential enrollment. The three categories of acceptable expenditure beyond private pay tuition include:

- *Expand the number of children to whom services are provided.*
- *Increase duration of services provided.* Here the ECE program could expand the amount of time children are served.
- *Increase current quality levels.* Quality improvements include staff training, curricula, infrastructure

Principles:

- Scholarship funds can benefit children who don't have scholarships; that is, the funds don't have to be targeted only to children with scholarships.
- Scholarship funds must be spent in the current fiscal year, but can pay for improvements that will benefit children in subsequent years.
- Scholarship funds must first be used to cover any parent fees or charges.

Review:

- A Review Team that includes members the Implementation Team and MELF reviews the Program Plans and offers feedback to ECE programs..

2. Year-end Report

At the end of each program year, ECE programs are required to submit a 2 to 3 page report on how scholarship funds were used in the following three areas:

- *Expand the number of children to whom services are provided.* How many children were provided services due to the scholarship funds compared with the number of children provided services if the ECE program didn't receive scholarship funds)?
- *Increase duration of services provided.* How many children received a longer duration of services due to the scholarship funds and for how much longer?
- *Increase current quality levels.* How much funds were used to support quality levels and which quality supports did the funds finance?

This report will be developed in cooperation with SRI to reduce duplication in data collection.

Review

- The Review Team reviews the Final Report and offers feedback to ECE programs.

ECE Collaboration Programs

ECE programs can work together to provide a full-day option for families. For example, a half-day preschool program may collaborate with a child care program to offer full-day services to a family. Both of the programs must have a 3- or 4-star or provisional rating on Parent Aware. Each collaboration program must offer a minimum of 12 hours/week to the child. The two programs must complete the Collaboration ECE Program Application and submit it to RCC in order to establish a payment schedule. The two programs must indicate on the Collaboration ECE Program Application how the total payments are to be split between the two programs and the fee schedule both ECE programs would charge private pay families for the same services provided.

Attendance records and payments are submitted to RCC by each program separately. RCC writes two checks, one for each of the programs based on how the funds are split between the two programs (as indicated on the Collaboration ECE Program Application). The ECE program's private pay fee schedule is used to account for CCAP payments and determine Quality Grant amounts.

Here are the steps two programs should take to offer a collaboration program:

1. Select days and hours the collaboration program is offered.
2. Determine whether the collaboration program will provide transportation between the two programs. Scholarship funds can be used for transportation.
3. Determine how funds will be split between the two programs. For example, if the collaboration program offers 40 hours per week total, the two programs must determine how to divide the \$1,000 4-week payment. Two programs could divide the total amount between the programs based on the proportional number of hours each program provides, the private pay fees one or both of the programs charge, and/or the cost of services the programs agree to pay for (such as transportation).

The programs indicate on the ECE Program Collaboration Application how to divide payments between the two programs.

RCC provides information to the City of St. Paul about collaboration ECE programs. The City of St. Paul publishes a complete list of available collaboration ECE programs on its Web site. In addition, RCC includes collaboration ECE programs

Parent choice limited to one program

Parents may send their child(ren) to two programs that are not listed as a collaboration, but may use their scholarship funds to pay for only one of those programs. However, as mentioned above, two ECE programs can work together to provide full-day services as a collaboration. Parents and parent mentors can encourage ECE programs to collaborate, but ECE programs must ultimately take the necessary steps to create a collaboration.

Child Enrollment Start Dates and Child Move

For children currently enrolled in an ECE program

ECE programs can enroll a child by one of these methods:

1. Provide to RCC a faxed copy of the parent's award letter plus the hours per week the child is attending and if the child is receiving CCAP; or fax to RCC the parent's and child's names, the hours per week the child is attending and indicate if the child is receiving CCAP,
2. E-mail RCC the parent's and child's names, the hours per week the child is attending, and if the child is receiving CCAP, or
3. Call RCC; however a fax or e-mail with the above information must be sent to RCC within two weeks. Payment will not be released until RCC receives documentation.

The payment start date will be the date of the fax, e-mail or phone call, provided the ECE program has signed a Program Agreement Form. If an ECE program has not signed a Program Agreement Form, the start date will be delayed until the ECE program has submitted a Program Agreement Form. The Advance will be sent within 2 weeks of the start date. Note that scholarship payments do not apply to fees charged or costs of service incurred prior to this date.

For children with a future start date

ECE programs can enroll a child by one of these methods:

1. Provide to RCC a faxed copy of the parent's award letter plus the hours per week the child will attend, the child's projected start date, and if the child is expected to receive CCAP; or fax to RCC the parent's and child's names, the hours per week the child will attend, projected start date, and indicate if the child is expected to receive CCAP,
2. E-mail RCC the parent's and child's names, hours per week the child will attend, projected start date, and if the child is expected to receive CCAP, or
3. Call RCC; however a fax or e-mail with the above information must be sent to RCC within two weeks. Payment will not be released until RCC receives documentation.

