



Early Learning Initiative Program Report

State Fiscal Year 2008
July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008

Progress at a Glance—By the Numbers

The Children:

- On average, 12,588 children were enrolled monthly, an increase of 23 percent from state fiscal year (SFY) 2007; approximately 25 percent of children in ELI were in the program for at least 10 months;
- The highest enrollment of children in ELI, 14,290, May 2008; the lowest enrollment of children was 10,121, July 2007;
- 6,428 children had pre-and post measures for *Get It, Got It, Go*, an increase of 10 percent of children with a pre-post measure from SFY07;
- 277 children enrolled in ELI are English Language Learners;
- 18,603 is the number of children who received health and/or developmental screening within the first 60 days of enrollment.

The Programs:

- ELI services were provided through 99 Contracted Agencies and 802 classrooms;
- 56 percent of classrooms participated in Step Up To Quality;
- 67 percent or 900 teachers had an associate degree or higher as of June 30, 2008;
- Contracted agencies experienced a 27 percent rate or 516 teacher turnover.

Program Support:

- 1,232 teachers in ELI programs participated in ODE-approved seminars;
- 52 teacher-leaders participated in a project aimed at building the capacity of teachers to deliver high quality language and early literacy experiences;
- 16 Early Language and Literacy Specialists provided professional development and technical assistance;
- 154 teachers and/or administrators attended a year-long course on language and literacy development;
- 389 ELI educators participated in seminars about the Early Learning Content Standards;
- 550 ELI educators attended PreK-K SIRI seminars;
- 468 professional development courses (12 hours each) were delivered in 16 regions of the state by 90 faculty members at 30 higher education institutions;
- Each Contracted Agency leadership and/or administrative team received an average of 72 contact hours of program support.

Accountability:

- ODE conducted 99 onsite program monitoring visits to determine program compliance;
- 54 ELI contracted agencies had no findings in any program area relative to ODE compliance measures;
- 180 Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observations were conducted in Spring 2008 to determine quality of the literacy environment;
- ODJFS conducted 99 fiscal monitoring visits;
- 93 of the ELI Contracted Agencies submitted fiscal corrective action plans per ODJFS requirement.



Executive Summary

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) was launched in state fiscal year 2006 to provide full-day, year-round high-quality child care and education services to low-income working families. ELI is a partnership between the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and the Department of Education (ODE). During this past fiscal year, 99 contracted agencies provided education and comprehensive services through 802 classrooms. Early Learning Initiative providers represent the mixed market of early care and education with services provided through federal Head Start programs (50 percent), community-based licensed child care (38 percent), school districts and Education Service Centers (12 percent).

The target number of 12,000 children to be served through ELI was met in November 2007, with enrollment increasing steadily through the close of the fiscal year. Child progress data indicates that of the total number of children enrolled, 6428 children received services for at least nine months of the year.

Data collected by ODE indicates that programs are working hard to meet child health and developmental screening requirements. Observations of a stratified sample of teachers across all ELI classrooms indicate that teachers are improving their understanding and implementation of evidence-based practices considered essential for cognitive and linguistic development.

The ODE and ODJFS state leadership team includes regional support of Early Language and Literacy Specialists and State Support Team early childhood personnel. Together they work as partners with their ELI agencies, an important strategy for continuous improvement.

Introduction

In SFY06, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) replaced state-funded Head Start/Head Start Plus. ELI was created to provide low-income working families with full-day, full-year care and provide quality early education experiences to address school readiness goals. ELI is a partnership between the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). Ohio's ELI programs are funded through federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) with programs reimbursed for services based on the hours of child attendance. ELI contracted agencies were selected through a competitive application process.

ODJFS is responsible for all aspects of the state contract and reimbursement for services. ODJFS work includes the monitoring of all contracts and invoices, fiscal monitoring of all programs, development, support and maintenance of the automated Web-based time and attendance tool (KinderAttend), the automated child and family eligibility system, financial technical assistance, Help Desk support and all data inquiries related to allocation, family authorization and utilization of services. The county departments of Job and Family Services determine family eligibility for ELI services and serve as points of contact and resources for eligible families.

ODE is responsible for working with ELI contracted agency leadership to assure that children are receiving the services as outlined in *Ohio's Early Learning Program Guidelines*. ODE consultants monitor teacher credentials, child progress data with regard to language and early literacy development, and health and developmental screenings. In addition, they work with programs to assure compliance and continuous improvement to meet the outcomes and goals as outlined in *Ohio's Early Learning Program Guidelines*.

