Evaluation for Minnesota’s Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Funds to Promote Access to High-Quality Programs: Year 3 Final Scholarship Implementation Annual Report

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Prepared for:
Lisa Barnidge
Minnesota Department of Education
1500 W Hwy 36
Roseville, MN 55113
Email: Lisa.Barnidge@state.mn.us

Prepared by:
Wei-Bing Chen
Kate Ferguson
Cristina Novoa
Donna Spiker
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Executive Summary

This is the third evaluation report on the effects of one Access Strategy of Minnesota’s Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC): Early Learning Scholarships (RTT-ELC Scholarships). The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) administered RTT-ELC Scholarships to promote children’s access to high-quality early learning and development (ELD) programs. This report describes how the RTT-ELC Scholarships were implemented in four geographic areas across Minnesota, referred to as Transformation Zones, from September 2014 to September 2015, the third year of the evaluation. Some information reported is summarized over the 3 years of the evaluation. MDE’s approach was to provide the Zones with general guidance and requirements for implementing the RTT-ELC Scholarships and to allow for local planning and decision-making about the specific procedures to be used in each Zone.

The report begins with an overview of Minnesota’s RTT-ELC grant, the context for the RTT-ELC Scholarships, and the evaluation questions being addressed, which were described in more detail in the Year 1 and Year 2 Annual Reports. The Year 3 data collection activities are then described. Findings are presented about implementation, successes and challenges, and impacts on children, families, and early learning and development programs in Year 3. The report ends with findings about long-term, sustainable impacts of the RTT-ELC Scholarships and Zone staff perspectives about the role of the state in building high-quality early childhood systems. Additional information can be found in the two previous evaluation annual reports, which describe the first 2 years of implementation of the RTT-ELC Access Strategies, the logic model, and the associated questions for the evaluations.

The overall goals of the RTT-ELC grant were to continue the state’s earlier efforts to increase high-needs children’s access to high-quality ELD programs (and thereby improve school readiness), improve ELD program quality, increase accountability and workforce qualifications, and create state and local infrastructures to sustain these efforts.

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1 A separate third evaluation report on the effects of the other RTT-ELC Access Strategy, Title I PreK Incentives, was submitted in December 2015.
evaluation report addresses the grant’s impact on increasing access to high-quality ELD programming for high-needs children and how the access strategies were implemented.\(^3\)

Data contained in this report come from three types of data collection. First, to understand the implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships in each Zone in Year 3 of the evaluation, the evaluation team conducted 1-hour phone interviews between May and September 2015, with a goal of interviewing all RTT-ELC Scholarship administrators and key informants identified as central to the planning and implementation of the initiative. The evaluation staff interviewed a total of 12\(^4\) respondents from the four Zones (four from Itasca, four from the NAZ, three from SPPN, and two from White Earth). Second, the evaluation team conducted an online survey of all ELD program directors in the four Zones between September and December 2015 to learn about the impact of the RTT-ELC Scholarships initiative on the programs. And the evaluation team used data from NACCRRAware, a web-based dataset from Child Care Aware of America (formerly known as the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies) that provides public use data about many ELD programs throughout the United States. Third, each Zone developed its own process and procedures for enrolling eligible families to receive RTT-ELC Scholarships and information was collected on a scholarships application form and made available to the evaluation team.

The findings are organized in four sections that describe (1) the early childhood context in each of the Zones before the RTT-ELC grant; (2) how the RTT-ELC Scholarships were implemented; (3) the impacts of the RTT-ELC Scholarships on children, families, and ELD programs; and (4) long-term success and sustainability related to the RTT-ELC Scholarships. Findings indicated that each Zone adopted a model of RTT-ELC Scholarship implementation that both met state guidelines and addressed the specific needs of its community. Each Zone identified strategies for administering the RTT-ELC Scholarships, developed plans for how the RTT-ELC Scholarships would fit in with the community’s existing early childhood activities, and worked to identify families that would benefit from participation. Implementation for each Zone is described.

Selected key findings about impacts on children and families include the following.

- Across the period of the grant, the four Zones awarded a total of 977 RTT-ELC Scholarships.

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\(^3\) For detailed descriptions of the state context and overall RTT-ELC grant, see the Year 1 and Year 2 evaluation annual reports.

\(^4\) One respondent served as an interviewee for both the NAZ and SPPN and contributed to counts in both Zones.
Across the Zones, when they were awarded the RTT-ELC Scholarship about one-fourth of the children were under 3 years of age (29%), were 3-year-olds (28%), or were 4-year-olds (29%). About one-tenth were 5 years or older (13%).

As in previous years, interviewees in all four Zones described the RTT-ELC Scholarships as having positive impacts on the children and families receiving them. In general, RTT-ELC Scholarships increased access for children to high-quality ELD programs. Increased access took the form of

- increased continuity of care (i.e., consistent enrollment with fewer disruptions);
- expanded hours (i.e., longer days or longer weeks) for those already in high-quality care; and
- more children formerly at home or in lower quality care settings filling slots in high-quality ELD programs. Interviewees noted that this continuity of care generally resulted in high-quality early learning experiences for children and less stress and more stability for families.

Selected key findings about impacts on ELD programs include the following.

- In general, across the 3 years of the evaluation, the overall number of ELD programs in the Zones’ geographic areas increased by 27% from 187 to 237 ELD programs.
  - All four Zones had increases in the overall number of ELD programs within their Zones between 2013 and 2015. The increases were 27% for Itasca, 35% for NAZ, 21% for SPPN, and 29% for White Earth.

- Across the Zones, between 2013 to 2015, the number of ELD programs participating in Parent Aware increased from 45 (24% of all ELD programs) to 80 (33% of all ELD programs), with variations across the Zones.

- Similarly, across the Zones, between 2013 and 2015, the number of 3- and 4-star-rated ELD programs increased from 35 (19% of all ELD programs) to 60 (25% of all ELD programs), with variations across the Zones.

- Across the Zones, by 2015, many ELD program were not yet rated by Parent Aware (66%). However, in 2013, 76% of all ELD programs were not yet rated, indicating a reduction in non-participation, with variations across the Zones.

- Across the Zones, family child care programs were more likely to be not rated yet (80%) than center-based ELD programs (36%). There were variations across Zones in rate of participation by type of program.

- Across the four Zones, the 977 children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships had attended a total of 120 ELD program sites.
In 2015, most of these ELD programs (98%) were participating in Parent Aware. Of these 120 total ELD programs, 69 (58%) were center-based child care programs, 31 (26%) were family child care programs, 7 (6%) were Head Start programs, and 13 (11%) were school-based preschool programs.

Variations by Zone are presented.

Results from the ELD survey are presented next. A total of 261 ELD program surveys were sent in September 2015, and 95 (36%) were completed. Response rates ranged from 31% in White Earth to 43% in the NAZ. Because of this low response rate, the findings may not be representative of all ELD programs in the Zone and should be interpreted with caution.

Data from interviews of key Zone staff described the RTT-ELC Scholarships as having positive impacts on the four communities through effects on the ELD programs. Results are described for each of the four Zones. In addition to positively affecting children and families and ELD programs, interviewees reported that RTT-ELC Scholarships had a third impact—on the communities’ early childhood systems. This impact took the form of improved communication and relationships between ELD program staff, between ELD program staff and parents, and between the Zones themselves and the families they serve. Common themes across Zones were the following:

- Local early learning entities were working together more as a system, with stronger relationships among ELD programs; this included school-based School Readiness, Head Start, and private child care programs. The need to create structures and processes to administer the RTT-ELC Scholarships brought people together over common funding and goals.
- RTT-ELC staffs across the four Zones also were interacting with each other and sharing approaches and common challenges.
- The RTT-ELC Scholarships brought a focus on ELD program quality because of the requirement that the scholarships could be used only in programs rated 3 or 4 stars on Parent Aware.

Additional implementation details for each of the four Zones also are described including quotes about community-wide impacts and challenges related to implementation.

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5 The data in Table 8 represent ELD programs that served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships at some point across all years of the evaluation and their Parent Aware participation as of July 2015. The programs that are shown as not participating in Parent Aware may have participated in Parent Aware before July 2015 and subsequently stopped participating. Programs rated 1 or 2 stars in July 2015 may have previously been rated higher and may no longer be serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships. Programs rated as “in process” at this time point may have been previously rated and were in the process of being rerated when the data were obtained.
of the RTT-ELC Scholarships. Interviewees also were asked about what they perceived to be the long-term successes of the RTT-ELC Scholarships, particularly successes they believed had the potential to be sustainable beyond the end of the grant. We found consensus on the following long-term, sustainable impacts across the four Zones:

- Respondents felt it was likely that the relationships between various early childhood stakeholders that were built or strengthened through administering the RTT-ELC Scholarships in the communities would remain as a long-term impact of the grant.

- The presence of funding through RTT-ELC Scholarships (and Title I PreK Incentives) brought new attention to the need for and importance of high-quality early childhood education. Interviewees felt this awareness is likely to extend beyond the grant period. The quality of preschool programming was now a topic of conversation for providers, school districts that had been largely K-12 focused, and parents who were learning about child development through Parent Aware, their providers, or (in White Earth) the parent education component of the RTT-ELC Scholarship program.

Responses about sustainability specific to each Zone also are presented. And finally, respondents were asked what they thought the role of state agencies should be in supporting local communities broadly in building and supporting strong, sustainable local early childhood systems. They also were asked what lessons learned regarding RTT-ELC Scholarship implementation in their Zone they thought the state department of education should heed in order to continue to support local communities. Some of these lessons and recommendations apply to actions the state department of education can undertake, whereas others relate to broader policies and funding decisions to build and support strong early childhood systems. Themes derived from an analysis of responses across the four Zones are presented including the following common themes (followed by Zone-specific responses).

- Zone staff recognized that an inherent challenge to implementing initiatives such as the RTT-ELC Scholarships is that higher level agencies (federal/state government) need compliance, scalability, and replicability across multiple localities, whereas local entities need flexibility to implement in a way that works for their particular community. These two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but finding the right balance requires all parties to listen, communicate openly, and be willing to compromise. Zone staff felt that state agencies, including the department of education, could support the localities by sharing knowledge learned across multiple communities about the best ways to foster mixed delivery systems (e.g., combination of school-based, Head Start, private child care) that provide high-quality early childhood programming.

- The respondents also commented that the state should find ways to use statutes, policies, and funding to promote local collaboration rather than competition, as well
as to support local communities in developing and implementing integrated local school readiness plans. One way the state can do this is by structuring payment (e.g., of RTT-ELC or other early learning scholarships) so that collaboration among local entities is required.

- The respondents felt that the state can also foster collaboration across communities such as the Transformation Zones, so that different localities can share ideas as well as resources.
- The respondents commented that the state needs to fund early childhood services in a sustainable way, not through time-limited grant funding. This would require legislative action.

The report ends with a summary section that includes implications of the findings for implementing early learning initiatives.
Introduction

This is the third evaluation report on the effects of one Access Strategy of Minnesota’s Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC): Early Learning Scholarships (RTT-ELC Scholarships). The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) administered RTT-ELC Scholarships to promote children’s access to high-quality early learning and development (ELD) programs. This report describes how the RTT-ELC Scholarships were implemented in four geographic areas across Minnesota, referred to as Transformation Zones, from September 2014 to September 2015, the third year of the evaluation. Some information reported is summarized over the 3 years of the evaluation. MDE’s approach was to provide the Zones with general guidance and requirements for implementing the RTT-ELC Scholarships and to allow for local planning and decision-making about the specific procedures to be used in each Zone.

The report begins with an overview of Minnesota’s RTT-ELC grant, the context for the RTT-ELC Scholarships, and the evaluation questions being addressed, which were described in more detail in the Year 1 and Year 2 Annual Reports. The Year 3 data collection activities are then described. Findings are presented about implementation, successes and challenges, and impacts on children, families, and early learning and development programs in Year 3. The report ends with findings about long-term, sustainable impacts of the RTT-ELC Scholarships and Zone staff perspectives about the role of the state in building high-quality early childhood systems. Additional information can be found in the two previous evaluation annual reports, which describe the first 2 years of implementation of the RTT-ELC Access Strategies, the logic model, and the associated questions for the evaluations.

Minnesota’s Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant is intended to improve early learning and development outcomes for young children. The RTT-ELC competition has a strong policy emphasis on the young children most at risk for poor school readiness and later poor school achievement—in other words,
high-needs children. Specifically, the RTT-ELC grants are aimed at supporting states’ efforts to

- increase access to high-quality early learning programs for high-needs young children;
- design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and services; and
- ensure that any use of assessments conforms to the recommendations of the National Research Council’s report on early childhood.  

In 2011 Minnesota was one of nine states awarded RTT-ELC funds. To increase the school readiness of high-needs children, beginning in fall 2012 some of Minnesota’s RTT-ELC funds were disbursed as RTT-ELC Scholarships to families enrolling children in high-quality early learning and development (ELD) programs. Other funds were given as supplements to school districts to incentivize them to allocate Title I funds to preschool programs (Title I PreK Incentives). These initiatives occurred in four geographic areas, or Transformation Zones, across Minnesota selected by MDE: the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) in Minneapolis, the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPPN) in Saint Paul, Itasca County, and White Earth Nation.

An evaluation was a required part of the federal RTT-ELC grant. SRI International and Child Trends, two nonprofit research organizations, worked together to conduct the evaluation of the two Access Strategies of the RTT-ELC grant, the RTT-ELC Scholarships and Title I PreK Incentives, for MDE.

**Minnesota Context Related to This Evaluation**

The overall goals of the RTT-ELC grant were to continue the state’s earlier efforts to increase high-needs children’s access to high-quality ELD programs (and thereby improve school readiness), improve ELD program quality, increase accountability and workforce qualifications, and create state and local infrastructures to sustain these efforts. This evaluation report addresses the grant’s impact on increasing access to high-quality ELD programming for high-needs children and how the access strategies were implemented.  

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9 These are programs rated 3 or 4 stars (on a scale of 1 to 4 stars, with 1 being lowest) on the Parent Aware Quality Rating system, Minnesota’s child care Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).

10 Minnesota’s RTT-ELC grant has a number of additional components in addition to the two Access Strategies. SRI and Child Trends were only hired to conduct these evaluations.

11 For detailed descriptions of the state context and overall RTT-ELC grant, see the Year 1 and Year 2 evaluation annual reports.
Evaluation Questions

MDE identified the following objectives for the evaluation of RTT-ELC Scholarships:

1. Describe and analyze the effectiveness of the implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships by studying the models of community collaboration and innovation used.

2. Describe the uses of the RTT-ELC Scholarships to increase access and meet the needs of families.\textsuperscript{12}

3. Examine the extent to which access for children with high needs to high-quality early learning development programs has increased.

4. Describe family engagement with the RTT-ELC Scholarships, including the effectiveness of outreach methods and family decision-making.

5. Examine the impact of the RTT-ELC Scholarships on child outcomes, specifically school readiness.

In this evaluation report, we address these objectives by describing the implementation and perceived impacts of the RTT-ELC Scholarships as reported by key personnel, including staff in the four Transformation Zones and other agencies responsible for the administration of the RTT-ELC Scholarships and staff at ELD programs who served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships. We also describe the children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships through an analysis of their scholarship application forms. Additional information on the impact of RTT-ELC Scholarships on children and families, including families’ experiences with the scholarships and an analysis of child assessment data, is in a report\textsuperscript{13} submitted in October 2015.

The specific questions addressed in this report are shown in Figure 1.

\textsuperscript{12} Throughout this report, the term “family” is broadly interpreted and may include parents and siblings as well as members of the extended family. Similarly, the term “parents” in this report encompasses biological parents, guardians, and other non-parental primary caregivers.

Figure 1. Evaluation Questions About Implementation of Minnesota’s RTT-ELC Scholarships

I. Models of Community Collaboration and Innovation
   1. What models of RTT-ELC Scholarship implementation were adopted?
      a. What partnerships were created in the Transformation Zones? How were they formed?
      b. What entities had responsibility for RTT-ELC Scholarship administration (e.g., outreach activities)?
   2. What were the common and unique features of the RTT-ELC Scholarship models across the Transformation Zones?
   3. How did the Transformation Zones partner with the state, and how did this affect implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships?
   4. What factors contributed to effective implementation?
   5. What were the barriers to effective implementation?
   6. What changes in implementation occurred in Year 3 of the evaluation?

II. Use of RTT-ELC Scholarships
   1. How did ELD programs use the RTT-ELC Scholarships to increase access to high-quality programs and to meet the needs of the families?
   2. What were the characteristics of programs that served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships?
   3. Did uses of RTT-ELC Scholarships or participating programs change in Year 3 of the evaluation?

III. Access for Children with High Needs to High-Quality ELD Programs
   1. In Year 3 of the RTT evaluation, how many high-quality ELD programs were there in each Zone? How many slots did those programs include?

IV. Family Engagement
   1. In Year 3, what community outreach methods were used to inform the communities and families about the RTT-ELC Scholarships?
   2. In Year 3, how effective were the methods used to inform and recruit families to participate? What were the challenges to effective outreach?
   3. In Year 3, how did families learn about the availability of RTT-ELC Scholarships?
   4. In Year 3, what were the barriers to participation in high-quality ELD programs for families? How did the RTT-ELC Scholarship initiative address these barriers?

V. Child Outcomes
   1. In Year 3, how many children received RTT-ELC Scholarships, and what were their demographics?

Methods

In the third year of the evaluation, the evaluation team used three data collection activities to learn about implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships from September 2014 to September 2015: phone interviews of Zone staff, an online survey of ELD programs, and review of RTT-ELC Scholarship application data. Those activities are described here.
Phone Interviews

To understand the implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships in each Zone in Year 3 of the evaluation, the evaluation team conducted 1-hour phone interviews between May and September 2015, with a goal of interviewing all RTT-ELC Scholarship administrators and key informants identified as central to the planning and implementation of the initiative. The evaluation staff interviewed a total of 12 respondents from the four Zones (four from Itasca, four from the NAZ, three from SPPN, and two from White Earth).

The qualitative data from the interviews captured the differences in implementation across the Zones, the factors related to these differences, the extent to which implementation was on track, and the factors that facilitated and impeded implementation and effectiveness of the RTT-ELC Scholarships. The interview protocols contained semistructured questions about the use of the funds and staff perceptions of the impact on the children, families, and ELD programs in their communities. The topics were the following:

- Process of implementing the RTT-ELC Scholarships
- Experiences engaging families with the RTT-ELC Scholarships
- Perceived impacts of the RTT-ELC Scholarships on children, families, ELD programs, and communities
- Challenges in implementing the RTT-ELC Scholarships
- Perspectives on long-term, sustainable impacts attributable to the RTT-ELC Scholarships
- Perspectives on the role of state agencies in building high-quality, sustainable early childhood systems.

The interview protocols are in Appendix A.

Online Survey of ELD Programs

The evaluation team conducted an online survey of all ELD program directors in the four Zones between September and December 2015 to learn about the impact of the RTT-ELC Scholarships initiative on the programs. The evaluation team used data from NACCRRAware, a web-based dataset from Child Care Aware of America (formerly known as the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies) that provides

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14 One respondent served as an interviewee for both the NAZ and SPPN and contributed to counts in both Zones.
15 Program directors were sent an e-mail containing a secure link to the online survey. The survey could be completed at any time during the survey window. If directors preferred, they were sent a paper survey and prepaid return envelope. Directors who completed the survey received a $20 gift card in appreciation of their time.
public use data about many ELD programs throughout the United States,\textsuperscript{16} and from the Parent Aware website\textsuperscript{17} to identify all ELD programs in each Zone (center based, family child care, Head Start) and their Parent Aware ratings.

The items on the survey addressed the following topics:

- Demographics of the families served by the ELD program
- Selected characteristics of the ELD programs
- The program’s participation in Parent Aware and why the program opted not to participate in Parent Aware if it was not doing so
- How the program was interacting with the RTT-ELC Scholarships initiative (if applicable) and experiences with the initiative, including impacts on the program and changes in the types of the children it was serving (if it was serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships)
- Program administration and director information.

The ELD survey was sent to 261 ELD program directors, and 92 responded (35%). (A copy of the survey is in Appendix B.) Because of the low response rate, findings may not be representative of all ELD programs in the four Zones and should be interpreted with caution.

**Scholarship Application Data**

Each Zone developed its own process and procedures for enrolling eligible families to receive RTT-ELC Scholarships. MDE provided the Zones with a model RTT-ELC Scholarship application form, and each Zone adopted or adapted it to create a form for families to complete to apply for the scholarships. In addition, the evaluation team and MDE developed a set of questions to elicit child and family demographic information during the application process; some of the questions were on the application form, or data for them were available on other databases used in each Zone (e.g., NAZ Connect database). These scholarship application data have been collected annually to describe implementation changes and progress. A summary of the items from the Zones’ scholarship applications (and other demographic information obtained from the Zones) is contained in Appendix C.

As in Years 1 and 2 of the evaluation, between August and September 2015 the evaluation team worked with the RTT-ELC Scholarships administrators in each Zone to obtain exports of the scholarship application data and other demographic data.

