

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION BUREAU

DECEMBER 2006



## *.The Future of Even Start?*

As many of you know Even Start was cut this year resulting in reduced grant awards and/or no new grant awards. We are all waiting to see what the new congress will propose for the future of Even Start. Below are excerpts from a letter being circulated by Senators Olympia Snowe and Hillary Clinton to their colleagues in the Senate. It seeks support for returning funding for Even Start to the FY 2005 amount of \$225 Million. To date, Senators from Hawaii, California, Connecticut, Vermont, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Arkansas, South Dakota, Illinois, Colorado, Maryland and Wisconsin have agreed to sign on to this letter.

Dear Colleague:

As you know, the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program is the only federal education program that focuses specifically on parents and their children working together to combat illiteracy. The Labor, HHS, and Education Subcommittee and the full Appropriations Committee have voted to eliminate funding for the Even Start Family Literacy Program. As you prepare to complete consideration of the remaining appropriations bills; including Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education; we ask that you reconsider this action and join us in supporting Even Start by returning the program to the FY2005 level of \$225 Million. Eliminating or further reducing funding will leave thousands of families in search of English language skills; as they also look to obtain jobs and support their children's education. During the last four budget cycles the program has been cut by over 60%. In your states, as well as across the country, this has resulted in dozens of local programs being shuttered leaving thousands of children and adults without the local support to become productive, literacy members of our communities.

Parents participating in Even Start acquire important skills to be their child's first and most important teacher. Nothing can make up for a lack of parental support. Even Start helps parents provide that support. The goals of No Child Left Behind can never be achieved if we leave the parents behind. Even Start provides a comprehensive family-parent involvement necessary for it to be successful. Over 70 percent of Even Start participants are from minority families, almost half are Hispanic. This program directly helps with NCLB's requirements to close the achievement gap among target populations.

We ask that you join with us in fighting to return funding for Even Start in the Senate and in Conference with the House to the FY 2005 level of \$225 Million.

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

### *What is Kindergarten Plus?*

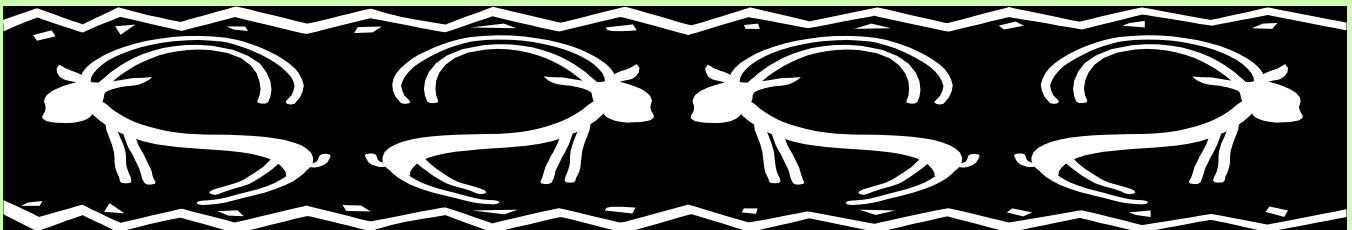
The purpose of the Kindergarten Plus is to demonstrate that increased time in Kindergarten narrows the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and other students, and increases cognitive skills, leading to higher test scores for all participants. 2005 completed year 3 of the original pilot with programs in Albuquerque, Gadsden, Gallup-McKinley and Gadsden. Albuquerque, Gallup-McKinley and Las Cruces implemented the Kindergarten Plus pilot model that added 40 extra days to the regular Kindergarten year. Gadsden received approval to implement a half-day pre-Kindergarten program for four-year olds. The three Kindergarten Plus pilot projects were implemented in a variety of ways including scheduling the extra days and number of students per classroom. The major suggestion from these programs is that they would like to hold a session prior to Kindergarten and then another session prior to First Grade, rather than the current practice of 20 days prior to Kindergarten and 20 days immediately following Kindergarten. In 2006 the Legislature voted to expand Kindergarten Plus to allow the original 4 districts to increase the number of classes and add new classes and new schools. The legislation also expanded Kindergarten Plus to new districts and schools. Bernalillo, Hobbs and Penasco applied for and received funds to start Kindergarten Plus programs in some of their schools.