The payment start date will be the date of the fax, e-mail, phone call, or child's actual

start date, whichever is later provided the ECE program has signed a Program Agreement Form. If an ECE program has not signed a Program Agreement Form, the start date will be delayed until the ECE program has submitted a Program Agreement Form. The Advance will be sent within 2 weeks of the start date indicated by the ECE program. Scholarship Tuition payments will begin after the child starts attending the ECE program, as indicated on the claim form ECE programs submit to RCC every four weeks.

ECE programs that charge higher fees than scholarship payments

ECE programs that charge higher fees than scholarship payments can charge parents for the difference. However, ECE programs must inform parents about the cost before they enroll in the ECE program.

Child move from an ECE program

ECE programs receive a 2 weeks notice before scholarship funding is terminated due to a **child move**. The 2 weeks of service is covered by the Advance. A child move is established on the following conditions:

- Family provides written notice to ECE program or RCC.
- Parent mentor informs ECE program or RCC. (RCC confirms with family)
- A social service agency informs ECE program or RCC. (RCC confirms with family)
- Consistent absence from ECE program. ECE program and parent mentor will work with the family to improve attendance, but at some point, on a case by case basis, RCC will determine the date when a child's scholarship has ended and the child is no longer enrolled at the ECE program.

Recruitment and Communication with ECE Programs

The Implementation Team has proposed a number of strategies to recruit ECE programs to participate in the Scholarship Program and for ongoing communication. Marketing and communication will work in conjunction with the Parent Aware pilot team, Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network, and RCC. Some strategies include:

- News and forms on websites of the MELF, City of Saint Paul, Resources for Child Caring, and the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network
- Joint Parent Aware and Scholarship kick-off event for ECE programs in July 2007
- Brochure for ECE programs
- Site visits to eligible ECE programs (see Family Recruitment, above)
- Outreach to community leaders
- Informational community events for ECE programs about Parent Aware

Administration of Scholarships

This section presents a number of administrative tasks regarding the scholarships that will largely be conducted by RCC.

Implement recruitment and communication strategies with ECE programs

These strategies will be coordinated by the City of Saint Paul, Parent Aware, and RCC.

Administer contracts and payments with ECE programs

ECE programs sign a contract to participate in the Scholarship Program. (see Appendix L.) ECE programs agree to the following:

- Declare whether program is half-day (12 to 14 hours or 15 to 17 hours) or full-day (at least 35 hours per week)
- Maintain and provide Scholarship Program daily attendance records every 4 weeks
- Maintain and provide Scholarship Program CCAP reimbursement records every 4 weeks
- Maintain approval status through the Parent Aware
- Provide specified child information to parent mentor as needed
- The MELF reserves the right to review financial records relevant to the Scholarship payments

RCC agrees to the following: (See Appendix L)

- Make Advance, Tuition and Quality Grant payments as outlined above
- Provide at least two weeks notice before a child leaves the program and payment ends

RCC developed a payment mechanism for calculating payments to ECE programs and delivering funds. The payment calculation requires an application that converts child enrollment data and program tuition rates into Advance, Tuition, and Quality Grant payments. Payments may be set up for electronic direct deposit transfer. The Scholarship Program is also responsible for determining a child move.

Definition of Terms

approval status: reached when ECE program achieves a Parent Aware rating of 3 or 4; or provisional rating from the Minnesota Department of Education or Minnesota Department of Human Services.

child move: the day Scholarship Program determines a child will be or is no longer enrolled at an ECE program.

City of Saint Paul – Mayor Coleman’s office is responsible for providing overall coordination of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program.

ECE program: includes private or non-profit child care centers, licensed family child care programs, private or non-profit preschools, Saint Paul school-based programs and Head Start programs.

national accreditation: An ECE program accredited through an accrediting body included in rate differential statute.

Parent Aware: Provides ratings of early child care and education programs and also provides resources to programs to improve quality. The 3-year pilot of the Parent Aware Rating Tool will include licensed child care providers/early educators in five locations: Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties, the City of Saint Paul, neighborhoods of North Minneapolis and the Wayzata School District. Accredited programs in the 7-county metro area may apply to be included in Parent Aware. <http://www.parentawareratings.org>

Resources for Child Caring (RCC): Organization responsible for determining family eligibility, child moves from ECE programs and administering payments to ECE programs.

Saint Paul-Ramsey County Department of Public Health: Organization responsible for administering the parent mentoring, including contracting with existing parent mentoring organizations, assessing families and referring families to these organizations for parent mentoring services.

Scholarship Program: refers to the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program Pilot project or administration.