\textsuperscript{16} Data from http://www.naccrra.org/membership/naccrraware/.
\textsuperscript{17} Data from http://www.parentawareratings.org/.
Findings

The findings are organized in four sections that describe (1) the early childhood context in each of the Zones before the RTT-ELC grant; (2) how the RTT-ELC Scholarships were implemented; (3) the impacts of the RTT-ELC Scholarships on children, families, and ELD programs; and (4) long-term success and sustainability related to the RTT-ELC Scholarships. More specifically, these sections present data on the assistance MDE gave the Zones in supporting the RTT-ELC Scholarships, how each Zone administered and implemented the RTT-ELC Scholarships, how each conducted outreach to families and ELD programs, and the implementation impacts, successes, and challenges as well as what the Zones saw as impacts that will be sustainable beyond the end of the RTT-ELC grant.

Context of the Four Transformation Zones

As described in the annual reports from Years 1 and 2, each Transformation Zone had a system supporting early childhood development in place before the start of the RTT-ELC grant. However, each community still had significant gaps in serving high-needs children in high-quality ELD programs that were not being met by available resources. These Zones were chosen to implement the RTT-ELC Scholarships because of this need for greater access to high-quality ELD programs, as well as for their existing resources and commitment to implementing the RTT-ELC Scholarships in a way that would support positive outcomes for children, families, and the community.
Itasca

The Itasca Transformation Zone encompasses all Itasca County (Figure 2), a large rural area in northeast Minnesota with approximately 1,300 children under age 6 living in low-income households in any given year. Interviewees noted that one of Itasca County’s challenges is providing high-quality ELD programs and services for children birth to 5 years in a variety of settings across a wide geographic span. (Additional information about the Itasca Transformation Zone is contained in the Year 1 Annual Report.)

**Figure 2. Itasca County Transformation Zone**
NAZ

The Minneapolis Transformation Zone includes the area of north Minneapolis known as the Northside Achievement Zone. The NAZ is modeled after the Harlem Children’s Zone and concentrates programming and services within a 13- by 18-block area in North Minneapolis (Figure 3). Approximately 2,000 children are under age 6 in the NAZ, with a large number (1,500) living in low-income households. (Additional information about the NAZ Transformation Zone is contained in the Year 1 Annual Report.)

Figure 3. Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) Transformation Zone

The Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) is a nonprofit organization serving families living in poverty in Harlem. It offers parenting workshops, preschool programs, public charter schools, and child-oriented health programs for children and families. The goal of HCZ is to reduce intergenerational poverty through a comprehensive system of programs aimed at keeping children on track throughout school into college and into the job market. See http://www.hcz.org/hcz-home.php
The Transformation Zone in Saint Paul is the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (Figure 4), which received a federal Promise Neighborhood planning grant in 2010–11 and has received philanthropic, state, and local funding in subsequent years. This area, which includes Frogtown and the Summit-University neighborhoods, has a large population of children from low-income families (i.e., close to 2,000 children under age 6) and relatively few high-quality ELD programs. (Additional information about the SPPN Transformation Zone is in the Year 1 Annual Report.)

Figure 4. Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPPN) Transformation Zone
White Earth

The White Earth Transformation Zone incorporates the entire White Earth Indian Reservation. The experience of implementing the RTT-ELC grant in this area of Minnesota and the data collected on the impact of the initiatives on children, families, ELD programs, and the community at large will be applicable to the state’s other tribal lands. The White Earth Reservation is in northwestern Minnesota and encompasses three Minnesota counties—all of Mahnomen, almost all of the northern half of Becker, and the southwest corner of Clearwater County (Figure 5). It is home to approximately 795 children under the age of 5.20 (Additional information about the White Earth Transformation Zone is contained in the Year 1 Annual Report.)

Figure 5. White Earth Reservation Transformation Zone

Implementation of RTT-ELC Scholarships

Support from Minnesota Department of Education on RTT-ELC Scholarships

As the administrator of the federal RTT-ELC grant, the Minnesota Department of Education provided guidance and supported the efforts of each Zone in planning and implementing the RTT-ELC Scholarships. Specific requirements for use of the RTT-ELC Scholarships were communicated to staff in the Zones, but local flexibility in implementation was encouraged, and MDE required each Zone to develop and submit to it an implementation protocol. This protocol was expected to include the Zone’s process for the RTT-ELC Scholarship application and eligibility determination, identification of staff involved in allocation decisions, decisions about the amount of each RTT-ELC Scholarship, and specification of the process for prioritizing RTT-ELC Scholarships to families if a waiting list was needed.

MDE told the Zones that the primary goal of the RTT-ELC Scholarships is to promote access to high-quality ELD programs for high-needs children and that the grant to Minnesota outlined four required parameters:

1. Eligibility is limited to children ages birth to kindergarten entry from families with incomes of less than 200% of the federal poverty rate.
2. RTT-ELC Scholarships must be used in 3- or 4-star Parent Aware-rated ELD programs.  
3. RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients must attend the ELD program for a minimum of 15 hours per week to ensure the intensity of instruction is adequate to address their learning needs.
4. Families must be offered the opportunity to have their child participate in early childhood screening.

RTT-ELC Scholarships in each Zone have been administered by the following agencies:
- Itasca County – Itasca Area School Collaborative (through a subcontract with Think Small)
- NAZ – Think Small
- SPPN – Think Small
- White Earth – White Earth Child Care/Early Childhood Program.

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21 This guideline was later amended to allow each Zone to decide whether or not any ELD program that was participating in Parent Aware could enroll children with RTT-ELC Scholarships.
Additional information about MDE’s support and guidance for the Transformation Zones is contained in the Year 1 Annual Report, including guidelines about how funds could be used.

**Models of Implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships**

Each Zone adopted a model of RTT-ELC Scholarship implementation that both met state guidelines and addressed the specific needs of its community. Each Zone identified strategies for administering the RTT-ELC Scholarships, developed plans for how the RTT-ELC Scholarships would fit in with the community’s existing early childhood activities, and worked to identify families that would benefit from participation. Phone interviews with key informants and RTT-ELC Scholarship administrators between May and September 2015 suggested that in the past year only minor modifications were made to further tailor administration and family engagement to local needs.

Additional information about MDE’s support and guidance for the Transformation Zones is in the Year 1 Annual Report, including guidelines about how funds could be used.

**Itasca.** As in previous years, in Year 3 of the evaluation Itasca used RTT-ELC Scholarship funding to increase both the number of ELD program slots available for students and the length of day for some students already in attendance. Itasca’s ELD programs were expanded or additional spaces for children were added in the following ways:

- Extended half-day Head Start to full-day programming for two classrooms of 17 children each
- Added 25 slots, or one and one-half Invest Early classrooms, for students to attend ELD programming.

As in the previous years, Itasca also used RTT-ELC Scholarship funds to support families that previously had intermittent CCAP funding or had been paying for ELD programs themselves; in Year 3 this benefited 19 children attending center-based care (YMCA) and 24 children attending family child care programs. Additionally, 3- and 4-star-rated family child care programs and the YMCA were able to use RTT-ELC Scholarships to extend the length of services or enable families to receive consistent care at one center over the course of the week rather than split time between multiple centers.

In a new use of funds in Year 3, Itasca obtained a “mentor grant” via the RTT-ELC grant to provide professional development for programs that were rated (or were in the process of being rated) in Parent Aware and that were therefore eligible to serve children with RTT-ELC Scholarships. These trainings, which occurred four times a year, served to enhance the quality of care provided to the community’s children and were also a means to coordinate the benefits of Care and Development through the use of RTT-ELC Scholarships.

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22 CCAP is the state’s Child Care Assistance Program.
funding and build collaboration across Itasca’s early childhood network. Feedback about the utility of these trainings from program staff members, especially those in family child care programs and the YMCA, was overwhelmingly positive.

In Year 3 of the evaluation, Itasca continued to target and prioritize 3- and 4-year-old children with high-risk rankings when awarding RTT-ELC Scholarships, although some younger children also received these scholarships. For the children from the lowest income families, Head Start funding was typically used first because of its family income requirements. These children were served in either KOOTASCA Head Start or Invest Early classrooms. ELD programs for children from higher income families (but still at least 200% of the federal poverty level) were paid for with Blandin Foundation funds, school-based School Readiness program funds, and the RTT-ELC Scholarship funds, or some combination. These children were served in Invest Early classrooms, school district School Readiness classrooms, or Parent Aware-rated ELD programs (both center-based and family child care programs).

Itasca also continued to require families to apply for CCAP funds as part of the RTT-ELC Scholarship application process. To ensure that families were not inadvertently using RTT-ELC Scholarships to supplant CCAP funding, families awarded RTT-ELC Scholarships were required to complete a CCAP application, and any CCAP funds received were included in the determination of the RTT-ELC Scholarship amount. Invest Early served as the intake location for CCAP applications and then transferred the applications to the county offices.

**NAZ.** As described in the previous annual reports, the NAZ had been serving the community for a number of years before receiving the RTT-ELC grant by providing families with a comprehensive system of “cradle to career” supports and by building an integrated network of partner organizations. The NAZ used the RTT-ELC Scholarships to complement other funding streams to further this work, including a federal Promise Neighborhood grant. Before a child could be awarded an RTT-ELC Scholarship, the family had to first be enrolled in the NAZ. NAZ Navigators and Connectors, individuals who were themselves members of the community, then worked with the family to identify its needs and provide it with relevant resources, including the RTT-ELC Scholarship. The RTT-ELC Scholarships enabled very high-risk children, most of whom had not previously been in formal care, to receive high-quality early learning experiences.

The community that the NAZ serves is predominantly African American and has large numbers of families experiencing multiple generations of poverty and high rates of unemployment. Accordingly, in Year 1 and Year 2 of implementation, the NAZ awarded many of its RTT-ELC Scholarships to families whose heads of household were not employed and therefore not CCAP eligible, so little braiding of funding occurred. As part of a holistic
approach to addressing families’ needs, the NAZ also chose to award RTT-ELC Scholarships to younger siblings of the 3- to 5-year-old children who were the RTT-ELC Scholarship targets. The NAZ also awarded RTT-ELC Scholarships to younger children with no older sibling when there were extenuating risk circumstances in the family; RTT-ELC Scholarships were often awarded to very young children in families with no other supplemental funding. These policies resulted in the disproportionate funding of younger children, whose tuition is typically higher. Thus, fewer children were served in the NAZ overall because of the higher cost per child.

In Year 2 many of the younger children who had not yet reached kindergarten received a second year of RTT-ELC Scholarship funding, meaning that they were experiencing longer, continuous high-quality ELD programming. However, it also meant that few slots were available for new children to receive RTT-ELC Scholarships in Year 2. Although NAZ interviewees continued to believe in the long-term benefits of this approach for their community, they did alter their policies in the second year to prioritize older children when new slots became available. At first, they stopped awarding RTT-ELC Scholarships to families that did not have at least one 3- to 5-year-old child. However, in families that did have at least one child in this age range, younger siblings were still eligible.

In Year 3 of the evaluation, the NAZ leadership decided that in the final year of RTT-ELC funding they would award new RTT-ELC Scholarships only to children in their last year before kindergarten and that younger siblings would not be eligible. Interviewees reported that these changes came about because of the realization that NAZ-enrolled children were entering kindergarten without any prior preschool experience and that more attention needed to be paid to school readiness in the Zone, given that it is an important target outcome of both the RTT-ELC and federal Promise Neighborhood grants.

As in Year 2, interviewees reported that RTT-ELC Scholarship funds in the NAZ were used to serve the community in two primary ways:

- to assist children in entering high-quality ELD programs for the first time but focusing on 4-year-olds only; and
- to increase participation of children already enrolled in ELD programs, either by adding days to the week or hours to the day.

In Year 3 the NAZ also worked with families of children with RTT-ELC Scholarships who were not yet entering kindergarten to enroll them in the Minnesota State Early Learning Scholarships so they would have continuing ELD programming up to kindergarten entry after the RTT-ELC grant funds were no longer available.

**SPPN.** In many ways similar to the NAZ, SPPN is also a place-based initiative that aims to provide the unique cultural community that it serves with comprehensive services and supports. However, SPPN’s approach is slightly different in that it does its work largely
through fostering community agency collaboration rather than vetting and bringing in partners. As in all Zones, the local context influenced the policies set for RTT-ELC Scholarship implementation. The families SPPN serves are largely inner city low-income families, and a substantial portion are recent immigrants and refugees, which can result in additional language-related challenges. However, SPPN had participated in the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF) Scholarship pilot before the receipt of the RTT-ELC grant, and interviewees reported that this helped promote a culture of early learning and acceptance of ELD programming within most of the cultural communities. Also, CCAP enrollment is relatively high in SPPN because of higher employment rates and/or school attendance among parents.

SPPN took this high CCAP enrollment into consideration when setting RTT-ELC Scholarship policies; its goal was to braid funding to the greatest extent possible in order to serve as many children as possible with some amount of RTT-ELC Scholarship funding. In Year 1, RTT-ELC Scholarships were awarded in a first-come, first-served manner, largely to children who were already attending some type of ELD programming. Priority for receipt of the RTT-ELC Scholarships was given to 3- and 4-year-olds, but younger siblings also were considered when there were extenuating circumstances. SPPN leadership determined that targeting 3- and 4-year-olds was the most efficient use of funds, given the desire to promote kindergarten readiness in combination with the short-term nature of the grant. Additionally, interviewees reported that in many SPPN cultural communities, parents were more comfortable sending older children out of the home into care but were hesitant to do so with infants and toddlers.

In both Years 1 and 2, SPPN determined the amount of RTT-ELC Scholarships by the cost of the program each child was attending, less any other funds the child may be receiving (such as CCAP). As in the other Zones, funds to support each child in ELD programming through kindergarten entry were obligated at the point of award, so some younger children had multiple years of funding allotted to them. However, relative to other Zones, a higher proportion of children in SPPN transitioned into kindergarten by Year 2 because they were older at the initial point of award. If a child with an RTT-ELC Scholarship left SPPN before the end of his/her award, those funds were reallocated to the next child on the waiting list. In Year 2 approximately 20 children were on the waiting list at any time.

In Year 2 SPPN RTT-ELC Scholarships were used in the following ways:

- To enroll children who had no previous experience with ELD programs and would otherwise not be enrolled; interviewees estimated that 25–33% of children receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships had not previously been in formal care.
- To provide more continuous care or additional hours or days for already enrolled students; these were children who were already attending a program prior to RTT-
ELC but who may have been experiencing discontinuity in care due to lapses in CCAP or families’ difficulty paying for programming, or who were attending only part time and would benefit from more care.

- To provide full-day Head Start for children who were initially enrolled in half-day Head Start; approximately one-third of the SPPN RTT-ELC Scholarships were used for this.

A significant change occurred in SPPN in Year 2 regarding which ELD programs RTT-ELC Scholarships could be used in. In Year 1, RTT-ELC Scholarships could be used in any ELD program that was Parent Aware-rated or that was in the process of becoming rated, regardless of actual star rating. SPPN considered the first year to be a grace period for programs, giving them more time to meet the criteria for a 3- or 4-star rating because of changes made to the rating system after the end of the Parent Aware pilot project. However, the policy was that beginning in January 2014, RTT-ELC Scholarships could be used only in 3- or 4-star-rated programs; 1- and 2-star-rated programs would no longer be eligible for RTT-ELC Scholarship reimbursement. This was necessary to meet the state mandate that RTT-ELC Scholarships provide high-needs children with access to high-quality ELD programming, and it was meant to give programs the incentive to raise their star rating so as to continue to serve children funded through RTT-ELC Scholarships. After this policy change, the number of 3- or 4-star-rated programs in SPPN increased from 16 in 2013 to 39 in 2014.

In Year 3 of the evaluation, SPPN did not change its policies for awarding RTT-ELC Scholarships. Because the RTT-ELC grant was drawing to a close, Zone staff shifted their focus to transition planning. Recruitment of new families was slowly discontinued, and by fall 2015 the waiting list for RTT-ELC Scholarships was closed and the priority was to spend down remaining funds. Given the significant reinvestment by the state legislature in the Minnesota Early Learning Scholarships, Zone staff also began transitioning recipients of the RTT-ELC Scholarships to these state-funded Early Learning Scholarships if they qualified for them.

**White Earth.** White Earth signed its RTT-ELC contract in September 2012, and the White Earth Child Care (WECC)/Early Childhood Program began awarding RTT-ELC Scholarships in November 2012. To empower parents and build capacity among families, White Earth RTT-ELC Scholarship use was linked with parent education. To receive RTT-ELC Scholarships, parents agreed to work with a mentor who visited their home and to attend two child development trainings per year. When funding for two of White Earth’s four parent mentors ended in Year 2, WECC asked child care providers to offer more parent mentoring. Interview respondents found that this was largely sufficient because many parents worked and were not available for home visits during the day.
In Year 2 and beyond, relatively few new families were being enrolled in the RTT-ELC Scholarship program. In White Earth, many of the children awarded RTT-ELC Scholarships in Year 1 were younger (age 2 or 3). As a result, White Earth was obligated to provide multiple years of funding for them. This low turnover meant that many children received more than 1 year of continuous care, and only a small number of new slots opened in Years 2 and 3 when some children exited the RTT-ELC Scholarship program to enter kindergarten. These were rapidly filled from the established waiting list. White Earth awarded 144 RTT-ELC Scholarships during the first 2 years. In Year 3, 40 new children (mostly age 0 to 3) were added.

As in Year 1, a risk-ranking system was used to select the highest need families to receive RTT-ELC Scholarships in the following years. Interviewees reported that the risk-ranking system prioritized nonworking families, although they were harder to find and enroll. As a result, most families that received RTT-ELC Scholarships were working families. The RTT-ELC Scholarship amount awarded varied from family to family as it was decided based on the availability of other funding sources. For children already receiving CCAP, those funds were used first. For CCAP-eligible families who were on the waiting list, the RTT-ELC Scholarship was used first since they were not yet receiving CCAP funds. Because the RTT-ELC Scholarships lack the parental work requirements of CCAP, the RTT-ELC Scholarships enabled WECC to provide the highest need families in the community with access to high-quality early learning programming. Many of these were families in which parents were not working and were socially isolated.

**Family Engagement in Implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships**

**Itasca.** In Year 3 of the evaluation, Itasca continued to use the same strategies to recruit families for RTT-ELC Scholarships as in previous years. Families and children were recruited through community referrals. Administrators worked with medical professionals, school systems, county support offices, and other services located throughout the community to refer families. Beginning in Year 2, a common application form was used to apply for Invest Early preschool classrooms, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and other Parent Aware-rated ELD programs in the community, including child care centers and family child care programs. This form was also the application for RTT-ELC Scholarships. As mentioned, families were also required to apply for CCAP if they had not already, to ensure they were not supplanting CCAP funds with RTT-ELC Scholarship funds. Families that wished to apply were supported by an in-person visit by Zone staff to their home, if desired, to help fill out forms. The process was personalized to fit the needs of the families Itasca serves.
**NAZ.** As described in earlier reports, in Year 1 the NAZ used a tiered approach for recruiting families to receive the RTT-ELC Scholarships, starting with those already enrolled in the NAZ. First, NAZ Connectors referred already enrolled NAZ families they believed could benefit from stable ELD programming to NAZ Navigators. The NAZ Navigators assisted those families through the RTT-ELC Scholarship application process. Second, NAZ staff reached out to their partner ELD programs and asked them to identify potentially eligible children (i.e., area residents who were not yet enrolled in the NAZ). NAZ staff contacted these families, and those who wanted an RTT-ELC Scholarship were assigned to a NAZ Connector and then enrolled in the NAZ. Third, the NAZ also planned to offer RTT-ELC Scholarships to non-NAZ families through outreach to the general public in the Zone. Some of these families then became NAZ families after receiving an RTT-ELC Scholarship.

In Year 2 the process was similar but abbreviated. As most of the RTT-ELC Scholarship funds had been obligated, there was less need to recruit. When funds became available, NAZ Connectors were asked to identify a family with a 4-year-old who could use those funds. In most cases, the NAZ Connector had already been working with the identified family to find care for the child, and he or she then offered the RTT-ELC Scholarship as a means to pay for that care. This approach was aligned with the shift to targeting older children.

As described above, in Year 3 the process of awarding new RTT-ELC Scholarships was the same as in Year 2 but focused on 4-year-olds only. In addition, NAZ staff worked with families of those children with RTT-ELC Scholarships who would not be entering kindergarten by fall 2015 to enroll them in the Minnesota State Early Learning Scholarship program.

**SPPN.** In Year 3 of the evaluation, SPPN continued to use strategies to recruit families for RTT-ELC Scholarships similar to those in previous years. It continued to target 4-year-old children in their last year before kindergarten and their younger siblings. Generally, the SPPN strategy for enrolling families to receive RTT-ELC Scholarships was to share information throughout the community and seek referrals from various agencies. SPPN benefited from the connections that its administrator, Think Small, had already developed within the community. Working on behalf of SPPN, Think Small provided information about RTT-ELC Scholarships to Parent Aware-rated programs and asked them to refer qualifying children and families. SPPN Community Navigators (staff in the SPPN who work closely with families), public health nurses, and family resource staff were all trained to inform families about RTT-ELC Scholarship availability and help them complete the application. When desired, Think Small’s referral department also helped families locate ELD programs that had available spaces and that fit their needs.