### *Schools, Districts and Students:*

The schools and districts that participate in the Kindergarten Plus initiative, while sharing the common denominator of being high poverty schools, vary in size, demographics, and academic standing. Students in the program share some similar characteristics. They are predominantly Hispanic and Native American, and for many English is not their home language. English Language Learners present a unique challenge as they may not be familiar with the sounds of English because their native language may not make the same or similar sounds. For example, there is no long "A" in Spanish so a native Spanish speaker would not be familiar with that sound. For Navajo children the "ch" sound in English for a word like "church" is actually a "clicking" sound in Navajo. Thus direct, intentional phonemic awareness and phonics must be taught. Students cannot be expected to pick this up on their own.

### *Results:*

In addition to looking at AYP status for the school as a whole, we have examined the results of the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessment used in Kindergarten. Data from the DIBELS assessment of Kindergarten Plus students continue to demonstrate positive results, and teachers and administrators continue to view the program as an effective way to ensure that students are prepared for Kindergarten and first grade.



The defining DIBELS initial assessments for Kindergarten are Initial Sound Fluency and Letter Naming Fluency. These are given to all entering Kindergarten students within the first ten days of school but no later than mid-September. While these may seem like simple enough skills when one considers that there are probably 8 sounds and 8 letters in a child's name, the vast majority of entering Kindergarten students, (67% statewide) do not pass this fall benchmark. If the goal of the Kindergarten Plus program is to provide students with a jump start into Kindergarten one would expect these children to score better than their peers on the Fall DIBELS assessments. As Figures 1 and 2 present this is indeed the case

Figure 1: Number of Students Scoring Low Risk (Benchmark), Some Risk (Strategic) and High Risk (Intensive) on Fall DIBELS assessments by District: Initial Sound Fluency

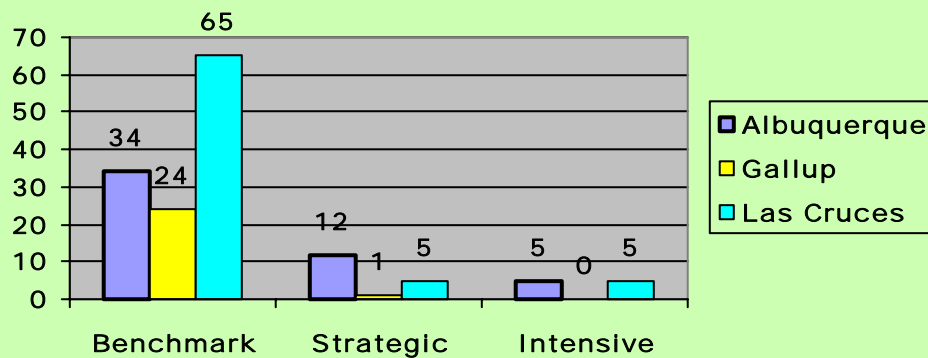
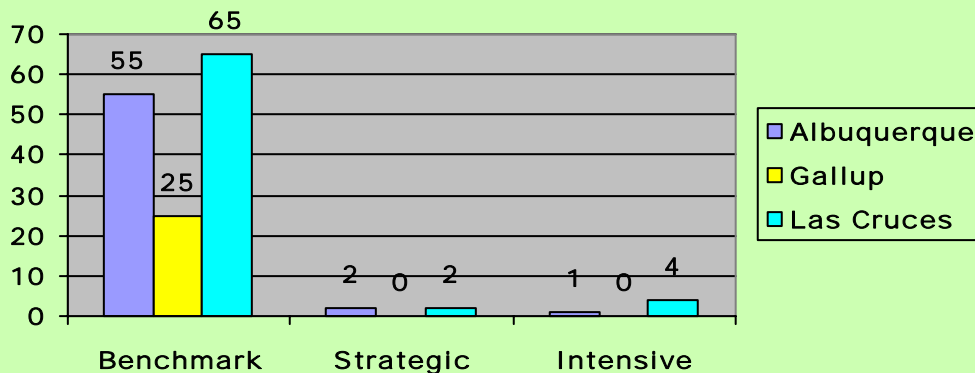


Figure 2: Number of Students Scoring Low Risk (Benchmark), Some Risk (Strategic) and High Risk (Intensive) on Fall DIBELS assessments by District: Letter Naming Fluency



We may conclude from this data that the vast majority of students participating in the Kindergarten Plus programs in Albuquerque, Gallup-McKinley and Las Cruces are entering Kindergarten with appropriate entry level reading skills thus closing the gap between these students and their non disadvantaged peers.