ELI is beneficial especially to the area in which we are located. Our staff has been challenged to go back to school and get degrees. It has challenged us to care more about our position and it has challenged us to focus on the importance of a child and his/her growth. It betters the teacher so the teacher betters the child.

Because of required screening, a child received glasses. And as he put it, "My eyes work...I saw a bug."

This year ELI will be counted as a state pre-kindergarten program as it now meets the elements defined by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). To be considered as a state preschool, the following criteria must be met:

- The initiative is funded, controlled and directed by the state;
- The initiative serves children ages 3 and 4;
- Early childhood education is the primary focus;
- The program offers group learning at least two days per week;
- The program is distinct from the state's subsidized system for child care;
- The program is not primarily designed to serve children with disabilities.

(The State of Preschool 2007, National Institute for Early Education Research)

The ELI Education Program

ODE requires each ELI Contracted Agency to have a written plan to address the outcomes and goals of *Ohio's Early Learning Program Guidelines*. The program guidelines were developed after an exhaustive review of the early childhood literature, research and program evaluation studies. Leaders from Head Start, child care and public preschool reviewed the seven outcomes and 18 goals to assess the value and importance of these outcomes and goals in helping children reach their potential.

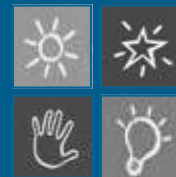
The program guidelines are organized into four broad themes that address: 1) the healthy development of children; 2) the education conditions necessary to help children be ready for school; 3) the elements of support to help teachers and families meet with success and; 4) the basic requirements for a successful operation of an organization. The ELI program results are organized and reported using the four themes of *Ohio's Early Learning Program Guidelines*.



Section I: All Children Are Born Ready To Learn highlights the importance of children's healthy development. The prevention and early identification of chronic health conditions and risks associated with behavioral health are essential to children's overall development and learning abilities.

"Early intervention has been shown to be particularly effective at improving outcomes for children who are at increased risk for developmental delays, or later academic underachievement, based on socioeconomic, medical, or other risk factors" (Sices, "Developmental Screening in Primary Care: The Effectiveness of Current Practice and Recommendations for Improvement," Dec. 2007). Chronic health conditions impact children's development and learning. Children who are in poor health often experience more stress, fatigue and pain that can "interfere with cognitive development" (Currie, J, 2005).

The *Early Learning Program Guidelines* require programs to assess children's health and development within 60 days of entrance into the program and when required, provide health and/or development referrals within 90 days of identification of need in full consultation with the child's family. The health and developmental screening results are reviewed at the data verification visit.



Health and Developmental Screening Results:

Health and developmental screening data were collected in May 2008 via survey data from the contracted agency. There was a 98 percent rate of return. The data and percentages cited below are based on 18,603* children who were served at some point by ELI agencies and classrooms.

Health screening results:

The following are the numbers of children who had a health screening within the required 60-day time frame:

- Height: 13,747 (74 percent of children served)
- Weight: 13,747 (74 percent of children served)
- Vision: 13,460 (69 percent of children served)
- Hearing: 12,925 (69 percent of children served)
- Dental: 10,199 (55 percent of children served)
- Lead: 9,125 (49 percent of children served)
- Hematocrit: 8,678 (47 percent of children served)

Between 9 and 18 percent of the total number of children screened were referred for additional health testing and/or services as a result of health screening results.

Developmental screening results:

Developmental screenings provide baseline information about children's speech and language, cognitive, gross and fine motor and social-emotional skills. The numbers of children who were administered a developmental screenings within the 60 day time frame are:

- Speech/language: 13,545 (73 percent of children served)
- Cognitive development: 13,796 (74 percent of children served)
- Gross/fine motor skills: 13,772 (74 percent of children served)
- Social/emotional/behavior: 12,932 (70 percent of children served)

Between 4 and 7 percent of the total number of children who received developmental screenings were referred for additional testing and/or services. This has served as a *catalyst* for programs to develop closer ties to community-based health services. ODE data indicate that the total number of children receiving health and developmental screenings within the 60-day timeframe has increased. Only dental screenings and services continue to be problematic for some programs in meeting the required timelines.

Survey responses indicated that the following were the most common strategies ELI contracted agencies used to facilitate completion of screenings:

- Partnering with a health care provider, university or Educational Service Center (36 percent);
- Providing screenings on site (32 percent);
- Training staff or a school nurse to administer one or more of the screenings (26 percent);
- Tracking screenings and engaging in follow-up processes (24 percent);
- Using a mobile health care provider (12 percent).