**White Earth.** In Year 1 WECC staff conducted outreach about RTT-ELC Scholarships by attending program staff meetings and distributing brochures to all public
agencies on the White Earth Reservation (e.g., home health, Head Start), to the tribal
government, and to each of the county governments that the reservation is part of (i.e.,
Mahnomen, Clearwater, and Becker counties). Staff reached out to area school districts and
ELD programs on the reservation about the RTT-ELC Scholarships. Advertisements were
also placed in the tribal newspaper, Anishinaabeg Today (which goes to all households on the
White Earth Reservation). White Earth interviewees reported that word of mouth is an
important way to spread information in the community. (For more detail, see the Year 1
Annual Report.) In Years 2 and 3, respondents reported doing much less outreach regarding
the RTT-ELC Scholarships because it was not necessary; a waiting list was established with
very few available slots. However, throughout the RTT-ELC Scholarship granting period,
WECC staff continuously engaged families by distributing monthly activity packets and
newsletters and interacting with parents during regular child development education
meetings.
Perspectives from the Zones on the Role of the State and Local Actors

"Our community has had a 10-year-long history of partnering very well together [with the state], and I think we are able to make decisions that make sense for our community. I don't think the state can make those same types of decisions that work for [each] community…. Allowing the communities to make some of the decisions based on the needs of their communities is what needs to happen."

"I certainly think [the state] needs to give guidance on some best practices, but I also think that what [it is] there for is support."

"I think the early learning standards that we have developed and that [the state] continually works on are good, but I think it gets back to if you're going to make a difference for a child care provider...you can't just hand them that and say 'Here are some standards.'"

"I believe the players have to be involved from the state level, but there can't be a model of 'This is what you're going to do and it's going to work in metro and rural.' It's not."

"I think the state agency should have responsibility for the overall big picture and the overall goals and managing the resources, but I think they should try to do it from a more flexible perspective. So they are managing to the goals, not dictating minute details."

"I think the way that Race to the Top worked was pretty ideal.... The state set the minimum requirements, and the zones could do more or less. ... It's individualized to the community served. Not every community is the same. The needs in the White Earth reservation are going to be very different from the needs of inner city kids. The community that we serve is very diverse.... The program needs to be able to shape itself to meet the needs of the community that it's operating in."

"It's a partnership. Race to the Top is a good model. The state has the funding, but it's given out to the different Transformation Zones to meet the need....Locally, the district determines how the [RTT-ELC] Scholarships are administered."

"The state can help with data collection for the evaluations. Its role is to find out what the needs are; it needs to do some of the assessing and listen to the lessons learned. The state could come up with more options for [RTT-ELC] Scholarships."

Impacts and Short-Term Successes of the RTT-ELC Scholarships

Presented here is information about the impacts of RTT-ELC Scholarships on the children and families, ELD programs, and the early childhood systems in all Zones and in each Zone in Year 3. The section begins with data from the RTT-ELC Scholarship applications (collected from August to September 2015), followed by data from the online
survey of ELD programs (collected from September to December 2015), interspersed with data from the interviews with Zone staff (conducted from May to September 2015).

**Impacts on Children and Families**

**Children and Families Receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships**

From RTT-ELC Scholarship application data, 977 RTT-ELC Scholarships were awarded in the first 3 years of implementation across the four Zones (Table 1). Of the 977 families, 70 (7%) were awarded to families who declined to share their information for the evaluation. The demographic data presented are for the remaining 907 children (93%).

Of the RTT-ELC Scholarships awarded across the four Zones, more than one-third were awarded to children in SPPN (38%), about one-fourth were for children in Itasca (28%), about one-fifth were for children in White Earth (19%), and almost one-fifth were for children in NAZ (15%) (Table 1).

**Table 1. RTT-ELC Scholarships Awarded, All Zones and by Zone**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>Total as of Year 1* (fall 2013)</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>676 100</td>
<td>127 19</td>
<td>279 41</td>
<td>121 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>Total as of Year 2 (fall 2014)</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>846 100</td>
<td>156 18</td>
<td>344 41</td>
<td>144 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Added in Year 2</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>Total as of Year 3 (fall 2015)b</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>977 100</td>
<td>150 15</td>
<td>367 38</td>
<td>186 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consented</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>907 93</td>
<td>120 80</td>
<td>330 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonconsented</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>70 7</td>
<td>30 20</td>
<td>37 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Added in Year 3</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>72 6*</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table represents the cumulative number of RTT-ELC Scholarships awarded as of the marking point. NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.

* Two duplicate records in SPPN were discovered and removed as of this Year 3 report, so the numbers for Year 1 and Year 2 in this table differ by 2 from those reported in the Year 1 and Year 2 annual reports.

b The totals show the percentages for each Zone out of the total for all Zones combined.

* Because of the way data were tracked at the administrative level between Year 1 and Year 2, we were unable to reconcile the drop in total number of children receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships in NAZ between Year 2 and Year 3.

23 Includes RTT-ELC Scholarships awarded as of dates ranging from August 26 to September 3, 2015, depending on Zone.

24 Each Zone received the same amount of funding for RTT-ELC Scholarships; NAZ and White Earth chose to use their funds to serve fewer children for a longer time (i.e., for 2 or 3 years before kindergarten), whereas SPPN (and Itasca to a lesser extent) served more children for a shorter time (i.e., for only 1 year before kindergarten).
Characteristics of the Children Who Received RTT-ELC Scholarships

Children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships had the following demographic characteristics:

- Across the Zones, about half were girls (48%) and half were boys (46%), with 5% missing data (Table 2).

Table 2. Gender and Age of Children Who Received RTT-ELC Scholarships, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>All Zones N</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca n</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ n</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN n</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth n</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at award*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth to 2 years</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years old</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years old</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years old or older</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood. The total numbers in the bottom row are the same for gender and age at award.

* Age was calculated using the RTT-ELC Scholarship start date provided by the Zone.

- Across the Zones, when they were awarded the RTT-ELC Scholarship about one-fourth of the children were under 3 years of age (29%), were 3-year-olds (28%), or were 4-year-olds (29%). About one-tenth were 5 years or older (13%) (Table 2).
  - In White Earth and the NAZ, more RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients were under age 3 (62% and 40%, respectively) than in Itasca and SPPN (20% and 14%, respectively).

- Across all Zones as of October 1, 2015, most children who received an RTT-ELC Scholarship had completed or stopped participating in the program (88%), although a small number were still using the funds (10%) (Table 3). All RTT-ELC Scholarships funds will end by June 30, 2016.
  - Of the 802 children who were no longer using their RTT-ELC Scholarships, relatively few (8%) had used them for less than 4 months. Larger proportions of
children had used their RTT-ELC Scholarships for 4–8 months (27%), 8–12 months (18%), or 1–2 years (28%). Approximately one-tenth (about 14%) used their RTT-ELC Scholarships for more than 2 years.

- Itasca had a small number of RTT-ELC Scholarships still active as of October 1, 2015 (27, 10%), all of which will end by June 30, 2016.

- White Earth had more RTT-ELC Scholarships still active as of October 1, 2015 (62, 33%). Many of those were moved to state Early Learning Scholarships during October (30 scholarships), and the remaining 32 scholarships were set to close by June 30, 2016 when RTT-ELC Scholarship funds end.

Table 3. Length of Time That Children Received RTT-ELC Scholarships, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 4 months</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–8 months</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–12 months</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 years</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown length</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Status and length of time calculated as of October 1, 2015.

- Across all Zones, about one-fourth of RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients were white (29%) or African American or African immigrants (28%), 17% were American Indian, and 10% were biracial; race/ethnicity data were missing for 10% of children (mainly in the NAZ and SPPN) (Table 4).

- The ethnicity of the children varied across the four Zones, reflecting demographic variations of the populations in each area.

  - In Itasca, the majority of RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients were white (84%).
Table 4. **Ethnicity and Home Language of Children Who Received RTT-ELC Scholarships, All Zones and by Zone**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child ethnicity</th>
<th>All Zones N</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca n</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ n</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN n</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth n</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American or African immigrant</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American or Asian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>907</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood. The total numbers in the bottom row are the same for ethnicity and home language.

- In the NAZ, about two-thirds of the RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients were African American or African immigrants (77%) (with information about ethnicity missing for 11% of the children).

- SPPN RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients were the most ethnically diverse; nearly half were African American or of African descent (46%), 12% were biracial, 7% were Asian, and 6% were Hispanic (with information about ethnicity missing for 24% of the children).
• In White Earth, 66% of RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients were American Indian, about one-fifth were biracial (21%), and 13% were white.

• Across the four Zones, the majority of children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships spoke English as their primary home language (94%) (Table 4).
  – English was the primary home language for all or almost all families in Itasca, the NAZ, and White Earth.
  – Matching the SPPN Transformation Zone’s ethnic diversity, for 11% of families, languages other than English were their primary home language (Hmong, Karen, Somali, Spanish, and other).

**Characteristics of the Families of Children Who Received RTT-ELC Scholarships**

All RTT-ELC Scholarships were awarded to children of families whose income was at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Many families also had other characteristics that can increase parent or caregiver stress or are risk factors for children having less than optimal school readiness skills (Table 5).

• Across all Zones, about two-fifths of parents or primary caregivers of children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships had a high school diploma (40%); 17% did not graduate from high school. Only 7% had a bachelor’s or higher degree.
  – In the NAZ, almost half of parents of the children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships had not completed high school (48%) (with data missing for 22% of the families).
  – In Itasca and White Earth, 37% and 29%, respectively, of parents of the children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships were high school graduates, and about half had completed some college, received an associate’s degree, or attended a vocational education program after high school (46% and 55%, respectively).
  – In SPPN, about one-fifth of parents had less than a high school degree (21%), and almost two-thirds were high school graduates (60%).

• Across the four Zones, more than half of the children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships lived with a single parent (59%), and small numbers were living with other relatives (3%) or in foster families (4%).
  – In each Zone, almost half or more families of children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships were single-parent households: Itasca – 45%; the NAZ and White Earth – 55%; and SPPN – 73% (with data missing for 16% of families in the NAZ).
Table 5. Demographic Characteristics of Parents/Caregivers of Children Who Received RTT-ELC Scholarships, All Zones and by Zone

| Table 5. Demographic Characteristics of Parents/Caregivers of Children Who Received RTT-ELC Scholarships, All Zones and by Zone |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parent education | All Zones | All Zones | Itasca | Itasca | NAZ | NAZ | SPPN | SPPN | White Earth | White Earth |
| | N | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Less than high school graduate | 155 | 17 | 14 | 5 | 58 | 48 | 68 | 21 | 15 | 8 |
| High school diploma/GED | 359 | 40 | 99 | 37 | 7 | 6 | 199 | 60 | 54 | 29 |
| Associate's or some college | 243 | 27 | 126 | 46 | 19 | 16 | 58 | 18 | 102 | 55 |
| Bachelor's | 42 | 5 | 25 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 5 |
| Master's or higher | 14 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 |
| Missing | 32 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 26 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Household type | | | | | | | | | | |
| Two parent | 295 | 33 | 132 | 49 | 34 | 28 | 89 | 27 | 40 | 22 |
| Single parent | 532 | 59 | 123 | 45 | 66 | 55 | 240 | 73 | 103 | 55 |
| Relative | 26 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 9 |
| Foster parent | 32 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | <1 | 25 | 13 |
| Missing | 22 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 19 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Parent employment status | | | | | | | | | | |
| Full time | 280 | 31 | 115 | 42 | 37 | 31 | 24 | 7 | 104 | 56 |
| Part time | 164 | 18 | 78 | 29 | 16 | 13 | 49 | 15 | 21 | 11 |
| Unemployed or retired | 322 | 36 | 73 | 27 | 51 | 43 | 138 | 42 | 60 | 32 |
| Missing | 141 | 16 | 5 | 2 | 16 | 13 | 119 | 36 | 1 | 1 |
| Household size (total number of people) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | 131 | 14 | 46 | 17 | 7 | 6 | 50 | 15 | 28 | 15 |
| 3 | 192 | 21 | 70 | 26 | 15 | 13 | 77 | 23 | 30 | 16 |
| 4 | 194 | 21 | 74 | 27 | 23 | 19 | 44 | 13 | 53 | 28 |
| 5 | 153 | 17 | 45 | 17 | 19 | 16 | 52 | 16 | 37 | 20 |
| 6 or more | 157 | 17 | 32 | 12 | 43 | 36 | 44 | 13 | 38 | 20 |
| Missing | 80 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 13 | 11 | 63 | 19 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 907 | 100% | 271 | 30% | 120 | 13% | 330 | 36% | 186 | 21% |

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood. The total numbers in the bottom row are the same for parent education, household type, parent employment status, and household size.
About one-third of parents of children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships were unemployed or retired (36%), one-third worked full time\(^2^5\) (31%), and 18% had part-time jobs, with caregiver employment varying across the Zones.

- In Itasca and White Earth, most parents were employed full time or part time (71% and 67%, respectively).
- In the NAZ and SPPN, about two-fifths of the parents were unemployed or retired (43% and 42%, respectively) (data were missing for 13% in the NAZ and 36% in SPPN).

Across all Zones, 5% of parents of children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships were teens, with Itasca and White Earth having the highest rates (10% and 7%, respectively) and the NAZ and SPPN having few teen parents (1% and 2%, respectively).

Across the four Zones, 9% of families of children receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships were homeless, with the highest rates of homeless families in the NAZ (16%) and SPPN (9%), compared with 7% in Itasca and 6% in White Earth.

Data about participation in public assistance program use was also collected. The families of children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships varied in their use of two public assistance programs, the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). MFIP, the state’s welfare reform program for low-income families with children, helps families move to work, and it includes both cash and food assistance to support caregivers’ participation in work or job training. CCAP is a subsidy program that helps qualifying low-income parents pay for child care while they go to work, look for work, or attend school.

- Across all Zones, about one-third of families with children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships received MFIP services (37%).
  - Itasca had the highest rates of MFIP use (48%).
  - In the NAZ and SPPN, about one-third of these families received MFIP (33% and 37%, respectively).
  - About one-fourth of the families in White Earth received MFIP (24%).

- Across the four Zones, one-fifth of families of children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships participated in CCAP (21%), either through the state CCAP or through the White Earth Nation CCAP.
  - White Earth had the highest rates of CCAP use by families of children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships (32%, including both state and tribal CCAP).

\( ^2^5 \) Full-time employment is defined as 35 or more hours of work per week.
- In SPPN, 27% of these families received CCAP.
- In Itasca, 11% of these families received CCAP.
- In the NAZ, only 8% (with 29% missing data) of the families of children who were awarded RTT-ELC Scholarships received CCAP because staff intentionally targeted families who were high risk and socially isolated, and these families were often not eligible for CCAP.

**Impacts on Children and Families: Perspectives from the Zones**

This section describes how well the Zones implemented the RTT-ELC Scholarships, as reported by interviewees. In summer 2015, evaluation staff interviewed a total of 12 respondents from the four Zones (four from Itasca, four from the NAZ, three from SPPN, and two from White Earth). Interviewees were asked about their perceptions of the successes of the RTT-ELC Scholarship program and the factors they believed were related to its effective implementation in their Zone.

**Findings Regarding Children and Families in Year 3**

As in previous years, interviewees in all four Zones described the RTT-ELC Scholarships as having positive impacts on the children and families receiving them. In general, RTT-ELC Scholarships increased access for children to high-quality ELD programs. Increased access took the form of

- increased continuity of care (i.e., consistent enrollment with fewer disruptions);
- expanded hours (i.e., longer days or longer weeks) for those already in high-quality care; and
- more children formerly at home or in lower quality care settings filling slots in high-quality ELD programs. Interviewees noted that this continuity of care generally resulted in high-quality early learning experiences for children and less stress and more stability for families.

**Itasca.** As in previous years, in Year 3 of the evaluation Itasca interviewees reported that RTT-ELC Scholarships “provided [more child care] options for parents” and continued to increase children’s participation in ELD programming in their community. RTT-ELC created opportunities to attend ELD programs for families that otherwise would not have been able to afford them. RTT-ELC Scholarships enabled children who were previously in informal care settings (e.g., in family, friend, and neighbor care, FFN) to receive high-quality licensed ELD programming. New Invest Early preschool slots were created using RTT-ELC

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26 One respondent served as an interviewee for both NAZ and SPPN and contributes to counts in both Zones.
funds and filled by children who had been on the Invest Early waiting list. For other children who had already been in care, the RTT-ELC Scholarships increased the amount of time they could spend in their ELD programs. These included some children in Head Start who had been attending half-day programs and were now able to attend for the full day using RTT-ELC Scholarships. As in previous years, Itasca interviewees reported that RTT-ELC Scholarships were having an effect on the adults in the family as well; having children in stable, high-quality care enabled parents to reenter the workforce or perform more consistently at the job they already had.

Additionally, the ELD programs that children were attending were of higher quality because many had made quality improvements to raise their Parent Aware ratings. Although Itasca allowed RTT-ELC Scholarships to be used at ELD programs with any rating, it also supported programs in working to comply with 3- and 4-star rating requirements. By Year 3 a substantial number of center-based and family child care programs had been rated 3 or 4 stars. The increased collaboration among ELD programs and the professional development provided to program staff through the mentor grant in Year 3 also served to improve the quality of care families experienced. In Year 3 Itasca interviewees also cited the personal level of service they were able to provide to families (e.g., making visits to help them complete application forms) as a key factor in being able to better support families in their rural community to access the services they need.

**NAZ.** As in Year 1, NAZ interviewees believed that one of their greatest successes was using RTT-ELC Scholarships to enroll children in high-quality ELD programming who otherwise would not have had access to such early learning experiences (e.g. families without CCAP or other alternative funding sources). These were children who had not experienced any kind of formal care setting (e.g., children in pieced-together family, friend, and neighbor care), a population that the Zone staff believed could benefit the most from programming. Although the NAZ began prioritizing older children for receipt of RTT-ELC Scholarships in Years 2 and 3, interviewees believed that their policy in Year 1 of giving younger children multiple years of access to RTT-ELC Scholarships was right for their Zone. Respondents believed this strategy would result in benefits for those children and their families, as well as the NAZ community, over time.

NAZ interviewees reported that the RTT-ELC Scholarships had made a difference for the high-risk families who were receiving them. NAZ Navigators used the RTT-ELC Scholarships as just one of the many tools available to them to help support a family. In particular, the RTT-ELC Scholarships were a financial tool that enabled family members to work, stabilized a family in crisis by providing consistent care for the child, and supported the children’s early learning and development. Interviewees also said that the RTT-ELC Scholarships helped NAZ staff build relationships with recipient families and helped to build families’ understanding of the value of education. Given that many families had no
prior experience with child care, the program staff members were able to educate families about what their child’s preschool and child care attendance means, attendance requirements, participation in parent-teacher conferences, and other information about the early childhood system. Respondents also commented that NAZ staff used the Parent Aware rating system to explain to parents what a high-quality ELD program is and how they could choose one. Other respondents noted that ELD program participation also led many parents to take advantage of other opportunities such as parent education classes and parent-child activities.

**SPPN.** Similar to what was reported in previous years, many families in SPPN awarded RTT-ELC Scholarships were also receiving CCAP subsidies, and interviewees commented that the scholarships were enabling these children to receive more continuous care or care for a longer duration. They noted that CCAP is a more stringent system that is quicker to disenroll students whose families fail to continuously meet eligibility requirements. The RTT-ELC Scholarships were a more flexible source of funding and allowed programs to work out challenges with families to maintain enrollment. SPPN staff believed that this had a positive effect on children, families, and program staff because stable, long-term attendance enabled them to build more meaningful relationships with one another.

There were also some children in SPPN, although fewer, who were entering ELD programs for the first time using RTT-ELC Scholarships. Interviewees said that the greatest success of RTT-ELC Scholarships for these children was that their participation in ELD programs would help them enter kindergarten on the same level as their peers in math, literacy, and socio-emotional skills. Interviewees believed that the time children spent in high-quality early learning environments, made possible by the RTT-ELC Scholarships, would increase their school readiness.

SPPN interviewees indicated that in addition to benefiting children, the RTT-ELC Scholarships provided parents and caregivers necessary economic relief, both through tuition assistance and in allowing them to work or attend school. These improvements in the family’s financial situation resulted in a greater sense of well-being in parents.

**White Earth.** As in Years 1 and 2, White Earth interviewees asserted that RTT-ELC Scholarships increased access to high-quality early childhood programming for high-needs children in the community. Many high-needs families that had previously been unaware of the RTT-ELC Scholarships, including foster care families and families headed by grandparent caretakers, could now enroll their children in Parent Aware-rated family child care and child care centers using RTT-ELC Scholarships. White Earth interviewees believed awarding a large portion of their RTT-ELC Scholarships to younger children (age 2 or 3) in Year 1 had proved to be a good strategy. They believed that long-term, continuous care was
important and that they could “see the families growing alongside the children” as they experienced multiple years of ELD programming in the same setting.

As in previous years, White Earth staff believed that another success of tying RTT-ELC Scholarship eligibility with Parent Aware participation for programs was that more children were receiving developmental assessments. Many ELD programs in White Earth were using Teaching Strategies GOLD (a child assessment tool) to meet Parent Aware requirements, and this information was being used to improve instruction as well as inform parents of their children’s progress. The shift to using assessments and the training providers received in association with it were changes that interviewees believed would also be sustainable beyond the RTT-ELC grant. In the future, White Earth Child Care staff can access this assessment information and use it to identify areas of need among the children, which can lead to targeted training for providers.

White Earth staff also asserted that RTT-ELC Scholarships assisted families financially by paying for high-quality ELD programming that many would otherwise have been unable to afford. One interviewee suggested that the true value of the RTT-ELC Scholarships in fact exceeded their face value. One example of this was that the RTT-ELC Scholarships gave parents the financial flexibility to enroll their children in local programs that were staffed by familiar community members rather than enrolling them in less familiar nontribal programs. Another example was that the WECC coordinator was able to overcome challenges resulting from families’ lack of adequate transportation by visiting families in their homes. Finally, interviewees noted that the RTT-ELC Scholarships provided much needed respite care, particularly for grandparents raising children.