## STATISTICS ON EVEN START

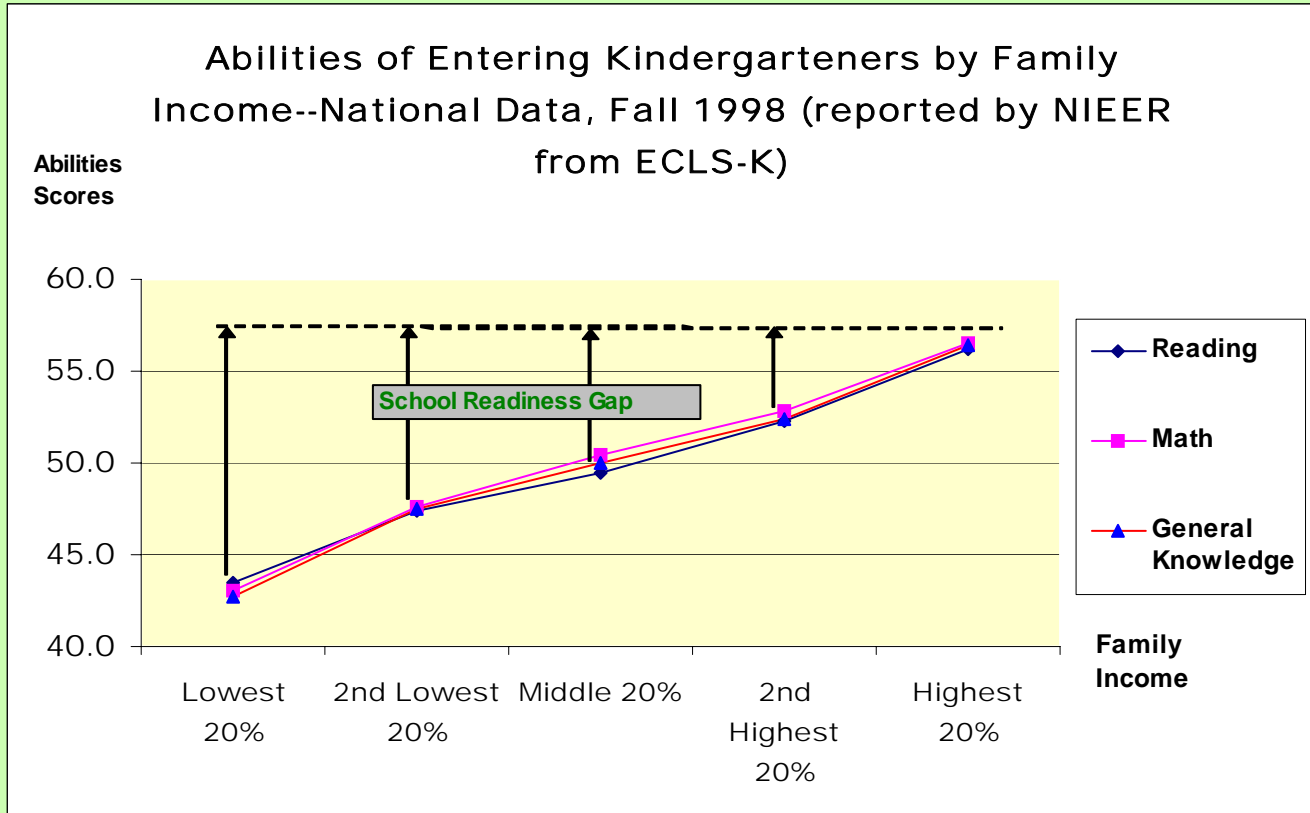
- Even Start serves an estimated 50,000 families nationwide in 1,200 state administrated projects.
- Eighty-four percent of Even Start's families are at or below poverty levels.
- Even Start families are significantly poorer than Head Start families. Nearly half of Even Start families have an annual household income under \$6,000. contrasted with only 13% of Head Start families.
- Further, 84% of Even Start adults do not have a high school diploma or GED; 44% of the parents have not gone beyond the 9th grade.