The most common health and/or developmental screening areas that contracted agencies would like to see improved include:

- Increased availability of dental services (27 percent);
- Assistance with lead and hematocrit (26 percent) screenings;
- Increased cooperation of health care providers to better meet the needs of programs (24 percent);
- Assistance in the referral and tracking process (24 percent);
- Extension in the time required for screenings (24 percent).
- (The total number of children reported for health and developmental screenings are self-reported by the contracted agencies and therefore may differ from ODJFS utilization data.)

I wish that all children could have the ELI experience—regardless of income level.

Reimbursements are timely—DJFS has done an excellent job in getting this process in order.

Bottom line—our program has undergone a tremendous amount of growth through our involvement in ELI.



Section II: Environments Matter provides the guidance and information required for programs to help children be ready for school. Early learning content standards, an evidence-based curriculum, and the use of formal and informal assessments serve as the framework for offering children key learning opportunities.

While all content areas (English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science) are of equal importance as are all domains of development (social, emotional, motor, aesthetic), a primary focus for ELI classrooms has been language and early literacy development. Children’s expressive and receptive language skills are of central importance to and “highly predictive of school success” (National Center for Children in Poverty, September 2006; How to Support School Readiness & Success of Children, Families, & Schools, September, 2007).

Children most often identified as at-risk for academic failure in the early grades are challenged because of limited vocabulary and general knowledge content. Both the quantity of words known by children and the richness of their vocabulary is important for reading achievement. “The quantity and richness of language in the home environment is related to myriad factors, such as parental education, parental mental health, and fluency levels of the parents in the languages spoken at home. (The) research suggests that many—if not all—parents and caregivers will benefit from greater access to information about how to cultivate healthy language development in their children—and why language is critical to success in school and life” (How to Support School Readiness & Success of Children, Families, & Schools, September, 2007).

“Children’s day care and preschool environments can have positive effects on children’s emergent literacy” (Whitehurst, G and Lonigan, C. Child Development and Emergent Literacy, 1998). Dimensions of teacher behavior and characteristics of the preschool settings are associated with higher level of children’s vocabulary. Two primary measures are used to determine program effectiveness for school readiness: the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) tool and *Get It, Got It, Go* (GGG). ELLCO is a rating tool of 14 elements considered as essential conditions and practices for the development of language and early reading skills. Each element is rated on a five-point scale by two trained independent observers. Information from ELLCO provides teachers with information about their practices that in turn can be used to determine professional development needs, use of resources and need for outside coaching support.



Get It, Got It, Go (GGG) is a 15-minute screening administered by teachers as a progress measure of three key pre-reading skills considered essential for reading. GGG data are reported two times per year, in the fall and spring. The data reported are only for children who have pre and post measures, indicating that they have been in attendance for at least nine months.

ELI continues to gently push us in the direction of making our program better for children each year.



Program Results (ELLCO):

In late winter and spring of 2008, 180 observations of teachers within ELI classrooms (a 14 percent sample of all ELI teachers) were conducted by two individuals trained in the administration of the classroom/teacher observation tool. A score of three is considered average and does not meet the desired quality needed, particularly by children with limited language experiences. The goal for teachers is to achieve at least a score of four. Learning Point Associates of Naperville, Illinois, won a competitive bid contract to administer the ELLCO observation schedule, protocols for teacher observations and interviews, and the training of evaluators. Although Learning Points is conducting ELLCO observations within early childhood classrooms and a sample of kindergarten through grade 5 classrooms, the data reported here are from ELI classrooms.

Observations of ELI teachers indicate that the *average rating* of all elements combined for the Classroom Observation Total score was 3.26 for spring 2008, an increase of .39 points from spring 2007. The spring 2008 data indicate improvement from spring 2007 in all 14 elements of the observation instrument. Forty percent (40 percent) of teachers observed received a rating of 3 on the Classroom Observation total score, a score considered basic for literacy education. Twenty-four (24 percent) percent of teachers received a score of 4 or higher and 36 percent received a score below basic, a rating of 3.

ELLCO results indicate that teachers have a basic understanding of classroom organization, management, classroom climate and general approaches to reading as evidenced by scores of 3.39 and higher. ELLCO elements that are most difficult for teachers to implement fall into the category of language and literacy instruction and integration of curriculum. Teacher observations using the ELLCO instrument indicate limited to basic understanding and use of best practices related to working with children of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the presence and use of technology and facilitating home support for literacy.