Across interviews, one of the most frequently mentioned impacts on families was the success of the parent mentoring and education program. Through the twice-yearly education requirement, parents and caregivers learned about child development, what constitutes high-quality child care, and how to find appropriate services. One interviewee noted that families became better informed about aspects of child development (e.g., early brain development, parenting relationships) and more engaged in meetings during Year 3; indeed, parents asked more questions and started developing a stronger network among themselves. As a result, interviewees felt that parents’ awareness of the importance of early childhood education services increased, as did their understanding of Parent Aware ratings, demand for Parent Aware-rated programs, and ability to relate to ELD providers and schools.
Impacts on ELD Programs

Data from RTT-ELC Scholarship applications (collected from August to September 2015) are used here to describe the ELD programs in the four Zones in Year 3. Maps of each Zone are included below, one set showing all the ELD programs and their Parent Aware ratings and another set showing ELD programs with children receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships. In addition, results of the surveys sent to all ELD programs in the Zones provide characteristics of those ELD programs that responded.

Supply and Parent Aware Participation of ELD Programs in Year 3

ELD programs within the borders of each Zone were identified from NACCRAware, a dataset from the Child Care Aware of America (formerly National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies), to provide a picture of local licensed and exempt ELD programs (including center-based and family child care programs). The map for each Zone shows the type and location of the ELD programs and their Parent Aware participation as of fall 2015 (Figures 6–9).

In general, across the 3 years of the evaluation, the overall number of ELD programs in the Zones’ geographic areas increased by 27%, from 187 to 237 ELD programs (Table 6).

- All four Zones had increases in their overall numbers of ELD programs between 2013 and 2015. The increases were 27% for Itasca, 35% for NAZ, 21% for SPPN, and 29% for White Earth.

### Table 6. Change in Total Numbers of ELD Programs Between 2013 and 2015, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Zones N</th>
<th>Itasca n</th>
<th>NAZ n</th>
<th>SPPN n</th>
<th>White Earth n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total change</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage change</td>
<td>+27%</td>
<td>+27%</td>
<td>+35%</td>
<td>+21%</td>
<td>+29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.

These are the numbers of programs included in the NACCRAware dataset; they may or may not reflect the true totals of ELD programs existing within the geographic areas.

27 Center-based programs are child care centers, Head Start, Invest Early programs, and school-based preschool programs.
Across the Zones, between 2013 and 2015, the number of ELD programs participating in Parent Aware increased from 45 (24% of all ELD programs) to 80 (33% of all ELD programs). Nonparticipation decreased from 76% in 2013, to 66% in 2015 (Table 7).

- In Itasca, between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of ELD programs participating in Parent Aware increased from 17% to 26% of all ELD programs.
- In NAZ, between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of ELD programs participating in Parent Aware increased from 15% to 41% of all ELD programs.
- In SPPN, between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of ELD programs participating in Parent Aware increased from 23% to 36% of all ELD programs.
- In White Earth, between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of ELD programs participating in Parent Aware decreased from 48% to 45% of all ELD programs.

Similarly, across the Zones, between 2013 and 2015, the number of 3- and 4-star-rated ELD programs increased from 35 (19% of all ELD programs) to 60 (25% of all ELD programs).

- In Itasca, between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of 3- and 4-star-rated ELD programs increased from 15% to 21% of all ELD programs.
- In NAZ, between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of 3- and 4-star-rated ELD programs increased from 5% to 26% of all ELD programs.
- In SPPN, between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of 3- and 4-star-rated ELD programs increased from 13% to 19% of all ELD programs.
- In White Earth, the percentage of 3- and 4-star-rated ELD programs remained the same between 2013 and 2015 (45% of all ELD programs).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Zones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All programs</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Aware</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4 stars</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 stars</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet rated</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itasca</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All programs</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Aware</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4 stars</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 stars</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet rated</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAZ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All programs</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Aware</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4 stars</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 stars</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet rated</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPPN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All programs</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Aware</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4 stars</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 stars</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet rated</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Earth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All programs</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Aware</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet rated</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Year 3, rates of program participation in Parent Aware and, among those participating, rates of 3- and 4-star Parent Aware ratings were lower for family child care programs compared with center-based ELD programs (Table 8).

- Across the Zones, family child care programs were more likely to be not yet rated (80%) than center-based ELD programs (36%). There were variations across Zones in the rates of participation for both types of programs.
  - For center-based ELD programs, the percentages of programs not yet rated were 34% for Itasca, 45% for NAZ, 41% for SPPN, and 25% for White Earth.
  - For family child care programs, the percentages of programs not yet rated were 88% for Itasca, 69% for NAZ, 76% for SPPN, and 68% for White Earth.

- Across the Zones, only one-fourth (25%) of all ELD programs within Zone boundaries were rated with 3 or 4 stars, with variations across the Zones (21% in Itasca, 26% in the NAZ, 19% in SPPN, and 45% in White Earth).

- Across the Zones, just over half (59%) of center-based ELD programs were rated with 3 or 4 stars, while only 10% of family child care programs were rated with 3 or 4 stars. There were variations across Zones in the rates of 3- and 4-star ELD programs for both types of programs.
  - For center-based ELD programs, the percentages of 3- and 4-star-rated programs were 66% for Itasca, 55% for NAZ, 45% for SPPN, and 75% for White Earth.
  - For family child care programs, the percentages of 3- and 4-star-rated programs were 5% for Itasca, 6% for NAZ, 5% for SPPN, and 32% for White Earth.
Table 8. Year 3 ELD Program Participation in Parent Aware, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4 stars</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>74</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-based(^a) programs (n = 74; 31% of total 237 ELD programs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family child care programs (n = 163; 69% of total 237 ELD programs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4 stars</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 stars</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet rated</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.
\(^a\)Center-based programs are child care centers, Head Start, Invest Early programs, and school-based school readiness programs.

Maps showing ELD program supply and Parent Aware participation for each Zone are shown below.

**Itasca**

- Of the four Zones, Itasca had the most ELD programs (107), with 29 center-based ELD programs and 78 family child care ELD programs (Table 8, Figure 6) licensed to serve a total of 756\(^{28}\) children.

\(^{28}\)The number of slots appeared to have dropped significantly between 2014 and 2015 for all Zones, but this seems to be because fewer programs reported their capacity in NACCRAware. This means that despite the increase in the number of programs between 2014 and 2015, the number of slots represented by the programs as reported here was lower.
• Three-fourths of ELD programs in Itasca were not yet rated in Parent Aware (74%), whereas 21% were rated 3-4 stars and 5% were rated 1-2 stars.
  - Center-based ELD programs were more likely than family child care programs to be highly-rated (3 and 4 stars) (66% of programs vs. 5%).
  - The majority of family child care programs were not yet rated (88%).

Figure 6. Licensed and Exempt ELD Programs in Itasca
NAZ

- The NAZ had 27 ELD programs inside or immediately outside its border: 11 center-based and 16 family child care ELD programs (Table 8), licensed to serve 399 children (Figure 7).
- More than half the ELD programs in the NAZ were not yet rated in Parent Aware (59%), and more family child care centers (69%) than center-based programs (55%) were unrated.
- More center-based programs were rated 3 or 4 stars (55%) than family child care programs (6%).

Figure 7. Licensed and Exempt ELD Programs in the NAZ
SPPN

- SPPN had 63 ELD programs in its Zone that could serve up to 1,261 children, with about one-third being center-based ELD programs (30%) (Table 8, Figure 8).
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of all ELD programs in SPPN were not yet rated in Parent Aware.
- Twelve of 63 ELD programs (19%) were rated 3 or 4 stars.
  - All but two of the highly rated programs were center-based ELD programs.

Figure 8. Licensed and Exempt ELD Programs in SPPN
**White Earth**

- Of the four Zones, White Earth had the second fewest ELD programs (40, both tribally licensed and county licensed) and the lowest capacity (376 slots) (Table 8, Figure 9).
  - White Earth had more than twice as many family child care (28) than center-based ELD programs (12).
- About half (45%) of ELD programs in White Earth were highly rated, whereas the other half (55%) were not rated in Parent Aware.
  - Most center-based ELD programs in White Earth were rated 3 or 4 stars (75%).
  - One-third of family child care ELD programs in White Earth were rated highly (32%).

**Figure 9. Licensed and Exempt ELD Programs in White Earth**
**ELD Programs Serving Children with RTT-ELC Scholarships in Year 3**

Across the four Zones, the 977 children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships had attended a total of 120 ELD program sites. In 2015, most of these ELD programs (98%) were participating in Parent Aware. Of these 120 total ELD programs, 69 (58%) were center-based child care programs, 31 (26%) were family child care programs, 7 (6%) were Head Start programs, and 13 (11%) were school-based preschool programs.

- The majority of these ELD programs were high quality (91% rated 3 or 4 stars), whereas 5% had a 1 or 2 star rating and 4% were not yet rated (Table 9).

**Table 9. Parent Aware Participation of ELD Programs Serving Children with RTT-ELC Scholarships Across Years 1, 2, and 3, All Zones and by Zone**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELD programs serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships</th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3–4 stars</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 stars</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.

The next sections show the numbers and locations of ELD programs in the Zones that served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships (Figures 10–13).

---

29 The data in Table 8 represent ELD programs that served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships at some point across all years of the evaluation and their Parent Aware participation as of July 2015. The programs that are shown as not participating in Parent Aware may have participated in Parent Aware before July 2015 and subsequently stopped participating. Programs rated 1 or 2 stars in July 2015 may have previously been rated higher and may no longer be serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships. Programs rated as “in process” at this time point may have been previously rated and were in the process of being rerated when the data were obtained.
Itasca

- All but one of the 26 ELD programs that served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships were located within Itasca County, and almost all had high-quality ratings (88%) (Table 9, Figure 10).
  - Three of these ELD programs (12%) were participating in Parent Aware but were not yet highly rated.

Figure 10. ELD Programs Serving Children with RTT-ELC Scholarships in Itasca
NAZ

- In the NAZ, 25 ELD programs served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships. All were highly rated, and most were located outside the NAZ boundaries (Table 9, Figure 11).

**Figure 11. ELD Programs Serving Children with RTT-ELC Scholarships in the NAZ**
In SPPN, children receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships attended 45 ELD programs, many of which were outside the borders of the Zone; 96% of these programs had high-quality ratings (Table 9, Figure 12).

**Figure 12.** ELD Programs Serving Children with RTT-ELC Scholarships in SPPN
White Earth

- White Earth had 24 ELD programs that served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships, most located with the Zone boundaries, and 79% of them were rated highly (Table 9, Figure 13).
  - Only three ELD programs with a 2-star rating served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships, and one ELD programs had not yet completed the rating process.

Figure 13. ELD Programs Serving Children with RTT-ELC Scholarships in White Earth
**Characteristics of ELD Programs in the Transformation Zones**

To understand the characteristics of the ELD programs in the four Zones and their participation in the RTT-ELC Scholarships program, the evaluation team collected data using online surveys between September and December 2015. The surveys were sent to the directors or providers of all ELD programs that were located within each Zone’s geographic boundaries or were outside those boundaries and served children who received RTT-ELC Scholarship funds.

**ELD Survey Response Rates**

A total of 261 ELD program surveys were sent in September 2015, and 95 (36%) were completed (Table 10). **Response rates ranged from 31% in White Earth to 43% in the NAZ. Because of this low response rate, the findings may not be representative of all ELD programs in the Zone and should be interpreted with caution.**

Of surveys sent to all four Zones, the majority were sent to family child care programs (171, 66%), and the remaining 34% went to center-based ELD programs (90). Center-based ELD programs were more likely than family child care ELD programs to return the surveys (53% compared with 27%).

Of the 261 surveys sent to ELD programs across the four Zones, 84 (32%) were sent to programs that served children receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships (Table 10). About half these surveys (43, **31 51%**) were returned. The response rates for the ELD programs serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships in each Zone were

- Itasca (8 of 13, 62%)
- NAZ (10 of 13, 77%)
- SPPN (18 of 35, 51%)
- White Earth (7 of 23, 30%).

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**Footnotes:**

30 Some ELD programs had multiple sites (e.g., KOOTASCA Head Start and Invest Early) but completed a single survey for all of them, and they are represented here as a single program. The 261 ELD programs represent 283 program sites.

31 These were 43 ELD programs identified through RTT-ELC Scholarship Application data exports from each Zone as serving children receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships. This group differed from the group of ELD programs that self-identified as serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships when completing the ELD program survey; the latter group is described later in this report.
Table 10.  ELD Program Surveys Sent and Completed, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Zones Sent N</th>
<th>All Zones Returned n</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca Sent n</th>
<th>Itasca Returned n</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ Sent n</th>
<th>NAZ Returned N</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN Sent n</th>
<th>SPPN Returned n</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth Sent n</th>
<th>White Earth Returned n</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>261</td>
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<td>30</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.
Characteristics of ELD Programs

Self-reported responses to the ELD surveys revealed both commonalities and variations across Zones in the populations served and ELD programs characteristics (e.g., language of instruction, accreditation status, staff education, and curriculum use).

- Across all Zones, the children attending the 95 ELD programs that returned surveys were mostly white (36%) and African American (20%), although this varied by Zone and program type (Table 11).
  - The majority of children attending ELD programs in Itasca that responded to the survey were white (92%).
  - Of the ELD programs that returned surveys, programs in the NAZ and SPPN had the most ethnic diversity. In the NAZ, almost half the children attending ELD programs were African American or of African descent (49%). In SPPN, close to one-third of children were reported as white (31%) and African American or of African descent (27%).
  - White Earth ELD programs that responded to the survey reported serving mostly white (15%) and American Indian children (20%), with 64% missing data.

- A majority of ELD programs that responded to the survey used only English for instruction (ranging from 65% in NAZ to 97% in Itasca).
  - About one-tenth (9%) of programs that completed the surveys had instruction in both English and another language (ranging from 0% in White Earth to 15% in the NAZ and SPPN). The other languages included those from Asia and Africa, American Indian languages, and Spanish.

- Across the four Zones, about two-thirds (67%) of the ELD programs that completed surveys had only full-day classes (5 or more hours per day), one-tenth (9%) had only part-day classes (less than 5 hours per day), and 19% had both part- and full-day classes (data missing for 5% of programs).
  - Most family child care and center-based ELD programs offered at least one full-day class (93% and 87%, respectively).
Table 11. Children’s Ethnicity, All Zones and by Zone and ELD Program Type

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5224</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1601</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>2368</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood. The total is the same for all variables.
• Across the four Zones, about one-fourth of ELD programs that responded to the survey did not have a waiting list (24%) (Table 12). Two-fifths had a waiting list of one to five children (42%), and 31% had a waiting list of six or more children.
  
  – In each Zone, the majority of programs that completed surveys had a waiting list. Itasca and the NAZ had the highest percentages of programs with a waiting list (86% and 85%, respectively), followed by White Earth (75%) and SPPN (62%).
  
• About half (45%) of the ELD programs that responded to the survey were accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or another organization, and about half (51%) were not accredited or had no plans to become accredited (Table 12). Rates of accreditation varied across urban and rural Zones.
  
  – In the NAZ and SPPN, the majority of ELD programs that completed surveys were accredited (90% and 71%, respectively), but few ELD programs in Itasca and White Earth reported receiving accreditation (0% and 8%, respectively).

• Across all Zones, among programs that responded to the survey, center-based ELD programs were more likely to be accredited than family child care ELD programs (81% compared with 9%).

Table 12. ELD Program Waiting List Size and Accreditation Status, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waiting list size</th>
<th>All Zones N</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca n</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ n</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN n</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth n</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No waiting list</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–5 children</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10 children</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation status</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not accredited</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood. The total is the same for all variables.
Across all Zones, more than half (53%) of the teachers at surveyed ELD programs had a bachelor’s degree (BA), 21% had an associate’s degree (AA), and 13% had a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential (Table 13).

- The percentage of teachers with a BA ranged from 25% in White Earth to 64% in SPPN.

Across the four Zones, teachers in center-based ELD programs were more likely to have BA degrees than teachers in family child care ELD programs (57% versus 24%).

- Most teachers in center-based ELD programs in SPPN had BA degrees (65%), whereas about half did in the NAZ and Itasca (44% and 55%, respectively). In White Earth, about one-third of teachers (30%) in center-based ELD programs reported having a BA degree.

- SPPN had the highest percentage of teachers with BA degrees in family child care ELD programs (36%).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA credential</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college courses in early childhood</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers at center-based programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA credential</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college courses in early childhood topics</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&gt;1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers at family child care programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA credential</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college courses in early childhood topics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This represents the number of teachers from 91 programs, with data missing for four programs. NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.
Across Zones, about two-thirds of ELD programs that completed the survey used a formal written curriculum (65%). Almost all ELD programs that responded to the survey and reported serving RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients used a formal curriculum (95%). Of programs not serving RTT-ELC Scholarships, fewer than half (42%) reported using a formal curriculum.

- Nearly all center-based ELD programs that completed the survey used a formal curriculum (83%), compared with about half of family child care ELD programs (57%).
- One-third of ELD programs in Itasca that responded to the survey reported using a formal curriculum (34%), compared with 95% in the NAZ, 76% in SPPN, and 58% in White Earth.
- Of the ELD programs that reported using a curriculum, 69% used only one formal curriculum. Center-based ELD programs were more likely than family child care ELD programs to use multiple curricula (33% compared with 25%).
- Across the four Zones and in each Zone, the Creative Curriculum was most commonly used (50% of ELD programs with a curriculum)

**Characteristics of ELD Program Directors**

Across the four Zones, most ELD program directors and family child care providers that responded to the surveys reported having more than 10 years of early childhood experience. Of the ELD program directors who responded, about half had a BA degree or higher (45%), almost all were women (99%), and nearly three-fourths were white (75%), with an average age of 44.

- Across all Zones, ELD program directors who responded to the survey (including family child care providers) had an average of 19 years of experience as an assistant teacher, director, coordinator, or other professional position in the early care and education field.
- Almost half the ELD program directors and family child care providers had a BA degree or more education (45%).
  - ELD program directors with BAs or higher education were more common in SPPN (62%) and the NAZ (50%) than in Itasca (31%) or White Earth (25%).
  - Almost all center-based ELD program directors who shared their education had attended some college courses or achieved at least a 2-year degree (91%). Most family child care providers had the same qualifications (82%).
- Almost all ELD program directors who shared their gender were female (99%).
• The majority of ELD program directors who reported their race/ethnicity were white (75% across all Zones), and there was some variation across Zones.
  – In the NAZ, 19% of ELD program directors were African American and the others were white (81%).
  – In Itasca, all ELD program directors were white (100%).
  – In SPPN, two-thirds of ELD program directors were white (66%), followed by African American (13%).
  – In White Earth, 80% of ELD program directors were white, and 20% were American Indian.

• ELD program directors’ ages ranged from 25 to 68 years, with an average age and median age of 44.
  – Average age varied across Zones, with the rural directors reporting younger average age (40 in White Earth and 42 in Itasca) than the metropolitan directors (46 in SPPN and 49 in the NAZ).
  – ELD directors at family child care programs and center-based programs had similar average and median ages (44 and 45, respectively)

**Perspectives of ELD Program Directors on Parent Aware Participation**

Responses of ELD program directors or providers about participation in Parent Aware showed that most had heard of it (94% of the 95 survey respondents), and about two-thirds of ELD programs were rated (68%); this reflected an increase in participation since 2013, when 54% of programs responding to the survey were rated in Parent Aware. Another four of these ELD programs were in the process of becoming rated. The percentage of these ELD programs that were already rated varied across the four Zones, from a low of 41% in Itasca to a high of 85% in the NAZ.

• Across the four Zones, almost two-thirds of ELD programs were participating in Parent Aware, either as fully rated programs or programs undergoing the rating process (69 programs, 73%) (Table 14).
  – Of these 69 programs, 81% were rated 3 or 4 stars, 13% were rated 1 or 2 stars, and 6% were in the process of becoming rated.
Table 14. ELD Program Parent Aware Rating Status, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Zones N</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca n</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ n</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN n</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth n</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rated</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the process of becoming rated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No plans to become rated</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.

- Of the 20 ELD programs reporting that they had no plans to become rated in Parent Aware, 18 were family child care ELD programs.
- These 20 ELD programs gave several reasons\(^{32}\) for not planning to become rated:
  - Becoming rated takes too much time (10)
  - Feel that their program is already high quality (8)
  - Have a waiting list (8)
  - Not enough benefits to becoming rated or unsure of the benefits (6)
  - Feel that the rating process is too complicated (5)
  - Costs too much money to do the things required to get a high rating (5)
  - Parents don’t use Parent Aware to choose programs (4)
  - Do not trust that the rating will reflect their program’s quality (4)
  - Feel that they do not need to improve the quality of their ELD program (2)
  - Cannot meet some of the criteria required to be highly rated (1).

The 20 ELD programs that did not have plans to become rated were asked what would encourage them to become rated. The various reasons given for getting rated were

- If getting rated was required (4)
- If there is a more streamlined, faster, and easier rating process (4)
- To receive more funds for improving quality before becoming rated (3)
- Need more evidence that being highly rated will positively impact their ELD program’s children and families (3)

\(^{32}\) Survey respondents could give more than one reason.
• If parents will use the rating to choose an ELD program (2)
• To qualify for a higher tiered CCAP reimbursement rate (1) or other payment incentives (2).