A TEXAS A+M UNIVERSITY STUDY (2004-2005) FOUND THAT PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN EVEN START WERE MORE OFTEN EMPLOYED AND BETTER EMPLOYED THAN THEIR PEERS. THE STUDY FOUND THAT EMPLOYMENT FOR EVEN START PARTICIPATING PARENTS JUMPED FROM 17% BEFORE ENROLLMENT TO 51% AFTER COMPLETION; AND WAGES INCREASE BY MORE THAN 25%



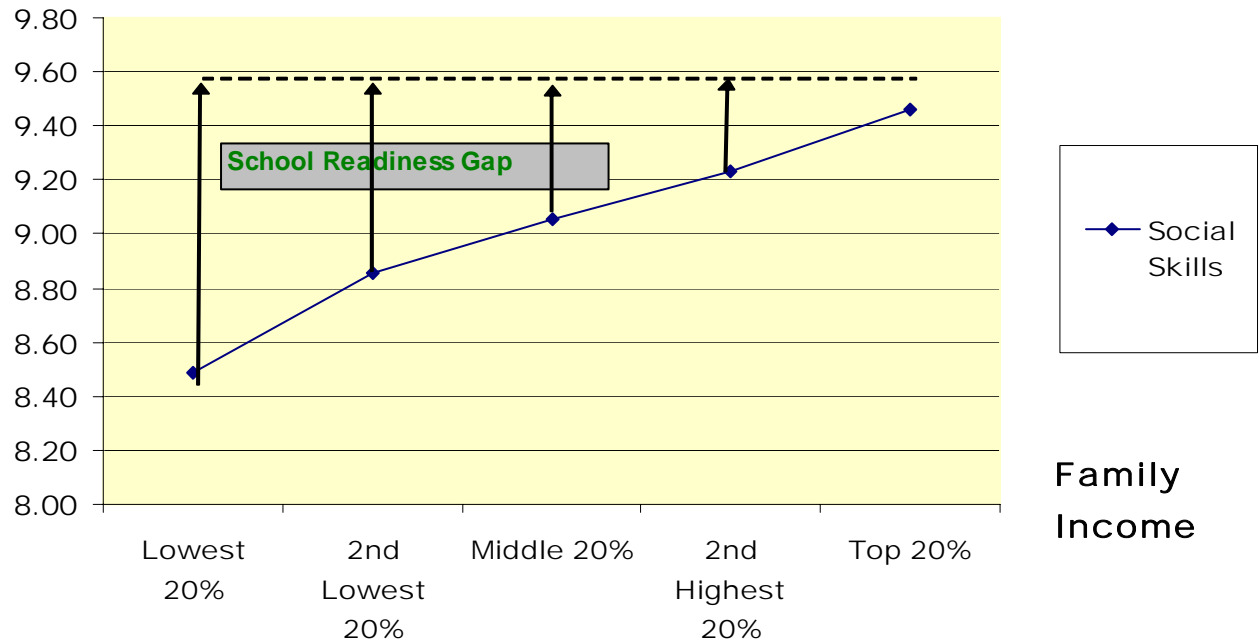
## The Relationship Between Income and Children's Kindergarten Entry Level Skills

Far too many American children enter school lacking the academic and social skills needed to succeed in today's more rigorous educational environment and with much of their potential undeveloped. Children in low income families are the least poorly prepared, but even children from middle income families begin school far behind their higher income peers. Looking at state learning standards for Pre-K, it is apparent that more is expected today than simple level one proficiency in math (e.g., counting to 10) and literacy (letter recognition). The Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) data reveals that most children fall far below their potential at kindergarten entry. Neither poor nor middle-income children are well prepared for school compared to higher income children. Children from families with average (median) incomes are as far behind children in families with higher incomes as poor children are behind the average. This middle class readiness gap was found for social and emotional development as well as cognitive development, as shown in the following graphs.

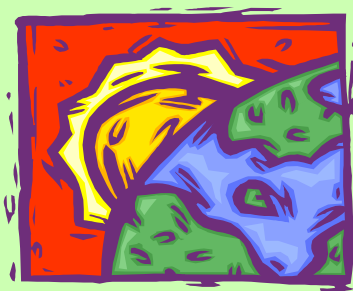


## Social Scores

## Social Skills of Entering Kindergarteners by Family Income (NIEER Analysis of ECLS-K)



In a 1995 survey of 3,500 kindergarten teachers from across the country, many reported that large proportions of their students lacked important school readiness skills. For example, 46 percent of the kindergarten teachers reported that at least half of the students in their class had difficulty following directions, 36 percent reported that at least half of their class lacked academic skills they needed, and 34 percent reported that at least half of their class had difficulty working independently. In Maryland, only 52 percent of children who entered kindergarten in 2002 were considered "fully ready." In a 2001 statewide survey, Colorado kindergarten and first-grade teachers reported that four out of 10 children were not academically prepared for school and that about one-third of their students were not socially and emotionally prepared.