Child Results (GGG):

Get It, Got It, Go is the statewide early literacy assessment for all ODE-administered early childhood education programs. GGG measures three essential reading foundation skills: vocabulary, rhyming and alliteration. All lead teachers are required to attend a training session on the administration and scoring of this screening.

In addition, this past year, all ELI programs identified an assessment coordinator whose role is to assure accuracy of administration and reporting of results. Assessment coordinators have the responsibility of observing each teacher administering the GGG screening, offering support to teachers in understanding the screening protocol and if needed, requiring teachers to obtain additional training if they do not meet the requirements of the administration protocol.

The GGG screening includes three subtests: Picture Naming, Rhyming and Alliteration. Pre- and post-measures of GGG were available for 6,428 children or 56 percent of all ELI children.

The results of GGG pre-post administration indicate that children served in ELI classrooms experienced statistically significant growth from fall to spring. While there are no national norms for GGG, a comparison can be made to average scores of a similar sample population of children (four-year-old children in poverty) established by the developers of GGG. The average score of four-year-old children in ELI classrooms tends to be higher than those of the demographically similar sample population.

Kudos to the state for helping all the families with financial help getting their children ready for school.



Section III: Relationships Are Influential reflects that mutual respect and support are the basic requirements of any successful organization. This section lists indicators of a learning organization that build on and support the strengths of everyone. Helping teachers become successful at their profession by providing time and support for obtaining degrees, advancing degrees, participating in professional development opportunities and using coaching services are indicators of supportive teaching practices.

Teacher Credentials:

Knowledgeable, skilled and thoughtful teachers are critical in helping young children reach their potential. *Eager to Learn*, a National Research Council publication, and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) advocate for a four-year degreed teacher who has had *specialized training* in early education (i.e., developmental psychology, early childhood special education, linguistics, pedagogy, academic content). While the research on the association between degree (associate's, bachelor's or higher) and child outcomes is not conclusive, the evidence suggests that essential features of quality early education settings are teachers who:

- Have early childhood specialized knowledge;
- Can demonstrate the skills associated with pedagogy appropriate to young learners;
- Design and implement intentional teaching methods to meet the needs of young children.

Current policy for ELI requires that 50 percent of the teachers operating within each contracted agency must have at least an AA degree. Teacher credential data as of July 2008 indicates that of all teachers working with ELI programs:

- 67 percent (900 teachers) possess an associate's degree or higher in Early Childhood Education as of June 30th data;
- For ELI contracted agencies that began in SFY06: 68 percent (808 teachers) possess the minimum of an associate's degree or higher;
- For ELI contracted agencies that began in SFY07: 55 percent (92 teachers) possess an associate's degree or higher in early childhood education;
- ELI programs reported a 27 percent teacher turnover rate or a total of 516 teachers leaving ELI teaching positions at some point during SFY08.

Professional Development:

All teachers not enrolled in college working toward a degree are required to take 20 hours of professional development per biennium. All professional development seminars sponsored by ODE were developed initially as a result of ELLCO and GGG data collected in the pilot phase of administration. ODE has worked with faculty identified experts in each of four academic content areas (language and literacy, mathematics, social studies and science) to develop seminars that may be taken for course credit and/or meet the 20 hours per biennium required professional development. ODE, in collaboration with faculty and ECE Q-Net (a service provider for state funded professional development), reviews program quality and child data to determine the impact of professional development efforts.



All seminars are offered free of charge and college credit is made available wherever possible. All seminars are taught by higher education faculty and/or content experts upon peer review of qualifications. In fiscal year 2008, there were 468 seminars offered in 16 regions of the state. Many sessions were offered in the evening and/or Saturday mornings to accommodate the teachers' work week schedules. The data provided below indicates the number of individuals who identified themselves as participating in professional development as ELI teachers but who also participate in Step Up to Quality programs.

Language and Literacy Seminars:

Participation in the year-long language and literacy seminar: 225 teachers of 470 total participants

Participation in Pre K-K SIRI courses: 370 teachers of 843 total participants

Ohio Early Learning Content Standards (mathematics, social studies and science):

Participation in content seminars: 389 teacher of 2178 total participants

Teacher Leader Project:

A teacher-leader project was initiated two years ago to help ELI programs develop their capacity to provide professional development opportunities within their own programs and to coach teachers in evidence-based practices that lead to academic and social success. Teachers who have access to mentors who provide feedback on teacher performance and use of child progress data to determine teaching strategies have a positive impact on student performance (Education Week, October 2007).