The 69 ELD programs currently participating in Parent Aware or planning to participate in the future were asked how influential the RTT-ELC Scholarships were on their decision to become rated.

• Across all Zones, almost one-third (29%) reported that the RTT-ELC Scholarships had a lot of influence over their decision to become rated (Table 15). However, RTT-ELC Scholarships were a more important incentive to become rated in some Zones than in others.
  – In Itasca, more participating ELD programs directors said it had a lot of influence (40%) than no influence (20%).
  – In the NAZ, an equal number of programs reported that it had a lot or no influence (24%). One-third (35%) reported that it had some or a little influence.
  – In SPPN, 33% of ELD programs that were rated or planned to become rated in Parent Aware reported that RTT-ELC Scholarships had no influence on their decision.
  – In White Earth, 43% said the initiative had a lot of influence, whereas only 14% reported it had no influence.
  – A few programs (14%) that were rated or planned to become rated in Parent Aware did not know what the RTT-ELC Scholarships were.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 15. Influence of RTT-ELC Scholarships on ELD Programs’ Parent Aware Participation, All Zones and by Zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Zones</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some or a little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not know about RTT-ELC Scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.
Characteristics of ELD Programs Receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships Funds

Of the 95 ELD programs completing the survey, about half (n = 50, 53%) reported serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships at the time the survey was completed. Nine programs were in Itasca, 12 were in NAZ, 22 were in SPPN, and seven were in White Earth.

- Across the four Zones, the total number of children with RTT-ELC Scholarships served by these 50 ELD programs varied, with 24 of the 50 ELD programs serving 1–5 children, 10 serving 6–10, 11 serving more than 10, and 5 being unsure of the number (Table 16).
- Itasca and SPPN had more programs serving small numbers of children than the NAZ and White Earth.

Table 16. Children with RTT-ELC Scholarships Served by ELD Programs, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Zones N</th>
<th>All Zones %</th>
<th>Itasca n</th>
<th>Itasca %</th>
<th>NAZ n</th>
<th>NAZ %</th>
<th>SPPN n</th>
<th>SPPN %</th>
<th>White Earth n</th>
<th>White Earth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving one or more RTT-ELC Scholarship children</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–5 children</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10 children</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 children</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure of number</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what RTT-ELC Scholarships are</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.

31 This number differs from the 43 programs reported in Table 9 because of the nature of self-report surveys. It is possible that some of these 50 programs served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships but were not represented in the 43 programs identified through scholarship application data exports because children had transferred to different programs at the time of export, or some programs may have mistakenly identified themselves as serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships when in fact they served children with Early Learning Scholarships.
Across the four Zones, 33 of the 50 ELD programs serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships (66%) reported that the RTT-ELC Scholarships enabled them to provide supplemental, more comprehensive services for the children in one or more ways (Table 17). The percentage of ELD programs able to increase services varied by Zone, ranging from 43% of programs in White Earth to 78% in Itasca.

- The most common way RTT-ELC Scholarships enabled programs to expand services was to provide more continuous care (26 ELD programs), followed by increasing the number of days each week (17) and increasing the length of the day (14).
- Other additional services included providing summer programming (10), parent support or education services (8), health or developmental screenings (6), and extended weekend or after-hours care (4).

**Table 17. ELD Programs Providing Additional Services for Children with RTT-ELC Scholarships, All Zones and by Zone**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Provided</th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One or more supplemental services</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided more continuous care</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased the number of days per week</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased the length of day</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided summer programming</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided parent support or education services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided developmental or health screenings</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided extended day, weekend, or after-hours care</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Programs could select more than one response, so the table does not sum to 33. NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.

* Two programs that reported serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships did not answer this question.

- The most common additional service differed by Zone.
  - In the NAZ and SPPN, the majority of programs (8 and 13 ELD programs, respectively) provided more continuous care.
In Itasca, programs most commonly reported increasing the number of days of care per week (six ELD programs), followed by providing more continuous care (five ELD programs).

ELD programs in White Earth that responded to the survey reported using RTT-ELC Scholarship funds to increase the number of days per week, provide summer programming, and provide parent support or education services (one ELD program each).

- Center-based ELD programs were more likely than family child care programs to provide continuous care (84% of programs compared with 63%), whereas family child care programs were more likely than center-based ELD programs to increase the number of days per week a child received care (63% compared with 48%) and increase the length of day (50% compared with 40%).

A total of 21 ELD programs receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships were able to open additional slots to serve more high-needs children, improve the quality of their ELD programs, or do both.

- A total of 167 slots at 21 ELD programs\(^{34}\) were opened.
  - 40 slots at four programs in Itasca
  - 32 slots at six programs in the NAZ
  - 85 slots at eight programs in SPPN
  - 10 slots at three programs in White Earth

- A total of 28 ELD programs used the funds for quality improvement, although the most common ELD program improvements varied across Zones (Table 18). Programs used these funds to
  - Improve the quality of classroom materials (22 ELD programs)
  - Provide professional development for teachers and other staff (20)
  - Improve or increase the physical space (9).

\(^{34}\) These 21 ELD programs represent 34 different program sites (e.g., Invest Early/KOOTASCA Head Start is represented in the survey data as a single program but serves children at 12 program sites).
Table 18. Use of RTT-ELC Scholarship Funds to Improve ELD Program Quality, All Zones and by Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Zones</th>
<th>Itasca</th>
<th>NAZ</th>
<th>SPPN</th>
<th>White Earth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve quality of materials used</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide professional development for teachers, aides, or other staff</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve or increase the physical space</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on 28 ELD programs reporting that RTT-ELC Scholarships were used for quality improvements. NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; SPPN = Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood.

Some of the 50 ELD programs that served children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships reported that the scholarships enabled them to serve a more diverse population of children and families.

- 24% of these ELD programs were able to serve children with more diverse ethnicities.
  - ELD programs in SPPN and White Earth were most likely to report serving a more diverse population (34% and 29%, respectively), whereas only a small percentage of programs in the NAZ (8%) reported serving more ethnically diverse children (and Itasca did not report serving more diverse children).

- ELD programs in the NAZ (25%) and SPPN (25%) were able to serve more children who spoke a language other than English, including Hmong, Spanish, Karen, Somali, and American Indian languages.

- Most of the 50 ELD programs (84%) reported being able to serve more families that would otherwise have been unable to pay. Across the Zones, this ranged from 71% in White Earth to 100% in Itasca.

- About half the ELD programs (54%) were able to serve more families that had parents who were not working, with the number of programs ranging from 33% in the NAZ to 78% in Itasca.

- About one-fourth of ELD programs reported being able to serve more children from homeless families (26%) and almost one-fifth served more children with a disability or special need (18%).
Perspectives of ELD Programs on the RTT-ELC Scholarship Payment Process

Overall, the 50 ELD programs that reported serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships found the application and payment process easy to use (Figure 14). Across all Zones and in each Zone, the ELD programs were more likely to agree with the following statements than to disagree or not know:

- It was easy to get my questions answered.
- Payments are made in a timely manner.
- The billing process is easy.
- The application process was easy for parents.
- The application process was easy for my program.

Figure 14. Perceptions of the RTT-ELC Scholarship Application and Payment Process, All Zones

Challenges with Implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships by ELD Programs

Of the 50 ELD programs serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships, 10 (20%) reported that they had challenges with the RTT-ELC Scholarship program. The numbers of ELD programs reporting challenges were two in Itasca, four in the NAZ, one in White Earth, and three in SPPN. The challenge described by ELD programs concerned experiencing a delay in receiving payments.
Zones’ Perspectives of Impacts on the ELD Programs

Interviewees also described the RTT-ELC Scholarships as having positive impacts on the four communities through effects on the ELD programs. RTT-ELC Scholarships allowed for consistent payment of providers. By limiting RTT-ELC Scholarship use to ELD programs rated 3 or 4 stars in Parent Aware, in some Zones previously unrated or 1- or 2-star-rated ELD programs had the incentive to take steps to achieve a higher rating and become eligible to serve children with RTT-ELC Scholarships. The intent of this policy was to increase the number of high-quality ELD programs available to families in a community over the course of the RTT-ELC initiative.

Perceptions of Impacts on ELD Programs

Itasca. In Itasca in Year 3 of the evaluation, as in previous years, interviewees reported that ELD programs had improved the quality of their services. A number of ELD providers responded to RTT-ELC Scholarship availability by making changes to their practices and attending trainings as part of becoming Parent Aware-rated or improving their ratings. Interviewees reported that at the advent of RTT-ELC in Minnesota in 2011, only two 4-star-rated programs were in Itasca—Invest Early and Head Start—but by summer 2015, there were 12 4-star-rated programs and at least twice that number of programs rated in Parent Aware. Interviewees reported that the number of rated programs represented about one-third of all licensed ELD programs in the community.

Itasca respondents attributed their success in increasing the number of highly rated programs in the Zone to their use of a collaborative (rather than a competitive) model in distributing RTT-ELC Scholarship funds. Instead of awarding all funds to Invest Early and Head Start, they made efforts to communicate and foster collaboration with other center-based and family child care programs and give them the incentive to participate in Parent Aware by making RTT-ELC Scholarship funding available to all programs undergoing the rating process. Several interviewees cited the importance of using a community partnership rather than competitive or market model in low-density rural areas because demand for child care largely exceeds supply and ELD programs do not typically need to compete for clients.

At the same time, being a Parent Aware-rated provider was attractive because the Itasca community partnership board automatically provided families with brochures describing RTT-ELC Scholarships and listing all eligible (rated) providers. Interviewees described this as “free advertising.” They also noted that Parent Aware-rated facilities that were at capacity first referred children on their waiting list to other Parent Aware-rated programs rather than unrated programs. Interviewees felt that all these changes indicated that the overall quality of ELD programming in Itasca had improved over the course of the RTT-ELC grant.
Additionally, unique to Year 3 of the evaluation, Parent Aware-rated (or in process) ELD programs in Itasca received professional development through a mentor grant. Interviewees reported this had a tremendously positive impact on the providers. One noted that it was a positive step forward by enabling providers who usually worked in isolation to meet to share ideas with other providers.

**NAZ.** As in previous years, in Year 3 of the evaluation, NAZ respondents reported that one perceived impact of RTT-ELC Scholarships was that they stabilized and strengthened ELD programs. Interviewees expressed the opinion that programs serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships could more confidently invest in their staff, both in hiring and in professional development, because they were much less concerned about fluctuating enrollment. Some ELD programs (mostly NAZ partner programs) increased enrollment by up to 30 children who were receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships. This influx helped grow the program, including the hiring of new staff. Interviewees also reported, however, that in some cases this resulted in “growing pains” for the programs as they also had to improve their ability to work with families. Because many families receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships in the NAZ were new to care, they required support and education from the programs on the expectations and social conventions of participating in an ELD program. As RTT-ELC Scholarships end, these programs will need to grapple with how to address declining enrollment if other funding sources are not identified to help maintain attendance.

As reported in Years 1 and 2, the effect of RTT-ELC Scholarships on increasing community-wide ELD program quality was less apparent in the NAZ. Because the NAZ served as a pilot for Parent Aware, it had an abundance of 4-star-rated programs that were NAZ partner programs. Because the NAZ directed families awarded RTT-ELC Scholarships to use them in the partner programs, few lower quality ELD programs had taken steps to either improve their rating or begin participating in Parent Aware. Further, interviewees in the first year reported that although NAZ partner programs were nearing capacity, the NAZ had some difficulty recruiting additional ELD programs to become partners. This was due in part to the significant time and philosophical commitment required to become a NAZ partner. In Years 2 and 3, the challenge remained, and it appeared that the RTT-ELC Scholarship program did not give other ELD programs the incentive to become 3- or 4-star-rated, given the NAZ policy of enrolling families first in NAZ partner organizations. However, to meet enrollment demands and possibly for other reasons related to family needs, NAZ did begin to include more ELD programs that were not NAZ partners in Years 2 and 3.

**SPPN.** In SPPN in Year 3 of the evaluation, interviewees noted that ELD programs serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships benefited from the stability of the children’s attendance and the resulting ability to build deeper, more meaningful relationships with the families. Interviewees also suggested that the RTT-ELC Scholarships had encouraged ELD
programs to become more invested community partners. For example, they were now slower to drop a child from an ELD program with a family that was not financially stable. RTT-ELC Scholarships guaranteed that tuition would be paid, so programs could focus on working with the families and identifying other wraparound supports.

As in the NAZ, SPPN interviewees were unsure, however, of whether the RTT-ELC Scholarships effectively incentivized many ELD programs to either become rated in Parent Aware or to improve a low rating. In previous years, interviewees had noted that the quality of care increased in some ELD Programs but that those programs may be located outside the Promise Neighborhood. SPPN’s previous participation in MELF meant that many programs within the neighborhood were already rated high by Parent Aware. Interviewees also noted that a Parent Aware rating was not necessarily wanted or needed by some ELD programs. Those that self-described as high quality, having waiting lists, and commanding high tuition had little incentive to enter into a system of review and monitoring.

**White Earth.** As in Years 1 and 2, White Earth interviewees in Year 3 perceived that the quality of ELD programming in the community had improved because more programs had undergone the Parent Aware rating process. Interviewees felt the availability of RTT-ELC Scholarships had successfully incentivized ELD programs to achieve 3- or 4-star status. Interviewees mentioned that this particular success was expected to be sustainable beyond the life of the RTT-ELC Scholarship initiative itself because the higher CCAP reimbursement rates for highly rated programs would encourage them to maintain their rating.

Another perceived impact of the RTT-ELC Scholarships on ELD providers in White Earth was that they stabilized ELD programs’ finances, which enabled them to provide better and more dependable services. Because RTT-ELC Scholarships were a reliable source of funding paid directly to them, providers no longer had to seek payment from families experiencing financial difficulties to remain open. Providers were also able to continue serving children when families were late on payments, which helped preserve struggling families’ anonymity in this small rural community.

Interviewees credited their successes in strengthening ELD programs to at least two factors. First, White Earth interviewees reported having strong support from child care professionals on the reservation. Presumably, these relationships would also have grown stronger over time, given the RTT-ELC Scholarships’ impacts on child care providers described above. Second, interviewees noted that the Transformation Zone staff’s experience running the child care assistance program enabled them to build on this experience, leverage relationships, and coordinate with existing programs like CCAP.
Impacts on Early Childhood Systems

In addition to positively affecting children and families and ELD programs, RTT-ELC Scholarships had a third impact—on the communities’ early childhood systems. This impact took the form of improved communication and relationships between ELD program staff, between ELD program staff and parents, and between the Zones themselves and the families they serve. Common themes across Zones were the following:

- Local early learning entities were working together more as a system, with stronger relationships among ELD programs; this included school-based School Readiness, Head Start, and private child care programs. The need to create structures and processes to administer the RTT-ELC Scholarships brought people together over common funding and goals.
- RTT-ELC staffs across the four Zones also were interacting with each other and sharing approaches and common challenges.
- The RTT-ELC Scholarships brought a focus on ELD program quality because of the requirement that the scholarships could be used only in programs rated 3 or 4 stars on Parent Aware.

Itasca

As in previous years, Itasca interviewees reported in Year 3 that relationships among Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), school-based school readiness programs, and Head Start were already in place because of their partnership through Invest Early. What the RTT-ELC Scholarships added was a connection with other child care centers and family child care programs. Because RTT-ELC Scholarships in Itasca could be used in any ELD program rated or in the process of being rated in Parent Aware, Invest Early made efforts to communicate with centers and family child care programs about the scholarships and about Parent Aware. This resulted in better working relationships between Invest Early and these programs, a mutual understanding of the services that the other provides, and a greater number of family child care programs and centers (including the local YMCA) participating in the RTT-ELC Scholarship and Parent Aware programs. The RTT-ELC Scholarships also fostered better connections between ELD programs and county offices, such as public health, which provided trainings and materials to two Parent Aware-rated child care centers.

NAZ

As described in the Year 2 Annual Report, NAZ interviewees reported that they have had a longstanding positive relationship with Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) but that MPS could have been more effective in enrolling children in their school-based preschool programs. In Year 3 interviewees commented that this situation had improved. MPS had
used Minnesota State Pathway II Scholarships and other funding to expand its preschool readiness programs in the NAZ in order to be responsive to the community’s needs. In Year 1, it added slots in its existing school-based school readiness classrooms and made them available to RTT-ELC Scholarship recipients. District leaders and RTT-ELC Scholarship administrators also worked well together; respondents noted that this had been a positive interaction.

NAZ interviewees also commented that although various early learning partners in their community were already building an early childhood collaborative as part of the NAZ solution plan before receiving the RTT-ELC grant, the grant funding served to further enhance and solidify those relationships. Specifically, by targeting the RTT-ELC Scholarship funds to those ELD programs that were NAZ partner ELD programs, connections between NAZ and those ELD programs were strengthened.

**SPPN**

In Year 3 of the evaluation, SPPN respondents perceived the main impact of RTT-ELC Scholarships on the early childhood system was fostering collaboration and communication among the ELD programs serving children with Scholarships. The grant funding served as a catalyst for the programs to discuss how to implement the RTT-ELC Scholarships in a manner that maximized benefits to the community. An Early Learning Network was established, and its business expanded beyond RTT-ELC Scholarship administration to broadly address increasing SPPN children’s school readiness. Zone leadership hoped to keep the group together after the RTT-ELC grant ends.

As in prior years, SPPN interviewees reported in Year 3 that the Promise Neighborhood’s relationship with Think Small continued to be a success, further strengthening the early childhood system in their area. Think Small had previous experience administering the MELF scholarships, and it had the staff capacity to reach multiple linguistic and cultural communities (e.g., Hmong, Somali). This has been an asset to SPPN, given its focus on supporting underserved minority communities and its more limited financial resources as a start-up initiative in the early years of RTT-ELC. Think Small’s role in SPPN has been that of a more active partner (compared with its role in the NAZ or Itasca), and staff were involved in helping SPPN identify and recruit families for RTT-ELC Scholarships, as well make decisions about RTT-ELC Scholarship administration.

**White Earth**

In Year 3 of the evaluation, White Earth interviewees cited the interpersonal relationships that RTT-ELC Scholarships helped foster and build as a systems-level success of the initiative. The creation of the White Earth Transformation Zone brought together a variety of stakeholders for the first time, including early childhood professionals, mental
health specialists, parent mentors, child care providers, teachers and administrators from the nine school districts, and parents. The RTT-ELC Scholarships also strengthened existing relationships, particularly with Head Start programs. Child care received more recognition from the various departments in the tribal government, and tribal leaders became aware of the positive effects RTT-ELC Scholarships were having on the community. The RTT-ELC initiatives (including Title I PreK Incentives) also highlighted the need for more high-quality ELD programming in the community and were used to encourage the school districts to further support their school readiness programs. Within districts, K–12 staff became more connected with early childhood and community education staff, representing a paradigm shift that interviewees were confident would continue.

Interviewees also reported that the well-timed additions of the Minnesota State Early Learning Scholarships and the state PreK-3rd Grade Alignment Group helped create more momentum for early childhood advocates. Many of the White Earth stakeholders involved in the RTT-ELC initiatives also participated in the Alignment Group, as well as the regional Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) group. Interviewees described the ECI group’s work as “unprecedented” for a tribal community; it included defining a specific set of skills as indicative of school readiness, compiling a resource pamphlet on best practices in early childhood, and exploring assessment tools for use. In Year 3 interviewees reported that all schools on the reservation were using the kindergarten readiness skill list and that the White Earth Tribal Council passed a resolution acknowledging the importance of PreK-3rd alignment. White Earth interviewees considered it a success that they were able to leverage available resources and relationships (e.g., existing WECC staff, parent mentors, CCAP) and combine them with new opportunities like RTT-ELC, State Early Learning Scholarships, and the ECI group to create a more robust system of care for young children in the community.
What Zones Said About How the RTT-ELC Grant Impacted Relationships in Their Communities

"I think that [the RTT funds] did help bring all types of providers together to the table, and that was really good."

"When providers first came to the table it was because it sounded like they would get money, and, granted, it was for service. But until you see the families whose lives are changing because this money has allowed them to stay in care, that makes a difference and the family looks at the provider as though they are working with them and they are a partner.... You aren't just looked at as someone who you pay this bill to; you are looked at as somebody who is a partner for raising my children."

"It so happens that the various partners in the community were already working on...collaboration. I would say that the RTT-ELC Scholarship funds did help solidify some of the relationships that were already being built."

"As far as families are concerned, I think once a provider gets invested in a family and a family gets invested in a provider, that provider...is going to work really hard to continue to support that family because they come to know them. The kind of support the family gets grows and becomes more rich because the provider understands and knows them better. I assume that some of those families who initially connected with a provider because they had a [RTT-ELC] Scholarship...will remain engaged with that provider. Because they are high-quality providers, they are often particularly suited to providing family support and encouragement, not just child care."

"All the different actors have come together, and the commitment to partnership should last beyond Race to the Top funding.... This group of partners recently went through a 6-month training on building the PreK to 3 pipeline and getting kids into particular partner schools. This was a separate opportunity, but it was Race to the Top funding that brought these people together initially."