***IS GREATER ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SOMETHING THAT BENEFITS CHILDREN FROM MIDDLE-INCOME FAMILIES AS WELL AS CHILDREN IN POVERTY?***

There is no sharp dividing line between rich and poor or low-income and middle-income in the United States when it comes to access to high-quality preschool education or the benefits of such programs. National statistics show that even families with incomes as high as \$50,000 a year have no more access to preschool education than families below the poverty line. And, many of the programs that middle-income families can afford are of limited quality—so while they provide safe child care, they provide little educational benefit. *Data from the ECLS-K study show that children from the middle class enter school as far behind children from higher income families as children in poverty are behind them.* School failure and dropout are also far more common among the middle class than is generally understood. More than one in 10 middle class children fail a grade and are held back and a similar percentage fail to graduate from high school. Recent studies including evaluations of the Oklahoma's universal preschool program and a large study of 5 state pre-K programs have demonstrated substantial learning gains for children from middle income families. Long-term findings of positive effects for the middle class come from the two large-scale studies, the Effective Preschool Education study in England and the Infant Health and Development Program (IHDP) study in the United States. The benefits for children in middle-income families from quality preschool education may be less than the gains for children in lower-income families, but they are still important and worthwhile.

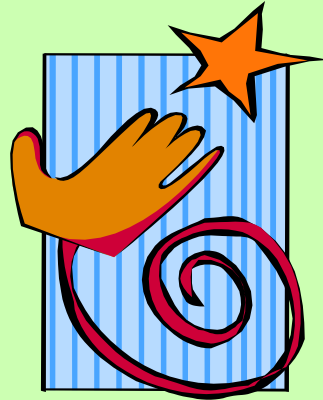
*Both high quality preschool education and full-day kindergarten have been shown to produce valuable educational gains in the short- and long-run.* Key relevant longitudinal studies demonstrate that effects seen at an early age continue as children grow older. The research that demonstrates long-term gains from preschool education includes rigorous studies of child care, Head Start and other programs including the Effective Preschool Education study, the Infant Health and Development Program (IHDP) study, the Michigan School Readiness Program Longitudinal Study, and a follow-up to adulthood of a randomized trial of quality preschool education with disadvantaged children in Mauritius. These studies are in addition to the better-known longitudinal studies of the Perry Preschool Study, Chicago Child Parent Center, and the Carolina Abecedarian Project.

***Do the cognitive effects of preschool disappear?***

*A comprehensive review of the literature indicates that the cognitive advantages produced by preschool education are strongest right after the program and decline somewhat after children leave preschool education.* However, this does not mean that cognitive gains disappear altogether over the years, just that they are somewhat smaller later. Moreover, this is not necessarily because the effects of preschool education decline. When children who have not had preschool education enter kindergarten, the public schools work hard to help them catch up. Studies find that children who have not received a good preschool education get a boost after

kindergarten entry. They also are more likely to repeat a grade and receive special education. Grade repetition and special education are, in fact, attempts to help children who are behind; to the extent they are successful they reduce the gap in later achievement between children who went to preschool programs and those who did not. However, this is a costly response to the problem of inadequate preschool education. And often the effects of grade repetition and special education have been found by numerous studies to persist through middle school and high school so they are hardly short-term.

(Material in this article is excerpted from "A Review of the Reason Foundation's Report on Preschool and Kindergarten" by W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., Director NIERR)



**Reading First Coaches, Principals and District Administrators  
Save This Date  
February 6, 2007  
State of the State & Administrators Mandatory Training  
8:00 am to 4:00 pm  
Tamaya, Bernalillo, New Mexico  
Register On-Line**

The staff of the Early Childhood Education Bureau wishes to extend a happy holiday season to all of you. We deeply appreciate the hard work you are doing for New Mexico's children. Thank you from all of us:

Lana M. Paolillo, Ph.D. Director

Vonell Huitt, Program Specialist Even Start

Richard LaPan and Barbara Bianchi, Program Specialists PreK

Liza Rael, Program Specialist, Reading First

Ann Zuni, Program Specialist, Full Day Kindergarten, Kindergarten Plus

Elizabeth Montano, Support Specialist, Reading First & Early Childhood Education Bureau

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