This initiative is completely voluntary. Early childhood education programs can decide to participate but in order to be considered for the project, teachers are required to complete the preschool core curriculum, secure the support and release time from their administrators, attend quarterly meetings, work with an Early Language and Literacy Specialist (ELLS) and build a coaching portfolio by working directly with the classroom teachers.

The coaching/mentoring model is build on the appreciative inquiry model of self reflection, active listening without judgment, and learning by demonstration and modeling. Teachers and ELLS have developed a model that can be implemented in early childhood centers, built from theory, research and practical wisdom.

The focus for the coaching comes directly from teachers' work inside their classrooms. The model is an attempt to improve "implementation practices that help teachers move away from generic practices to those that have an evidence base and are linked to improved student outcomes." This past year, 52 (of 86) teacher-leaders met quarterly to learn the art of coaching. These teacher-leaders in turn worked with 156 classroom teachers to help them hone their teaching skills, primarily in language and early reading development.

Ohio Resource Center:

The Ohio Resource Center (ORC) provides early childhood teachers, child care providers and parents with up-to-date information about research, evidence based practices and resources for Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards. The center is an online service with 715 educational resources that align to and complement Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards. Teachers may create their own portfolio to keep a record of lesson plans and research articles they find most beneficial. ORC data indicate that the early childhood Website is visited an average of 4009 times each month.



Section IV: Communication is Critical refers to the importance of program leaders providing families, teachers and their communities with information about program operation, policies, procedures and *results*. The following data highlight the ways in which ODE staff worked with ELI contracted agencies to help them be successful.

Continuous Improvement:

A total of 14 ODE consultants provided technical assistance to help programs meet compliance and performance goals. Technical assistance was offered through local leadership meetings, quarterly meetings with other contracted agency personnel or early childhood providers, specialized professional development offerings such as curriculum alignment and review of the contracted agency continuous improvement strategies and corrective action plans when necessary. Each consultant met with his or her ELI leadership an average of 23 meetings over the course of the year. In addition, staff visited a total of 242 ELI classrooms to meet with teachers providing ELI services.

Data Verification:

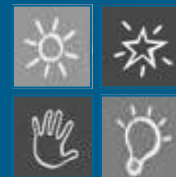
In SFY08, five individuals were contracted to review and verify data and documentation (i.e., teacher credentials; health and developmental screenings; GGG data; child and teacher portfolios). In addition, monitoring visits were made to 200 classrooms. The results of these visits and consultant reports indicate that of the total number of contracted agencies (99), 54 had no findings in any program area (up from 31 contracted agencies with no findings from SFY07). Of the 54 agencies with no findings, 25 contracted agencies achieved this goal for two successive years. Forty-five contracted agencies were required to submit corrective action plans in one or more of 18 program areas.

Program areas with the highest number of need for *corrective action*:

- Development of a more effective internal monitoring process of classrooms;
- Lack of demonstration of progress toward required hours of professional development;
- Not meeting required timelines for conducting developmental and/or GGG screenings;
- Incomplete records of curriculum-based assessments;
- Lack of evidence of reporting child progress to all families;
- Lack of new teacher orientation to ELI requirements;
- Lack of individual teacher professional development plan;
- Lack of regular classroom observation and/or monitoring;
- Inadequate training in the agency adopted curriculum for all teachers;
- Limited demonstration by teachers of modifying teaching plans to meet the needs of individual children;
- Inability by the classroom teacher to demonstrate curriculum alignment.

Additional Support:

All ELI programs benefit from a state leadership team which includes the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness consultant, the State Support Team early childhood personnel and the regional Early Language and Literacy Specialist. Using the State Support Team regional delivery model, ELI programs benefit from the consultation provided by the leadership team members through quarterly regional leadership meetings, direct technical assistance to programs when requested, coordinated onsite visits, assistance to local community colleges in understanding ELI, and work with ELI classrooms through study group support. In addition, the SST personnel provided a total of 76 trainings in the administration and use of the *Get It, Got It, Go* screening.



Children and Families:

When the ELI program began in July 2005, families who desired services were required to be eligible under Title IV-A of the federal Social Security Act with family income not greater than 185 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). At this level, for example, a family of three could make an income of approximately \$29,000 per year. The child’s caretaker or caretakers had to be employed or meeting the requirements of an Ohio Works First (OWF) self-sufficiency plan. The child could also be a recipient of OWF child-only cash assistance. In addition, a co-payment was assigned to families above 165 percent FPL. Subsequent policy changes were made in order to improve the continuity of a child’s early education experience and to increase the number of eligible children.