"The relationships with other Transformation Zones may continue.... It opens the door for broader statewide coalitions to do policy work."

"The partnership between early childhood and kindergarten has emerged and [there is greater] awareness, especially among the school and partners, about the importance of early childhood programs."

"I think that the training that we have done with the families...has helped them understand the importance of that relationship [between families and Early Childhood systems]. I think and I hope that there will be more interaction between the families and the providers and that the interaction will carry over with the families when they go into the school system."

"The dynamic [between early childhood and K-12] is no longer us versus them. People have come together and formed relationships."
Challenges Related to Implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships

During the Year 3 interviews, respondents in each Transformation Zone described new challenges and barriers they faced in implementing the RTT-ELC Scholarships and reiterated challenges that continued. (For challenges related to start-up in the first year of RTT-ELC and other previously mentioned challenges, see the Year 1 Annual Report.) Challenges in the previous 2 years ranged from deep cultural differences to unintended policy implications to the burden of logistical tasks. Themes from interviews in Year 3 were the following:

- Across Zones, respondents commented that they were unable to reach all the children who could have benefited from RTT-ELC Scholarships. This was due both to limited funding and to the fact that some eligible families simply did not want to be served in ELD programs.

- In some Zones, respondents felt that there was limited evidence that the RTT-ELC Scholarships were an incentive for many ELD programs to participate in Parent Aware. They commented that the rating process was particularly difficult for family child care programs to navigate as it could be lengthy and costly and that these programs may have needed someone to act as their guide or champion. Itasca and White Earth may have had more success because Invest Early and WECC staff members were very engaged in helping ELD programs, noting that the “personal touch” may especially make a difference in rural areas.

- Respondents noted that the RTT-ELC Scholarships did not particularly encourage ELD programs to expand in size or encourage new programs to open in their communities. Challenges cited were that (1) the RTT-ELC Scholarships were time limited and ELD programs may be cautious about making new commitments without assurance of future funding and (2) a limited workforce in rural areas constrains expanding classrooms or opening new ELD programs.

Itasca

- In Year 3 of the evaluation, respondents reiterated that the RTT-ELC Scholarship payment/reimbursement process was a challenge for both participating ELD programs and the Itasca administrators attempting to assist them. Small programs (especially family child care) have difficulty carrying operating expenses for up to 2 months while they await payment. They were able to manage this by having MDE advance the funds; then the administrators were able to process reimbursements in a timelier manner.
Respondents reiterated that the availability of RTT-ELC Scholarships awarded directly to families was not enough to motivate existing ELD programs to expand in size or motivate new programs to open in Itasca. Given that RTT-ELC Scholarships are a time-limited initiative, few programs were willing to make changes that would permanently increase capacity, such as hire new staff or enlarge their space. At least one respondent said that community- or program-based (rather than family-based) scholarships, such as the Minnesota State Pathway II Scholarships, were more appropriate for encouraging an increase in program capacity.

Given that Invest Early staff served as RTT-ELC Scholarship administrators in addition to fulfilling their regular job responsibilities, the logistics of scholarship administration could feel burdensome. Staff needed to distribute information, share applications, and collect data. Respondents commented that any assistance from the state in streamlining processes, such as with paperwork, would be greatly appreciated. Additionally, data that were collected were often incomplete or inaccurate, largely because of applicant self-reporting.

A new challenge Itasca respondents mentioned was that throughout the RTT-ELC initiative, there was an expectation that they keep records and generate data on RTT-ELC applications and awards but that they were given no guidance about how to do this. The Itasca administrators were under the impression that participating in this initiative would include some technical assistance from the state on how to manage data more efficiently and effectively, perhaps using a system standardized across Zones, but this did not occur.

**NAZ**

As reported in Year 1, the NAZ faced barriers in locating and serving certain segments of its population. Some families for various social and economic reasons “don’t want to be found.”

Because of limited funding, the NAZ was not able to serve all the families that wanted and qualified for RTT-ELC Scholarships. This situation was not unique to the NAZ in that all Zones had waiting lists and more families to serve than there were RTT-ELC Scholarships available. The number of families served in the NAZ was even lower because of the policies it set regarding which families would be prioritized for the scholarships. The highest quality programs have many comprehensive services that high-risk children would benefit from, but they are also expensive. Enrolling a child and possibly their siblings in these programs consumed a large portion of limited resources, limiting the number of children who could be served.
• Respondents from the NAZ described challenges related to planning and budgeting for services. Given that the families served were high needs and highly mobile, it was difficult to create algorithms to accurately predict how much money would be spent in a given year. In addition, CCAP rates increased during this time, which also drove up costs unexpectedly. One respondent suggested that providing a flexible funding ceiling would have eased this challenge.

• Respondents suggested that the NAZ struggled to think through the implications of policies set for RTT-ELC Scholarship administration. For example, policies for what age group of children should be targeted were based on the assumption that children would stay local and would cost less money as they aged. However, administrators realized that not all children remained in the service area, and the NAZ struggled to negotiate policies regarding families that moved out of the NAZ but wanted to continue to receive RTT-ELC Scholarships.

SPPN

• In Year 3 of the evaluation, SPPN interviewees again mentioned that the SPPN policy change to allow RTT-ELC Scholarships to be used only in the 3- and 4-star programs resulted in difficulty for some families when the programs their children had been attending were unable or unwilling to be rated before the deadline. The process of encouraging programs to comply and then helping them meet the new requirements was challenging for the Promise Neighborhood and Think Small staff, despite their best efforts.

• In Year 3 SPPN respondents also reiterated that they had difficulty reaching certain segments of their population. A key goal for SPPN is to close achievement disparities between communities of color and their more socioeconomically advantaged peers. However, SPPN was not able to reach all cultural communities at the scale desired to address some disparities.

• In Year 3 SPPN interviewees noted that it was unclear to them whether RTT-ELC Scholarships effectively incentivized ELD programs in their Zone to either become rated in Parent Aware or to work to make needed changes to raise a low rating. They recognized that there were probably ELD programs that were high quality but chose not to participate in Parent Aware and that endorsement of the Parent Aware system may not be strong among all ELD programs.

• Respondents also recognized that RTT-ELC Scholarships served as a revenue source disproportionately for large mainstream child care centers. As they noted in previous years, because of the financial and logistical difficulties many smaller family child care programs faced in becoming Parent Aware-rated (e.g., they did not have the resources to purchase a curriculum or train providers), ratings and the associated
RTT-ELC Scholarship funds were more easily accessed by child care centers and school-based programs. Respondents noted that it often takes additional supports and community commitment to help family child care programs overcome these challenges to being rated, as well as a shift in the ways in which the ParentAware standards are set for family child care. SPPN staff had hoped to invest in minority cultural communities and the smaller family child care homes they tend to own and operate in order to facilitate their receipt of an equitable portion of the RTT-ELC Scholarships, but they were unable to do this effectively because the ParentAware system requirements posed challenges for these family child care homes.

**White Earth**

- As in previous years, interviewees described workforce capacity as a major challenge in White Earth. ELD programs were more fully enrolled after children began using RTT-ELC Scholarships, and many had waiting lists. However, the availability of RTT-ELC Scholarships did not substantially increase the supply of providers or early childhood education programs as had been hoped. The supply of ELD programs was particularly low in the summer because some (e.g., school-based programs) do not operate through the summer. Service providers for infants and toddlers also remained in particularly low supply. Furthermore, interviewees noted that some White Earth families do not easily accept child care providers who are new to the community, which exacerbates the workforce supply problem. Because of this capacity issue, interviewees felt strongly that the need for families to have access to high-quality child care in the community has not been fully met—even if they had had more RTT-ELC Scholarships to give out, resulting in more families seeking care, they would not have had enough providers.

- Another continued challenge identified was sustainability of RTT-ELC Scholarship funding. As in the other Zones, White Earth staff viewed the Minnesota State Early Learning Scholarships as a means to continue giving high-needs children access to high-quality early learning programming. However, at least one interviewee noted that the lack of sustainable funding may threaten either the state or the early childhood community’s credibility among families by providing unpredictable funding and services.

- Interviewees also described the low amount of funds for administering RTT-ELC Scholarships as a challenge. WECC was able to pay for only a half-time administrator, even though this individual was described as “doing the work of two people.” Administering the RTT-ELC Scholarships efficiently and effectively would have been difficult for someone who did not have this person’s experience and capabilities.
A new challenge identified in Year 3 was difficulty in blending RTT-ELC Scholarships with Head Start. According to one interviewee, it was difficult to use RTT-ELC Scholarships to create full-time care for children who were attending the part-time Head Start program because many private child care providers did not accept children who would need to be enrolled for only part of the day.

Long-Term Success and Sustainability of the RTT-ELC Scholarships

Interviewees were asked about what they perceived to be the long-term successes of the RTT-ELC Scholarships, particularly successes they believed had the potential to be sustainable beyond the end of the grant. They were asked to comment specifically on (1) relationships in the early childhood community, (2) relationships between early childhood providers and families, and (3) coordination or collaboration within their local early childhood system. We found consensus on the following long-term, sustainable impacts across the four Zones:

- Respondents felt it was likely that the relationships between various early childhood stakeholders that were built or strengthened through administering the RTT-ELC Scholarships in the communities would remain as a long-term impact of the grant.
- The presence of funding through RTT-ELC Scholarships (and Title I PreK Incentives) brought new attention to the need for and importance of high-quality early childhood education. Interviewees felt this awareness is likely to extend beyond the grant period. The quality of preschool programming was now a topic of conversation for providers, school districts that had been largely K-12 focused, and parents who were learning about child development through Parent Aware, their providers, or (in White Earth) the parent education component of the RTT-ELC Scholarship program.

Responses specific to each Zone are as follows.

Itasca

Respondents in Itasca described three main ways they thought RTT-ELC Scholarships would have a long-term, sustainable impact on their community, even after the grant itself ends.

- Having the grant funding in their community helped foster collaboration and relationship building among various early childhood stakeholders, including Head Start, Invest Early, School Readiness, and private ELD providers. The relationship among early childhood stakeholders and Head Start was already strong before RTT-ELC, but the initiative helped “soften the competition” between Invest Early and the...
private providers. One respondent commented, “We are a small area, so relationship is important. Now we know providers on a name basis, relationships have been built, and have long-term relationships.” Another said this about collaboration: “You’re looking at the broader picture, not just your agency or my agency, but starting to talk about how this community can work together.”

- A second lasting reported impact was the increase in child care quality in the region overall. This was achieved through incentivizing providers to become rated in Parent Aware and through the professional development the mentor grant provided. The result was more options (in addition to Invest Early and Head Start) for parents seeking high-quality care for their children.

- A third long-term reported impact of RTT-ELC Scholarships in Itasca was a strengthening of provider-family relationships. The RTT-ELC Scholarships provided a steady source of funding, resulting in stable care for children, and allowed providers and families the time to develop deeper relationships with one another. Relatedly, respondents also reiterated that although many providers were initially either reluctant to undergo the Parent Aware rating process or were motivated primarily by funding to do so, as they built relationships with the families and began to see the impact that increasing their quality had on the children they served, providers truly bought in to the quality improvement process.

**SPPN**

Respondents in SPPN described several ways they thought RTT-ELC Scholarships would have a long-term, sustainable impact on their community.

- SPPN respondents hoped that there would be a longer term impact for the school district when the children who had received RTT-ELC Scholarships reached kindergarten and were more school ready than previous cohorts of students who did not receive a scholarship or who did not have access to a high quality early learning setting.

- As in the other Zones, SPPN respondents expected the relationships between the school district, Head Start, and child care programs that had been built through the mutual administration of the RTT-ELC Scholarships would remain past the life of the grant.

- SPPN respondents also hoped the relationships built across the various Transformation Zones would continue; SPPN now regularly works with the NAZ, and its relationship with White Earth and Itasca represents an opportunity to create a broader statewide coalition for policy work and advocacy.
At least one interviewee believed families of children who received high-quality care via RTT-ELC Scholarships would now have a better understanding of child development because many of the programs kept parents informed of their child’s progress and helped educate them on ways to foster their child’s success.

**NAZ**

In the NAZ, respondents noted several potential long-term sustainable successes of the RTT-ELC Scholarships.

- As in other Transformation Zones, NAZ respondents believed that the RTT-ELC Scholarships strengthened relationships within the early childhood community and between early childhood and elementary school communities.
- At least two respondents remarked that parents and child care providers developed strong partnerships that are expected to continue after RTT-ELC funding ends.
- At least one respondent believed parents of children receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships became more knowledgeable about child development, features of high-quality early childhood programming, and how to locate high-quality services.

**White Earth**

In White Earth, respondents reported that they expected several long-term sustainable successes of the RTT-ELC Scholarships.

- The increase in the quality of the community’s early childhood programs resulting from programs participating in the Parent Aware rating system was expected to be sustainable beyond the life of the RTT-ELC grant; programs that became Parent Aware-rated would also continue to be reimbursed at higher CCAP rates even after the end of the RTT-ELC grant.
- Respondents reported that the RTT-ELC Scholarships had created new relationships within the early childhood community and had strengthened preexisting relationships. In particular, the RTT-ELC Scholarships helped strengthen the relationships between WECC and the area Head Start centers and school districts.
- The parent education requirement associated with the RTT-ELC Scholarships also helped parents develop stronger relationships with the early childhood community as well as other families and made them more knowledgeable about early childhood development and services. Interviewees noted that parents appreciated this education program and both hoped it would continue past the RTT-ELC Scholarship.
- There was also some evidence of a more lasting community commitment to early childhood, including a tribal proclamation acknowledging the importance of school readiness.
Perspectives on State and Local Roles in Early Childhood Systems Building and Lessons Learned for the State

Respondents were asked what they thought the role of state agencies should be in supporting local communities broadly in building and supporting strong, sustainable local early childhood systems. They also were asked what lessons learned regarding RTT-ELC Scholarship implementation in their Zone they thought the state department of education should heed in order to continue to support local communities. Some of these lessons and recommendations apply to actions the state department of education (or other state agencies) can undertake, whereas others relate to broader policies and funding decisions to build and support strong early childhood systems which may apply to multiple state agencies, the legislature, and other stakeholders and funders. Themes derived from an analysis of responses across the four Zones included the following:

- Zone staff recognized that an inherent challenge to implementing initiatives such as the RTT-ELC Scholarships is that higher level agencies (federal/state government) need compliance, scalability, and replicability across multiple localities, whereas local entities need flexibility to implement in a way that works for their particular community. These two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but finding the right balance requires all parties to listen, communicate openly, and be willing to compromise. Zone staff felt that state agencies, including the department of education, could support the localities by sharing knowledge learned across multiple communities about the best ways to foster mixed delivery systems (e.g., combination of school-based, Head Start, private child care) that provide high-quality early childhood programming.

- The respondents also commented that the state should find ways to use statutes, policies, and funding to promote local collaboration rather than competition, as well as to support local communities in developing and implementing integrated local school readiness plans. One way the state can do this is by structuring payment (e.g., of RTT-ELC or other early learning scholarships) so that collaboration among local entities is required.

- The respondents felt that the state can also foster collaboration across communities such as the Transformation Zones, so that different localities can share ideas as well as resources.

- The respondents commented that the state needs to fund early childhood services in a sustainable way, not through time-limited grant funding. This would require legislative action.

Specific responses from each Zone were as follows.
Itasca

- At least one respondent in Itasca expressed the idea that as the funder, the state had the right and responsibility to foster collaboration among local entities. Collaboration rarely occurs organically, but when purposely nurtured it can result in benefits to the community in the form of more efficient and effective services. Leadership needs to be bought in to the idea, and funding should be used as an incentive. The state could require collaboration among its grantees contractually, but it could also use softer touches such as establishing lines of communication and creating venues and opportunities for shared learning.

- Itasca interviewees unanimously conveyed that flexibility was key to their successful implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships. The fact that the state allowed each Zone to tailor the specifics of implementation to meet the needs of its particular community was both appreciated and seen as necessary. Respondents emphasized that rural areas can be very different from urban areas and that “one size doesn’t fit all.” Itasca used a community partnership model rather than a competitive model for awarding RTT-ELC Scholarships, and it was very successful in incentivizing ELD providers to become rated in Parent Aware.

NAZ

- Like those in other Transformation Zones, respondents from the NAZ believed that the state played an important role in establishing overall goals, managing resources, and listening to lessons learned from local partners to better support local implementation. They believed local programs should be responsible for implementing programs that are suited to communities’ needs. Program flexibility and adaptability are therefore critical. An important part of this process is developing an ongoing feedback loop in which the state hears about effective local practices and applies that information to vary administration by region.

- Respondents’ strongly endorsed the idea that local communities should have a major decision-making role in how funds are spent in their community. They commented that a need exists for state-local community collaboration in the design of early learning systems that work well within different community contexts, but effective systems must be built, supported, and sustained with local infrastructures.

- Another theme from NAZ respondents was that MDE needs to understand and support early childhood programming that is a mixed delivery system—one with a variety of ELD program types such as child care, Head Start, and school-based programs. This perspective calls for more and better collaboration across state agencies in education, health, and social services.
Finally, and related to this collaboration theme above, NAZ respondents also mentioned the need for the state to consider that early childhood begins at birth and that policies and funding priorities need to address the continuum of development across the entire early childhood period before kindergarten. To be effective, policies and funding would need to be coordinated across state agencies and support collaboration at the local level.

**SPPN**

- Interviewees in SPPN recognized that a natural tension exists between local and state/federal control in implementing programs or initiatives. The programs or initiatives need to be flexible enough to be implemented well locally, but the state needs to think about scalability across numerous communities. Respondents suggested that as part of the balancing process, the state must hear from local communities to know whether something does or does not work for them, and when something does not work to allow for corrections through flexible implementation of general guidelines.

- SPPN interviewees expressed the belief that despite being an obvious financial boon, time-limited grant funding such as RTT-ELC can pose a challenge to communities because it can create an increase in services that is unsustainable once the grant ends. SPPN learned this lesson with the MELF pilot so in implementing RTT-ELC Scholarships, it chose to braid the funds with CCAP and award these scholarships to older, preschool-age children. This minimized the number of children who would be left without services at the grant’s end but not yet be age eligible for kindergarten. SPPN interviewees believed it was important for the state to know that local entities must make these types of considerations when implementing grant funding.

- At least one respondent in SPPN also expressed the feeling that the Transformation Zone model of implementing early childhood initiatives was “really brilliant” because it resulted in a depth of investment in communities that have historically been underserved. Making serious commitments in these places was important, and it allowed both the state and local governance to learn in a contained setting while also changing family outcomes. This was in contrast to the model for implementing state Early Learning Scholarships, which are spread widely across the state in a way that may impact individual children and families but makes it harder to transform communities and build strong local early learning systems.
White Earth

- Respondents tended to favor local control in programmatic decision-making because “we know best what our families and what our communities need.” In White Earth, RTT-ELC Scholarship administrators determined that an important strategy was “starting where the family is” to get young children into the system in the first place. They accomplished this by focusing on earlier ages, building continuous relationships with families grounded in trust, and emphasizing parent education through comprehensive ongoing training on early childhood development and services, including Parent Aware. Both interviewees believed that linking parent education to RTT-ELC Scholarship receipt had been successful and suggested that the state has a role in listening to lessons learned at the local level in order to provide better guidance to local programs later.

- Interviewees also believed the state should play a central role in coordination and accountability of local programs. In particular, they considered the state had a role as a centralized resource agency, potentially providing learning opportunities, collecting and using data to inform training, and interfacing with the legislature. Additionally, respondents believed the state could take the lead in setting the tone regarding educational priorities and philosophy, such as being inclusive of preschool programming as an important part of the overall educational system.

- Respondents in White Earth noted that they need more funds that are dispersed in a consistent, predictable manner. Respondents noted that the state needs to stay well informed about what and how the local communities are doing and avoid adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. That means they need to bring people together to share their experiences and lessons learned.

- Respondents noted that the state has a role in continuing to expand public awareness about the types and benefits of early childhood programming for children.

- Respondents also said that the state needs to continue efforts to integrate early childhood programming into the K-12 school system, which includes increasing the professionalization of the early childhood workforce.

Summary and Conclusion

Data presented in this Year 3 report about implementation of the RTT-ELC Scholarships in Minnesota’s four Transformation Zones indicate that the Zones were successful in using the RTT-ELC Scholarships to provide high-needs children with greater access to high-quality ELD programming in this most recent year, as well as over the course of the RTT-ELC initiative (2012–16). All four Zones awarded a number of new RTT-ELC
Scholarships in the third year and continued to fund scholarships given in previous years to younger children who had not yet entered kindergarten. Here, we summarize the findings of our formative evaluation, describing the recipients of the RTT-ELC Scholarships, the ELD programs in the Zones, and the impacts of the RTT-ELC Scholarship program on the early childhood system in each Zone. This is followed by a summary of the challenges of implementation and then a few broad lessons learned and implications of the evaluation findings for consideration in future early learning work in Minnesota.

Findings About RTT-ELC Scholarship Recipients

- Over the course of the RTT-ELC initiative, a total of 977 RTT-ELC Scholarships were awarded in the four Transformation Zones. More than one-third of the RTT-ELC Scholarships were awarded to children in SPPN (38%), about one-fourth were for children in Itasca (28%), about one-fifth were for children in White Earth (19%), and one-fifth were for children in the NAZ (15%).

- Looking across the Zones, RTT-ELC Scholarships were awarded to children of a wide range of ages; 29% of children were under age 3, 28% were 3 years old, 29% were 4 years old, and 13% were 5 years or older when initially awarded the RTT-ELC Scholarship.