SRI: Organization evaluating the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program.



For additional information, please contact:
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Appendix B

List of Interviewees (May–August 2009)

Appendix B List of Interviewees

Developers

1. Art Rolnick – Scholarship Program
2. Rob Grunewald – Scholarship Program

MELF staff and leadership

3. Duane Benson – MELF Executive Director
4. Denise Garcia – Director of Administration, MELF
5. Rob Johnson – Founding Director of MELF since 2005
6. Laurie Davis – consultant to MELF
7. Ken Burdick – MELF Board Member

Legislators

8. Nora Slawik – State senator, co-authored allowances bill, chaired the Early Childhood Finance Committee in the House
9. Mindy Greiling – State representative, chair of House K-12 Education and Finance Committee
10. Margaret Kelliher – State representative, Speaker of the House

Scholarship Program Implementation Team (Implementers)

11. Lisa Cariveau – Early Education Project Coordinator, Mayor's office / currently Child Development Services, MN Department of Human Services working on the Pre-K Allowances Project.
12. Sandy Myers – Director of Programs at RCC
13. Patti Kester – Scholarship Program Coordinator at RCC
14. Carolyn Veese-Egbide – Program Manager at RCC
15. Sue Mitchell – Saint Paul Ramsey County Public Health Program Supervisor (coordinates Parent Mentor Agencies)
16. Kathy Johannes – Saint Paul Ramsey County Public Health Program Planning and Evaluation Team in Healthy Families section (parent mentor for the scholarship program)
17. Don Sysyn – Program Manager at ECFE (Parent Mentor Agency)
18. Corinne Swenson – Supervisor and parent mentor at ECFE (Parent Mentor Agency)
19. Georgia Boehlke – Program Manager at Lifetrack (Parent Mentor Agency)
20. Vallay Varro – Education Policy Director for the Mayor's Office
21. Lauren O'Brien – RCC referral staff
22. Ka Vang – RCC referral staff
23. Alicia Wilfahrt – Neighborhood House parent mentor

Parent Aware

24. Kathryn Tout – Evaluation PI for the Parent Aware Quality Rating System

ECE Program Directors and Providers

25. Head Start/Early Head Start
26. Non-Profit
27. Non-Profit
28. Public Schools PreK Program
29. Non-Profit
30. For-Profit
31. For-Profit
32. Non-Profit
33. For-Profit
34. For-Profit

Appendix C

Interview Protocol (2009)

A. Core questions (with follow-up probes) for all interviewees

Tell interviewees: "We are asking everyone almost all of the same questions. If I ask you a question for which you have no information, please say so, and we will continue on with the next question."

1. What is your day-to-day connection to/role in the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program? What specific activities have you been involved in since June of 2008?
 - a. How involved? Would you say that you . . . ?
 - (4) Work on it most days
 - (3) Some involvement . . . about once or twice a week
 - (2) About monthly
 - (1) Updates a few times a year or less
2. Since starting up in January 2008, how do you think the implementation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program has been going?
 - a. Overall, would you say implementation has gone? Has it gone:
 - (4) Extremely well
 - (3) Very well
 - (2) Somewhat well
 - (1) Not very well
 - b. Why do you say that about how things have gone with implementation?
 - c. How do you think the recruitment and outreach to families has gone? Tell me why you say that.
 - i. Has anything surprised you about how recruitment and outreach to families has gone so far?
 - ii. What has been successful?
 - iii. What has been a challenge?
 - d. How do you think the outreach to and participation of center-based programs has gone? Tell me why you say that.
 - i. Has anything surprised you about how outreach and participation of center-based programs has gone so far?
 - ii. What has been successful?
 - iii. What has been a challenge?
 - e. How do you think the outreach to and participation of family-based programs has gone? Tell me why you say that.
 - i. Has anything surprised you about how outreach and participation of family-based programs has gone so far?
 - ii. What has been successful?
 - iii. What has been a challenge?