- White Earth and the NAZ gave a larger proportion of their RTT-ELC Scholarships to children under age 3 (62% and 40%, respectively) than Itasca and SPPN (20% and 14%, respectively). SPPN gave the majority of its RTT-ELC Scholarships to preschool-age children; 73% of its scholarships went to 3- and 4-year-olds. Among the Zones, Itasca distributed its RTT-ELC Scholarships the most evenly across the age groups, with each age group receiving 20–30% of scholarships. Itasca also awarded more RTT-ELC Scholarships to older children (age 5+) than the other Zones (23%).

- Families receiving RTT-ELC Scholarships demonstrated a number of risk factors, although they varied by Zone.
  - Among the Zones, NAZ parents had the lowest level of formal education, with 48% having attained less than a high school degree. SPPN parents had somewhat more education; 21% had less than a high school degree, but 60% were high school graduates. Parents in Itasca and White Earth had higher educational attainment, with 56% and 62%, respectively, completing some college or vocational school or more.

35 Each Zone received the same amount of funding for RTT-ELC Scholarships; NAZ and White Earth chose to use their funds to serve fewer children for a longer time (i.e., for 2 or 3 years before kindergarten), whereas SPPN (and Itasca to a lesser extent) served more children for shorter periods (i.e., for only 1 year before kindergarten).
- In all Zones, many families were headed by a single parent, ranging from 45% in Itasca to 73% in SPPN.
- White Earth had the highest percentage of children cared for by a relative (9%) or foster family (13%).
- Across Zones, only about half of parents worked at least part time (49%, varied by Zone).

These data demonstrate that the Zones were indeed targeting RTT-ELC Scholarships to serve high-needs children in high-quality ELD programs. Furthermore, as in previous years, staff in all four Zones described the RTT-ELC Scholarships as having positive impacts on the children and families receiving them. In general, the RTT-ELC Scholarships increased access for children to high-quality ELD programs. Increased access took the form of (1) greater continuity of care (i.e., consistent enrollment with fewer disruptions), (2) increased hours (i.e., longer days or longer weeks) for those already in high-quality care, and (3) more children formerly at home or in lower quality care settings filling slots in high-quality ELD programs. Zone staff noted that this generally resulted in high-quality early learning experiences for children and less stress and more stability for families.

**Findings About ELD Programs**

In a review of NACCRRAware data, which give the quantity and types of ELD programs located within Zone boundaries, over the years of the evaluation we found the following:

- The number of programs participating in NACCRRAware increased across the Zones between April 2013 and April 2015 from 187 to 237, with increases in individual Zones ranging from 7 to 23 new programs.
- The number of programs that were participating in Parent Aware increased across Zones between April 2013 and April 2015 from 45 to 80, with increases in individual Zones ranging from 8 to 13 new programs participating in Parent Aware.
- The number of programs that were highly rated (3 or 4 stars in Parent Aware) increased across the Zones between April 2013 and April 2015 from 35 to 60, with increases in individual Zones ranging from 4 to 10 new highly rated programs.

These data indicate that ELD program supply was increasing during the RTT-ELC grant and, more important, that across the Zones the number of high-quality ELD programs increased, another major objective of the grant.

In Year 3 of the evaluation, we conducted a survey of ELD programs that were either located within the geographic areas of the Zones or located outside the Zones but were serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships. As discussed previously, low response rates and self-reported data meant that findings should be interpreted with caution because these
data might not accurately reflect all ELD programs. Low response rates also meant that we were unable to analyze differences across ELD program types because there were too few ELD programs in different categories to draw valid conclusions. Finally, the self-report nature of these data also could mean that ELD program directors may have misunderstood some questions and thus provided responses that seem to contradict other data sources of data (e.g. some program directors may have identified their programs as serving RTT-ELC Scholarship children when children with scholarships had the state scholarships instead).

Despite these limitations, we found the following about ELD program administrators’ perspectives about Parent Aware and the influence of RTT-ELC Scholarships on Parent Aware participation:

- ELD programs reporting they had no plans to participate in the Parent Aware rating system were more likely to be family child care rather than center-based programs (18 of 20 programs that gave this response were family child care programs). The most frequently cited reasons for this lack of interest in Parent Aware were that programs (1) believed the ratings process takes too much time, (2) felt their program was already high quality, and (3) had a waiting list (implying full enrollment). Four ELD programs responded they would be more willing to become rated if it was required, and four responded that they would be more willing or if the process was easier and faster.

- ELD programs in the rural Zones were more likely than those in the urban Zones to report that the existence of RTT-ELC Scholarships influenced them to become rated in Parent Aware. In Itasca and White Earth, 40% and 43% of ELD programs, respectively, reported RTT-ELC Scholarships had a lot of influence on their becoming rated, compared with 24% of ELD programs in the NAZ and 23% of programs in SPPN.

- Across the Zones, many ELD programs reported that the quality improvement funds they received through participation in Parent Aware enabled them to increase the quality of their classroom materials (22 programs reporting) and provide professional development for teachers and staff (20 programs reporting).

Across the four Zones, the 977 children who received RTT-ELC Scholarships over the course of the initiative attended a total of 120 ELD programs (located both within and outside the geographic areas of the Zones), and in July 2015 most of these ELD programs (98%) were participating in Parent Aware. Of these 120 ELD programs, 69 (58%) were center-based child care programs, 31 (26%) were family child care programs, 7 (6%) were Head Start programs, and 13 (11%) were school-based preschool programs. Of these 120

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36 Because of the low survey response rate (95 of 261, or 39%), findings may not be representative of all ELD programs in the Zones and should be interpreted with caution.
programs, 50 (42%) participated in the evaluation survey. Findings based on the responses of these 50 programs indicated the following:

- Across the Zones, 66% of the respondent ELD programs that served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships reported that the scholarships enabled them to provide enhanced or more comprehensive services. The most common additional services cited were (1) more continuous care, (2) more days of care per week, (3) more hours of care per day, and (4) summer programming.

- Across the Zones, 84% of the respondent ELD programs that served children with RTT-ELC Scholarships reported that the scholarships enabled them to serve families who would have otherwise been unable to pay. About one-fourth (24%) reported that the RTT-ELC Scholarships enabled them to serve children of more diverse ethnic backgrounds. In the NAZ and SPPN, 25% of ELD programs in each Zone reported they were able to serve more children who spoke languages other than English because of the RTT-ELC Scholarships.

- Respondent ELD programs reported opening 167 additional slots with RTT-ELC Scholarship funds over the course of the RTT-ELC grant.

As in previous years, staff in all four Zones described the RTT-ELC Scholarships as having positive impacts on the ELD programs in their community. Interviewees noted that ELD programs serving children with RTT-ELC Scholarships benefited from the stability of the children’s attendance and the resulting ability to build deeper, more meaningful relationships with the families. Guaranteed payment also served to strengthen and stabilize the ELD programs themselves.

The effect of RTT-ELC Scholarships on increasing community-wide ELD program quality was less apparent, however. The 2015 NACCRAware data showed that in all four Zones, a large percentage of ELD programs were still not choosing to participate in Parent Aware, so it is unclear how well the RTT-ELC Scholarships incentivized programs overall to demonstrate or increase their quality through participation in the rating system. The percentage of nonparticipation was especially high among family child care programs. The evaluation did find, however, that among ELD programs that chose to participate, those in Itasca and White Earth were more likely than those in the NAZ and SPPN to report that RTT-ELC Scholarships had at least some influence on their decision to become Parent Aware-rated.

Interview data with key staff in the Zones corroborated this finding to some extent, with respondents from Itasca and White Earth reporting that they believed RTT-ELC Scholarships directly incentivized some ELD programs to participate in Parent Aware and increase their quality. Respondents in Itasca attributed their success in increasing the number of highly rated ELD programs in their Zone to their use of a collaborative/
incentivizing model rather than competitive process in distributing RTT-ELC Scholarship funds, as well as the personal touch of having Zone staff act as guide and champion to programs navigating the ratings process. White Earth staff reported playing a similar role; perhaps this approach may have been possible (and effective) only in the rural context because it required Zone staff to develop and foster personal relationships with each ELD provider on a frequent and regular basis.

Findings About Early Childhood Systems

In addition to affecting children and families and ELD programs positively, RTT-ELC Scholarships had an impact on the communities’ early childhood systems as well. This impact was improved communication and relationships between ELD program staffs, between ELD program staff and parents, and between the Zones themselves and the families they served. Common themes from respondents across Zones were the following:

- Local early learning entities were working together more as a system, with stronger relationships among ELD programs; this included school-based School Readiness, Head Start, and private child care programs. The need to create structures and processes to administer the RTT-ELC Scholarships brought people together over common funding and goals.

- RTT-ELC staff members across the four Zones were also interacting with each other and sharing approaches and common challenges (supported in part by the role MDE played in bringing Zone staff together in meetings and conference calls).

- The RTT-ELC Scholarships brought a focus on ELD program quality because of the requirement that the scholarships could be used only in programs rated 3 or 4 stars on Parent Aware.

Challenges of RTT-ELC Scholarship Implementation

In addition to the successes of RTT-ELC Scholarship implementation, Zone staff we interviewed in Year 3 of the evaluation also described challenges and barriers. Some challenges were new in the last year, but many were from previous years. Most of the start-up challenges reported in the first year had been resolved, however. Findings from earlier annual reports indicated that both state and Zone staff believed that many of the start-up challenges could have been eliminated by having a period of time for planning before implementation of the Access Strategies began. Themes from interviews in Year 3 of the evaluation included the following:

- Across Zones, respondents commented that they were unable to reach all the children who could have benefited from RTT-ELC Scholarships. This was due both
to limited funding and to the fact that some eligible families simply did not want to be served in ELD programs.

- Respondents in some Zones felt that there was limited evidence the RTT-ELC Scholarships incentivized many ELD programs to participate in Parent Aware. They commented that the rating process was particularly difficult for family child care programs to navigate because it could be lengthy and costly. Itasca and White Earth may have had more success because Invest Early and WECC staff members were very engaged in helping ELD programs, noting that the “personal touch” may especially make a difference in rural areas.

- Respondents noted that the RTT-ELC Scholarships did not particularly encourage ELD programs to expand in size or encourage new programs to open in their communities. Challenges cited were that (1) the RTT-ELC Scholarships were time limited and ELD programs may be cautious about making new commitments without assurance of future funding, and (2) a limited workforce in rural areas constrains expanding classrooms or opening new ELD programs.

### Implications of Findings for Implementing Early Learning Initiatives

Several broad implications can be drawn from the findings from this evaluation for implementing future early learning initiatives in Minnesota. They are the following:

- RTT-ELC Scholarships were an effective way to increase access to high-quality ELD programming for high-needs children. They were easy for families and ELD programs to use. Additionally, ELD program staff and Zone administrators believed the approach of ensuring continuity of funding for ELD program attendance more readily benefited families and the programs (i.e., once a child was awarded the RTT-ELC Scholarship and began attending a highly rated program, funding was secured with no additional changes in eligibility until the child left the ELD program).

- Time-limited, initiative-based (or one-time grant) funding is a short-term financial benefit for communities but does not typically encourage the building of infrastructure for a strong and sustainable early learning system. Therefore, the state should work with local communities to determine not only how to most effectively leverage grant funding while it is available, but also plan for sustainability of services after its end.

- In implementing the RTT-ELC grant, Minnesota created a framework for implementation that gave the Zones the autonomy to make certain decisions about

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37 Some of these broad lessons build on information contained in earlier evaluation reports.
how best to serve their unique populations. Zone staff raised the issue of the inherent challenge to implementing initiatives or grants such as the RTT-ELC Scholarships in that higher level agencies (federal/state government) need to demonstrate compliance, scalability, and replicability across multiple localities, whereas local entities need flexibility to implement in a way that works for their particular community and takes into account local context, history, and resources. Across much of the evaluation data, information obtained from both Zone and state agency staff supported the notion that these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Finding the right balance requires all parties to listen, communicate openly, and be willing to understand the other’s perspective and compromise as needed.

- Relatedly, throughout the evaluation Zone staffs expressed a desire for local autonomy in implementing any kind of early childhood initiative, but they viewed the state agency role as a convener, supporting local communities in building strong, high-quality early childhood systems. They commented that the work with children and families takes place in the local contexts and programs, but local communities need to share their strategies, challenges, and solutions with each other. The state can play a major role in fostering collaboration across communities such as the Zones so that different localities can share ideas as well as resources.

- Zone staff also commented that state agencies should find ways to use statutes, policies, and funding to promote local collaboration rather than competition and to support communities in developing and implementing strong, coordinated, and integrated early learning networks with the common goal of promoting school readiness.

- The evaluation data showed that local infrastructure in a particular area (e.g., staff, existing relationships, collaborative early childhood entities or teams such as Invest Early in Itasca, the NAZ in Minneapolis, SPPN in Saint Paul, and WECC in White Earth), and additional funding had a direct impact on how each Zone implemented the RTT-ELC Scholarships and had implications for the long-term impact of the initiative on the community.
  - For example, differences between the NAZ and SPPN in levels of staffing and organizational capacity at the beginning of the RTT-ELC initiative affected how they did outreach to families, which in turn had an effect on the relationship families developed with the Zone outside the RTT-ELC Scholarships.
  
  - The extent to which each Zone used outside infrastructure (e.g., SPPN relying on Think Small) rather than building its own infrastructure over the course of implementing RTT-ELC Scholarships also had implications for how it would transition out of having the additional RTT-ELC funding for a few years only, as
well as what long-term impacts the RTT-ELC initiative would leave on the Zone even as the grant ended.

- Zone staffs expressed the desire for the state to serve as a clearinghouse for information on best practices, as well as locally collected data. They look to the state for high-level guidance and for information on national trends in early childhood policy and practice. Because the state also collects data across localities (e.g., from child care programs in various regions), it can also play a role in giving data back to local early childhood stakeholders (e.g., about child care supply and Parent Aware participation) so that staff can make informed decisions and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their work to build high-quality local ELD programs and services.

- Zones made deliberate and difficult decisions about the population of children they wanted to target for receipt of RTT-ELC Scholarships based on the limitations of the funding and the scope and nature of their goals; some Zones awarded more RTT-ELC Scholarships to children early in the birth-to-5 age range, committing them to several years of funding per child, whereas others focused on providing funding for preschoolers. Serving younger children over multiple years versus serving only 4-year-olds in the year before kindergarten entry has implications for the total number of children who can be served and the intensity with which each child can be served given the limited funding. It is unknown which strategy gives a better return on investment regarding school readiness outcomes. Research does show that children benefit from experiencing high-quality early learning environments consistently throughout the early childhood years.

Next Steps

Before the conclusion of the RTT-ELC grant, the evaluation team will organize the findings from the evaluations of the RTT-ELC Access Strategies, the Minnesota State Early Learning Scholarships, and the Parent Aware Validation Study into a cross-evaluation summary. This summary will be shared and discussed with MDE, the Department of Human Services, Transformation Zone staff, and other early learning stakeholders to further guide policy development and the planning of future early learning initiatives in the state.
Appendix A: Interview Protocols
MN-RTT Key Informant Interview

We talked with you or other staff in your Zone in the summer of last year. The first set of questions is about early childhood programs in your community, and your use of Race to the Top Scholarships. I will be referring to Race to the Top as RTT during this interview. Because the scope of the questions is very broad, you may find that not all questions apply to you. Please let me know if this is ever the case and we will skip that question.

1) Our records show that your role in this transformation zone is ROLE. Is that still true? If not, what has changed?

2) In this last year of RTT implementation (July 2014 through May-June 2015), describe for me how your community is using RTT-ELC Scholarship funds (e.g. to create new slots, pay for existing slots by supplementing CCAP or parent fees, lengthen the day). Is this different from how you used these funds last year?
   - Program/use #1:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.
   - Program/use #2:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.
   - Program/use #3:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.
   - Program/use #4:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.

3) Given the experience of the last three years, if you were able to repeat the RTT initiative again, would you or the broader leadership in your Zone make any changes to the way you used the RTT-ELC Scholarship funds? (E.g., who you are serving - population, how they allocate funds per child, what they use the funds for -- programs or services.) Why is this?

4) In retrospect, what aspects of the process of implementation and administration of the RTT funds in your community were the **most successful**?

5) In retrospect, what aspects of the process of implementation and administration of the RTT funds in your community were the **most challenging**?

6) What do you perceive to be the most important immediate or short-term impacts of the RTT funds in your community in the past year? Are these any different from last year? For RTT Scholarships funds, PROBE FOR:
   - **increased quality** of early childhood programs
- **Increased access** to high quality early childhood programs among high needs children
- **Increased continuity of care**
- Or providing a **longer day or week**?

7) We are interested in potential long-term impacts of having RTT funds in your community that you feel will be sustainable beyond the end of the grant.

- Have there been sustainable changes in relationships amongst the EC community? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations has been developed or enhanced?
  - If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
  - If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?

- Have there been sustainable changes in relationships between EC providers and families? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations or interactions have been developed or enhanced?
  - If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
  - If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?

- Have there been sustainable changes in the way the EC system works? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations has been developed or enhanced?
  - If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
  - If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?

8) Thinking back to the start of the grant and the initial goals you had for RTT in your community, are there impacts that you had anticipated or hoped for but never actually came to be?

- If yes, what were the factors that contributed to this? Was there anything that could have been done differently?

9) What are the lessons learned at your community or Zone level that you think the state Department of Education needs to pay attention to in order to continue to support local communities and build strong, high-quality, sustainable early childhood systems?

- Are there collaborations that have improved? Describe them.
- Are there coordinated services that have improved? Describe them.
- What are the key lessons learned that are unique about your Zone?

10) What do you think the role of state agencies versus local communities and systems should be in building and supporting early childhood systems?

11) Did having RTT funding impact the way you collect or use data in EC programs in your Zone?

- If yes, describe the impact.
- If no, why not?
MN-R TT Scholarship Administrator Interview

We talked with you or other staff in your Zone in the summer of last year. The first set of questions is about early childhood programs in your community, and your use of Race to the Top Scholarships. I will be referring to Race to the Top as RTT during this interview. Because the scope of the questions is very broad, you may find that not all questions apply to you. Please let me know if this is ever the case and we will skip that question.

1) Our records show that your role in this transformation zone is ROLE. Is that still true? If not, what has changed?

2) In this last year of RTT implementation (July 2014 through May-June 2015), describe for me how your community is using RTT-ELC Scholarship funds (e.g. to create new slots, pay for existing slots by supplementing CCAP or parent fees, lengthen the day). Is this different from how you used these funds last year? (PASTE IN SECTIONS FROM YEAR 2 ANNUAL REPORT TO REFER TO.)
   - Program/use #1:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.
   - Program/use #2:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.
   - Program/use #3:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.
   - Program/use #4:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.

3) Given the experience of the last three years, if you were able to repeat the RTT initiative again, would you or the broader leadership in your Zone make any changes to the way you used the RTT-ELC Scholarship funds? (E.g., who you are serving - population, how they allocate funds per child, what they use the funds for -- programs or services.) Why is this?

4) In retrospect, what aspects of the process of implementation and administration of the RTT funds in your community were the most successful?

5) In retrospect, what aspects of the process of implementation and administration of the RTT funds in your community were the most challenging?

Now I have some questions about the impact of RTT in your community.
6) What do you perceive to be the most important immediate or short-term impacts of the RTT funds in your community in the past year? Are these any different from last year? For RTT Scholarships funds, PROBE FOR:
  - increased quality of early childhood programs
  - increased access to high quality early childhood programs among high needs children
  - increased continuity of care
  - Or providing a longer day or week?

7) We are interested in potential long-term impacts of having RTT funds in your community that you feel will be sustainable beyond the end of the grant.
  - Have there been sustainable changes in relationships amongst the EC community? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations has been developed or enhanced?
    i. If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
    ii. If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?
  - Have there been sustainable changes in relationships between EC providers and families? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations or interactions have been developed or enhanced?
    i. If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
    ii. If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?
  - Have there been sustainable changes in the way the EC system works? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations has been developed or enhanced?
    i. If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
    ii. If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?

8) Thinking back to the start of the grant and the initial goals you had for RTT in your community, are there impacts that you had anticipated or hoped for but never actually came to be?
  - If yes, what were the factors that contributed to this? Was there anything that could have been done differently?

9) What are the lessons learned at your community or Zone level that you think the state Department of Education needs to pay attention to in order to continue to support local communities and build strong, high-quality, sustainable early childhood systems?
  - Are there collaborations that have improved? Describe them.
  - Are there coordinated services that have improved? Describe them.
  - What are the key lessons learned that are unique about your Zone?

10) What do you think the role of state agencies versus local communities and systems should be in building and supporting early childhood systems?
11) Did having RTT funding impact the way you collect or use data in EC programs in your Zone?
   
   o If yes, describe the impact.
   o If no, why not?

Those are all my questions for now. Do you have any questions for me?

After I review this interview, I may get back to you to clarify some of your responses. Thank you so much for your time. It has been a pleasure learning about RTT implementation from you over the past few years.
MN-RTT Title 1 Administrator Interview

We talked with you or other staff in your Zone in the summer of last year. The first set of questions is about early childhood programs in your community, and your use of Race to the Top Scholarships. I will be referring to Race to the Top as RTT during this interview. Because the scope of the questions is very broad, you may find that not all questions apply to you. Please let me know if this is ever the case and we will skip that question.

1) Our records show that your role in this transformation zone is ROLE. Is that still true?

2) In this last year of RTT implementation (July 2014 through May-June 2015), describe for me how your district or school is using RTT Title I PreK Incentive money (e.g., to add classrooms, hire staff, increase program quality, purchase materials, professional development). Is this different from how you used these funds last year?
   - Program/use #1:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.
   - Program/use #2:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.
   - Program/use #3:
     i. How many children are currently benefitting from this use of the funds? If so, how do you calculate that? Just give us your best estimate.

3) Given the experience of the last three years, if you were able to repeat the RTT initiative again, would you or the broader leadership in your Zone make any changes to the way you used the RTT Title 1 PreK Incentive funds? (E.g., who you are serving - population, how they allocate funds per child, what they use the funds for -- programs or services.) Why is this?

4) In retrospect, what aspects of the process of implementation and administration of the RTT funds in your community were the most successful?

5) In retrospect, what aspects of the process of implementation and administration of the RTT funds in your community were the most challenging?

Now I have some questions about the impact of RTT in your community.

6) For each use of these RTT Title 1 Incentive funds you named already, what do you perceive to be the most important immediate or short-term impacts of the RTT funds in your community in the past year? Are these any different from last year?
   - increased quality of early childhood programs
   - increased access to high quality early childhood programs among high needs children
   - increased continuity of care
7) We are interested in potential long-term impacts of having RTT Title 1 PreK Incentive funds in your community that you feel will be sustainable beyond the end of the grant.

○ Have there been sustainable changes in relationships amongst the EC community? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations has been developed or enhanced?
  i. If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
  ii. If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?

○ Have there been sustainable changes in relationships between your district/school and families? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations or interactions have been developed or enhanced?
  i. If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
  ii. If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?

○ Have there been sustainable changes in the way the EC system works? Specifically, what kinds of coordination or collaborations has been developed or enhanced?
  i. If yes, what were the factors that helped facilitate these impacts?
  ii. If no, what were the barriers to sustainable impacts?

8) Thinking back to the start of the grant and the initial goals you had for RTT in your district or community, are there impacts that you had anticipated or hoped for but never actually came to be?

○ If yes, what were the factors that contributed to this? Was there anything that could have been done differently?

9) What are the lessons learned at your district level that you think the state Department of Education needs to pay attention to in order to continue to support local communities and build strong, high-quality, sustainable early childhood systems?

○ Are there collaborations that have improved? Describe them.
○ Are there coordinated services that have improved? Describe them.
○ What are the key lessons learned that are unique about your district, school, or Zone?

10) What do you think the role of state agencies versus local communities and systems should be in building and supporting early childhood systems?

11) Did having RTT funding impact the way you collect or use data in EC-related programs in your district/school?

○ If yes, describe the impact.
○ If no, why not?

Thank you, those are all of my questions. Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix B: ELD Program Survey
Early Learning and Development Program Survey

You are being asked to complete this survey because you are listed as the contact person for a preschool or child care program that is a) receiving funding for one or more children through Minnesota's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Scholarship initiative and/or b) located in one of the four RTT-ELC communities (i.e., the Northside Achievement Zone in Minneapolis, the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood, Itasca County, and the White Earth Indian Reservation).

The RTT-ELC initiatives are funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, and administered through the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). MDE has hired SRI International and Child Trends, two non-profit research agencies, to evaluate Minnesota’s RTT-ELC initiatives.

The purpose of this survey is to help us understand the structure of early childhood care and education programs (including family child care programs), the children and families in those programs, the program's participation in parts of the RTT-ELC initiatives such as the Scholarships and Parent Aware, and the background and experiences of the program directors, center managers, or supervisors.

Completing this survey is voluntary. Your responses will be kept confidential and will be reported in the aggregate (grouped with others) only. Your identifying information will never be attached to any of your responses, or shared outside of the research team.

Thank you for taking the time to honestly and thoughtfully respond to each of the questions. The survey will take approximately 10-20 minutes of your time. We greatly appreciate your help. You will receive a $20 gift card from Target or Walmart as a token of our appreciation upon completion of this survey. To receive the $20, please complete the survey by {Due}.

If you have any questions or experience a problem, please feel free to contact Kate Ferguson at 650-859-4428 or by email at katherine.ferguson@sri.com.

Consent

Please select one:

- I will take the survey now, and I agree to have my responses included in the evaluation of the RTT-ELC initiatives.
- I will take the survey at a later time by returning to this site before {Due}.
- I do not wish to take the survey.

Please click "Next" to begin.

You may close your browser now.

Please use the link that was sent to you by email to return soon and take the survey.

Please click "Next" for instructions on removing your name from the study. (Skip to end)
Program Structure

Please think about the 2014-15 school year (approximately September 2014 to August 2015) as you answer these questions. If you are not sure about an answer, please put your best guess.

The first questions are about your program's structure

Q1
How many full-day classes does your program have?
(Full day is 5 or more hours per day. Most family child care programs have a single full-day class. Enter a whole number, enter "0" if none.)

___________

Q2
How many part-day classes does your program have?
(E.g., one classroom with a separate morning and afternoon class would be 2 classes. Part-day is less than 5 hours per day. Enter a whole number, enter "0" if none.)

___________
Program Structure

Q3
Does your program use a formal written curriculum?

- Yes
- No

Q3=1

Q3_b

Please indicate which: (Choose all that apply.)

- My program uses an approach, such as Montessori or Project Approach
- My program uses a locally developed curriculum
- Creative Curriculum
- High/Scope
- Opening the World of Learning (OWL)
- Bank Street Developmental Interaction Approach
- Core Knowledge
- Curiosity Corner
- DLM Early Childhood Express
- Everyday Math
- High Reach Curriculum
- Houghton Mifflin Pre-K
- Investigator Club
- Project Early Kindergarten (PEK) (PEK manual, Everyday Mathematics and Doors to Discovery)
- Scholastic Early Childhood Program
- Other curriculum

Q3_b=16

Q3_TXT

Please specify:
Please enter the number of lead teachers you have at your program. A lead teacher is a full-time, certified teacher or the main family child care provider. (Enter a whole number.)
Program Structure

Q4 $\geq 1$

For each category below, please enter the number of your {Q4} lead teachers or providers who have attained that category as their highest level of education. Count each person in only one category.

Q4_a
a. Bachelor’s degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field:

Q4_b
b. Bachelor’s degree or higher in another field:

Q4_c
c. Associate’s degree in early childhood education or a related field:

Q4_d
d. Child Development Associate (CDA) credential:

Q4_e
e. Associate’s degree in another field:

Q4_f
f. College credits in early childhood education but have not attained a degree:

Q4_g
g. High school diploma or GED:

Q4_TOT
TOTAL (must equal {Q4} lead teachers or providers)
Q5
Which of the following best describes your program’s accreditation status?

- Currently accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- Currently conducting the NAEYC self-study
- Awaiting NAEYC validation visit
- Currently working with the Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP)
- Not accredited at this time but plan to pursue accreditation in the future
- No intentions to become accredited by any organization in the future
- Currently accredited by another organization

Q5=7

Please specify:
Children and Families

The next questions are about the children and families at your program.

Q6
What is the typical number of children on the waiting list for your program?

- We do not typically have a waiting list
- 1-5 children
- 6-10 children
- 11-15 children
- 16-20 children
- More than 20 children

Q7
How many children were in your program last year (the 2014-15 school year)?
For each category below, please enter how many of your {Q7} students from the 2014-15 school year were of that ethnicity. Count each student in only one category.

Q7_a
a. African:

Q7_b
b. African-American, not of Hispanic origin:

Q7_c
c. American Indian or Alaskan Native:

Q7_d
d. Asian or Pacific Islander:

Q7_e
e. Hispanic:

Q7_f
f. White, not of Hispanic origin:

Q7_g
g. Other/multiracial:

Q7_h
h. Unknown:

Q7_TOT
TOTAL (must equal {Q7})
Children and Families

Please choose the best description of the language(s) a) most often spoken by children in your program, and b) most frequently used for instruction in your class sessions or program. (Choose one for each item.)

Q8_a
a. Spoken most often by children:
   - English only
   - Spanish only
   - English and Spanish
   - An Asian language only
   - English and an Asian language
   - An African language only
   - English and an African language
   - One or more American Indian languages
   - English and one or more American Indian languages
   - English and one other language not listed above

Q8_b
b. Used most frequently for instruction:
   - English only
   - Spanish only
   - English and Spanish
   - An Asian language only
   - English and an Asian language
   - An African language only
   - English and an African language
   - One or more American Indian languages
   - English and one or more American Indian languages
   - English and one other language not listed above
Children and Families

How many of the children served in your program are in families with the characteristics listed below? Give us your best estimate. (Choose one for each row.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q9.a</th>
<th>Q9.b</th>
<th>Q9.c</th>
<th>Q9.d</th>
<th>Q9.e</th>
<th>Q9.f</th>
<th>Q9.g</th>
<th>Q9.h</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Low income family</td>
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<td>b. Homeless family</td>
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<td>c. Teenage parent</td>
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<td>d. Parent does not have a high school diploma</td>
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<td>e. Single parent family</td>
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<td>f. Child has an identified developmental delay or disability</td>
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<td>g. Child is ward of state/primary caregivers not parents</td>
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<td>h. Parent(s) in active military duty</td>
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Most: 70-100%  Many: 40-70%  Some: 15-40%  A Few: 1-15%  None  Don't Know
### Children and Families

In the 2014-15 school year, about what percentage of your families currently receive the following benefits? Just your best estimate is fine. *(Choose one for each row.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Most: 70%</th>
<th>Many: 40%</th>
<th>Some: 15%</th>
<th>A Few: 1%</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q10_a</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Child care assistance or CCAP</td>
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<td><strong>Q10_b</strong></td>
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<td>b. MFIP (Minnesota Family Investment Program)</td>
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<td><strong>Q10_c</strong></td>
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<td>c. Medicaid or Medicare</td>
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<td><strong>Q10_d</strong></td>
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<td>d. Food Stamps</td>
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<td><strong>Q10_e</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. WIC</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q10_f</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Free or reduced price school lunches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent Aware

The next questions are about the Parent Aware rating system.

Q11
Have you heard of Parent Aware, Minnesota’s child care quality rating system?

☐ Yes
☐ No (Skip to next section)
Q12
What is your rating status in Parent Aware?

- 4-star rating
- 3-star rating
- 2-star rating
- 1-star rating
- In the process of becoming rated
- Plan to become rated in the future
- No plans to become rated
Q12=1 or Q12=2 or Q12=3 or Q12=4

Q13
How well do you think this rating represents your program’s quality?
- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not very well
- Not well at all

Q12=1 or Q12=2 or Q12=3 or Q12=4 or Q12=5 or Q12=6

Q14
How much did eligibility for receiving Race to the Top (RTT) early learning scholarships influence your decision to become Parent Aware rated?
- I don’t know what RTT scholarships are
- A lot
- Some
- A little
- Not at all
Why have you chosen not to participate in the Parent Aware rating process? (Choose all that apply.)

- My program already has a waiting list
- My program is already high quality
- I don’t know the benefits of being rated
- There are not enough benefits to becoming rated
- It costs too much money to do the things required to get a high rating
- It takes too much time to become rated
- The rating process is too complicated
- Parents don’t use Parent Aware to choose programs
- We can’t meet some of the criteria required to be highly rated
- I don’t trust that the rating will reflect my program’s quality
- I am waiting to hear from other programs about their experience first
- I don’t need to improve the quality of my program
- There is not enough support offered to programs
- Other

Please specify:

_________________________________________________________
What would encourage you to become rated? (Choose all that apply.)

- More funds to put toward improving quality and becoming highly rated
- More evidence that shows being highly rated positively impacts my program’s children and families
- A more streamlined, easier rating process
- To be part of a cutting-edge early childhood initiative
- If someone else requires me to participate
- To qualify for a higher tiered CCAP reimbursement rate
- To qualify for other payment incentives (e.g., scholarships)
- Evidence that parents will use the rating to choose a program
- Other
- None of these

Please specify:
What amount of funds for improving quality would encourage you to become rated? *(Enter a whole number.)*

$____________

What would you use these funds for? *(Choose all that apply.)*

- Purchase a curriculum
- Train staff on curriculum
- Purchase an assessment system
- Train staff on assessment system
- Provide professional development training on early childhood topics
- Improve or increase parent information and engagement activities
- Provide translations or interpreter services for parents
- Purchase additional or improved materials
- Improve physical spaces (e.g., classroom, playground, bathrooms)
- Other

Please specify:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Scholarships

The next section is about the impact of Race to the Top early learning scholarships on your program.

Q19
About how many children at your program received Race to the Top (RTT) early learning scholarships last year (2014-15)?

- I don’t know what these scholarships are (Skip to next section)
- None (Skip to next section)
- 1 or 2 children
- 3-5 children
- 6-10 children
- More than 10 children
- I don’t know how many have scholarships
Scholarships

Q20

For children already attending your program, did receiving RTT scholarships allow you to do any of the following to supplement services?

Increase the length of day
Increase the number of days per week
Provide more continuous care (e.g., supplementing irregular funding so that a child can have more reliable care)
Provide summer programming
Provide extended day, weekend, or after hour care
Provide developmental or health screenings
Provide parent support or education services (e.g., parent classes, referral services)

☐ Yes
☐ No

Q20=1
Q20_b

Please indicate which: (Choose all that apply.)

☐ Increase the length of day
☐ Increase the number of days per week
☐ Provide more continuous care (e.g., supplementing irregular funding so that a child can have more reliable care)
☐ Provide summer programming
☐ Provide extended day, weekend, or after hour care
☐ Provide developmental or health screenings
☐ Provide parent support or education services (e.g., parent classes, referral services)
Scholarships

Q21
In the past year, how many additional preschool/child care slots have the RTT scholarships allowed you to open? Just give us your best estimate. (Enter a whole number, enter "0" if none.)

Q22
Did receiving RTT scholarships allow you to do any of the following?

- Improve quality of materials used
- Improve or increase the physical space
- Provide professional development for teachers, aides, or other staff
  - Yes
  - No

Q22=1
Q22_b

Please indicate which: (Choose all that apply.)

- Improve quality of materials used
- Improve or increase the physical space
- Provide professional development for teachers, aides, or other staff
Scholarships

Q23
Did receiving RTT scholarships allow you to serve more families of diverse ethnicities?

- No
- Yes

Q23=2
Q23_b

I serve more children who are: (Choose all that apply.)

- African
- African-American, not of Hispanic origin
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Latino/Hispanic
- White, not of Hispanic origin
- Multi-racial
- Other

Q23_b=8
Q23_TXT

Please specify:
Scholarships

Q24_b
Did receiving RTT scholarships allow you to serve more non-English speaking families?

- No
- Yes

Q24=2
Q24_b

I serve more children who speak: *(Choose all that apply.)*

- Hmong
- Karen
- Somali
- Spanish
- One or more American Indian languages
- Other

Q24_b=6
Q24_TXT

*Please specify:*

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
**Scholarships**

Did receiving RTT scholarships allow you to serve more children who…  *(Choose one for each row.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q25_a</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Have an IEP/IFSP, 504 plan, or diagnosed disability or special need?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q25_b</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Would otherwise be unable to pay?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q25_c</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. Have parents who are not working?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q25_d</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. Are from homeless families?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q25_e</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e. Other</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q25_e=1

Please specify:

_________________________________________________________
Scholarships

Q26
To what extent has receiving RTT scholarships benefitted your program and families?

- Greatly benefitted
- Somewhat benefitted
- Slightly benefitted
- Not at all benefitted

Q26=1 or Q26=2 or Q26=3

Q27
In what ways have the scholarships benefitted your program and families? (Choose all that apply.)

- Reduced conflict with families over payment
- Families have less stress over paying for care
- Increased provider knowledge about high quality early care and education
- Reduced paperwork burden on you
- Reduced paperwork burden on families
- Other

Q27=6

Q27_TXT

Please specify:

__________________________________________________________________________________
Tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the RTT scholarships. *(Choose one for each row.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q28.a</th>
<th>a. The application process was easy for my program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Agree] ![Agree] ![Disagree] ![Disagree] ![Don't Know]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q28.b</th>
<th>b. The application process was easy for parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Agree] ![Agree] ![Disagree] ![Disagree] ![Don't Know]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q28.c</th>
<th>c. The billing process is easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Agree] ![Agree] ![Disagree] ![Disagree] ![Don't Know]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q28.d</th>
<th>d. Payments are made in a timely manner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Agree] ![Agree] ![Disagree] ![Disagree] ![Don't Know]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q28.e</th>
<th>e. It was easy to get my questions answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Agree] ![Agree] ![Disagree] ![Disagree] ![Don't Know]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q29

Have you had any challenges with the RTT scholarship program?

- No
- Yes

Q29=2

Please describe:
Funding and Fees

The next questions are about program funding and fees.

Q30

Does your program receive cash revenue from any of the following sources? (Choose all that apply.)

- Child care subsidy (CCAP)
- Federal Head Start
- Fee-for-program/tuition
- Cash grants or cash donations from foundations, organizations like United Way, local resource and referral agencies, or local early childhood initiatives
- Fundraising and individual donations
- School district funds
- Other

Q30=7

Please specify:

________________________________________________________________________________________
Funding and Fees

What is the average cost of a slot at your program? Just your best estimate is fine.

Q31_a
Enter $ amount:

Q31_b
Per:
- Hour
- Day
- Week
- Month
- Year

Q31_b=2
Q32_a
About how many hours of care per day does that amount cover? (Enter a whole number.)

hours:________________

Q31_b=3 or Q31_b=4 or Q31_b=5
Q32_b
About how many hours of care per week does that amount cover? (Enter a whole number.)

hours:________________
You’re almost finished. The last questions are about you.

Q33
What is your name?

Q34
What is your title/position?

Q35
Including years spent as a family child care provider, assistant teacher, director, coordinator, or other professional position, how many years altogether have you worked in the early care and education field since you were 18 years old?

- One year or more
- Less than one year

Q35=1
Q35_y

**How many years?**
*(Enter a whole number.)*

Q35=2
Q35_m

**How many months?**
*(Enter a whole number.)*
Q36
What is the highest level of education you have attained?
- High school classes, but no diploma
- High school graduate or GED
- Some college courses but no degree
- Two year college degree (associates degree or CDA)
- Two year college degree in early childhood or related field
- Bachelor's degree
- Bachelor's degree in early childhood or a related field
- Graduate degree (Master's or above)
- Graduate degree in a child-related field

Do you have… (Choose one for each row.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q37_a</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Any early childhood certificates, licenses, or credentials?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q37_b</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. A director's or administrator's credential or a director's advanced training certificate?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal Info

Q38
What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

Q39
What year were you born?
- 1995
- 1994
- 1993
- 1992
- 1991
- 1990
- 1989
- 1988
- 1987
- 1986
- 1985
- 1984
- 1983
- 1982
- 1981
- 1980
- 1979
- 1978
- 1977
- 1976
- 1975
- 1974
- 1973
- 1972
- 1971
- 1970
- 1969
- 1968
- 1967
- 1966
- 1965
Q40
How would you describe your racial or ethnic group? (Choose all that apply.)
- African
- African-American, not of Hispanic origin
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Latino/Hispanic
- White, not of Hispanic origin
- Other/multi-racial
Thank you for your consideration.
Click "Submit" to close your survey and receive no more messages.

This concludes the survey.

Card
What type of $20 gift card would you like?

- Target
- Walmart
- None, thank you

Card=1 or Card=2
Please provide a mailing address where you would like to receive your gift card. (Cards will be mailed in the fall.)

Street_1
School or program (if applicable):

______________________________

Street_2
Street address or PO Box:

______________________________

City
City

______________________________

State
State

- AK
- AS
- AZ
- AR
- CA
Thank you for your participation!

Click "Submit" to save your responses and close your survey
# Scholarship Application Variables for Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Proposed item for RTT evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL PARTICIPANTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Birth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHILD</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability/special needs</td>
<td>Child has a disability or is diagnosed as having a special need: □ Yes □ No Specify: ______________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary language</td>
<td>1st Language: □ English □ Other____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Language □ English □ Other____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Check all that apply for child: □ White □ Black □ Asian □ American Indian/Alaskan □ Hispanic □ Hawaiian/Pac. Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email (if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to child(ren)</td>
<td>□ Parent □ Other Relative Guardian □ Foster Parent □ Other Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Parent has a disability, special needs, or mental health problem(s). □ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Proposed item for RTT evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>Primary caregiver highest level of education:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Less than high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- High school diploma or GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Some college/vocational certification/associates degree</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Master’s degree or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status/hrs worked</td>
<td>How many hours does the child’s primary caregiver work for pay each week, on average?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of hours: __________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>Is this family experiencing homelessness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen parent</td>
<td>Mother was a teen parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size</td>
<td>- Total number of people in household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Number of parents/legal guardians, including yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Number of children under age 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in other services</td>
<td>□ Yes, MFIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Yes, CCAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Yes, State scholarship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other: __________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family type/support level</td>
<td>□ Single Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Single Parent with live-in support (partner, grandmother, aunt etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Two Parent Household</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Relative only (grandma, aunt, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Foster parent(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Other, specify: __________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tribal enrollment</td>
<td>Enrolled Tribal Member or Descendent of White Earth Reservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Proposed item for RTT evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant status</td>
<td>Are you from an immigrant or refugee group? We only care about how you identify yourself. We are not interested in the legal or documented status of your immigration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>