- f. How do you think the evaluation has gone? Tell me why you say that.
 - i. Has anything surprised you about how the evaluation has gone so far?
 - ii. What has been successful?
 - iii. What has been a challenge?
3. How do you think the parent mentoring part of the scholarship model has gone? Tell me why you say that.
 - i. Has anything surprised you about how the implementation of the parent mentoring has gone so far?
 - ii. What has been successful?
 - iii. What has been a challenge?
 - iv. Do you think that the parent mentoring is/was having its intended effects on parents - giving them information about the benefits and quality of early education programs that then influences their choices? Tell me why you say that.
4. How do you think the scholarship model has influenced the supply and quality of ECE programs in districts 6 and 7? Tell me why you say that.
 - i. Has anything surprised you about how the effects of the model on the supply and quality of ECE programs in districts 6 and 7 have gone so far?
 - ii. What has been successful?
 - iii. What has been a challenge?
5. Since start-up in January 2008, from your perspective, what do you see as the accomplishments of the Program so far? We are interested in both general and specific accomplishments.
 - a. With the agencies and programs implementing the scholarship program?
 - b. With the early childhood programs in districts 6 and 7?
 - c. With the families and children?
6. Since last June of 2008, what aspects of the scholarship program implementation do you think have been most successful? Why do you say that? What important factors have supported achieving these 'successes'?
7. Since last June of 2008, what aspects of the scholarship program implementation do you think have been least successful, or have been significant challenges? Why do you say that? What important factors have affected those challenges?
8. Now that the program has been up and running since January 2008, what do you think would be the 'ideal' outcome(s) of the scholarship program at the end of the 4 years, by December 2011? Stated differently, what will 'success' look like? How will you know if it is successful?
 - a. How might it change "business as usual" for ECE programs?
 - b. How might children, families, programs, and communities look differently because of the program?
9. What would you say have been the 'lessons learned' about the scholarship model and its implementation so far?
 - a. What features of the initial implementation would you say worked very well and you would recommend retaining in any replication of the scholarship program?

- b. What features of the initial implementation would you say did not work well, and what changes would you recommend in any replication of the scholarship program?
10. Thinking about how implementation has gone since January 2008, what do you think is a realistic timeline for full implementation of the scholarship model?
 - a. How long do you think it takes to "make a consumer market" respond? Tell me why you say that.
 - b. What percentage of parents in a community do you think need to be demanding high-quality for the consumer market to work? Tell me why you say that.
 11. If the scholarship model were to be replicated in other communities, what are 3 things that you would tell the developers for successful implementation?

B. Specific questions for legislators

1. How is the scholarship program influencing your views about early childhood as a priority on Minnesota's legislative agenda and priorities?
2. How do you think that the scholarship program might influence policy or legislation about early childhood in the future?
3. As a legislator, have you been influenced in your views about early childhood by what is happening in other states? If so, tell me about that.

C. Specific questions for ECE programs

1. Why did you decide to participate in the scholarship program? How many children with scholarships attend your program?

OR Why did you decide not to participate in the scholarship program?

If relevant, why did you decide to participate in the Allowances project? How many children with allowances attend your program?

2. Why did you decide to participate in Parent Aware? Has participating positively or negatively affected your program? Tell me why you say that.

OR Why did you decide not to participate in Parent Aware? What prevents you from participating in Parent Aware?

3. What, if any, aspects of your program's participation in the scholarship program have:
 - a. changed the way you operate your program?
 - b. changed the number and/or kinds of children and families you serve?
 - c. caused difficulties or been challenges?
 - d. been helpful and beneficial?

If relevant, what, if any, aspects of your program's participation in the allowances project have:

- e. changed the way you operate your program?
 - f. changed the number and/or kinds of children and families you serve?
 - g. caused difficulties or been challenges?
 - h. been helpful and beneficial?
4. How is your program using the scholarship funds? What other funding streams are you blending together with scholarship funds?

If relevant, how is your program using the allowance funds? What other funding streams are you blending together with allowance funds?

5. Have there been any negative effects of the scholarship program on your program? Tell me about them.

If relevant, have there been any negative effects of the allowances project on your program? Tell me about them.

6. Has the scholarship program changed the way you facilitate families' use of CCAP? If so, how?

If relevant, has the Allowances project changed the way you facilitate families' use of CCAP? If so, how?

7. If relevant, how do you see the Scholarship Program affecting the Allowances Project? And vice versa, how do you see the Allowances Project affecting the Scholarship Program?

Is there anything we have not discussed that you think would be important to mention for the evaluation of the Saint Paul Early Childhood Scholarship Program or the PreK Allowances Evaluation?

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us! The information provided is a valuable component of the evaluation.

Appendix D Parent Focus Group Protocol

(Mostly English-speaking parents whose children were attending an ECE program using their scholarship funds)

Questions

1. Let's start off by introducing ourselves. Please tell us a little bit about you and your family including you 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. Parent Mentoring: How many people have a parent mentor/home visitor?
 - 4a. If yes, tell us about what your parent mentor/home visitor does (did) when she/he comes to your house. What kinds of things does she/he talk to you about? What does s/he do?
 - a. Is your parent mentor someone that worked with your family for awhile or is this person new to your family?
 - b. What activities and/or services offered by the Parent Mentor are most helpful to you?
 - c. What information offered by the Parent Mentor is most helpful to you?
 - d. Are there topics, information, activities, or services that you still need?
 - e. 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? What do you like about this program?
 - 5c. If you did not have this scholarship for your child, where would your child have been cared for this past year?
 - 5d. 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]?
 - 6a. 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.

7. Would you change anything about the Scholarship Program?