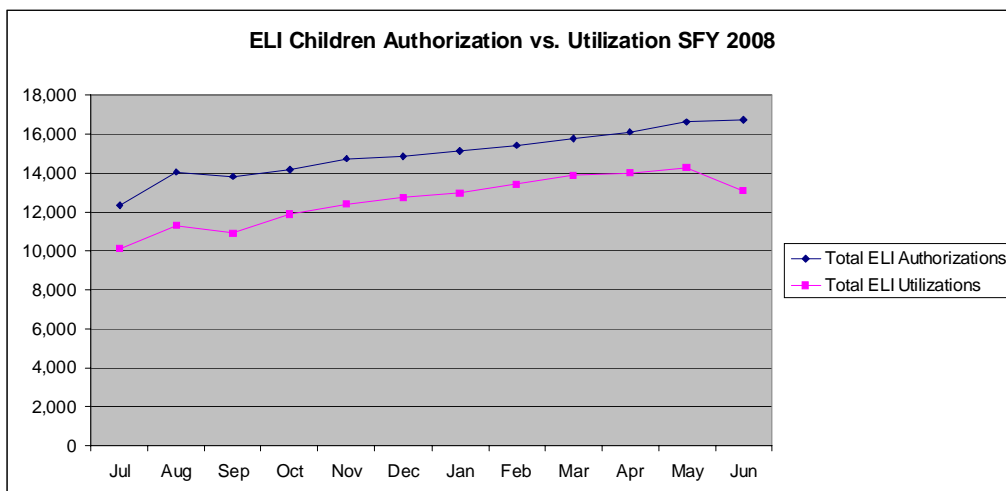
In SFY08, Governor Strickland enacted two major policy changes to further support utilization of this program by Ohio’s most vulnerable families:

- Families who meet income eligibility standards are no longer required to demonstrate work status;
- Once a child is enrolled for ELI services, the child has continuous eligibility for ELI for up to 12 months.

For SFY 09, the income requirement for ELI eligibility will increase to 200 percent of the federal poverty level assuring that an additional number of low-income families will be eligible for the program.

Authorization and Utilization

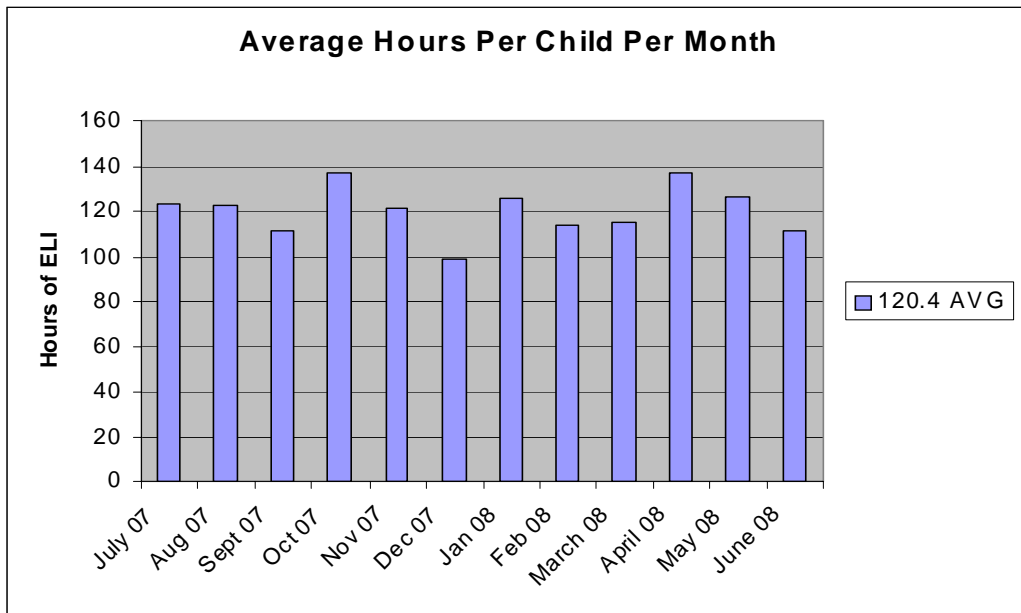
The goal of ELI to provide full-day, full-year services to 12,000 children was met in SFY08. The average monthly utilization for SFY08 was 12,588 (92 percent of authorized children). Utilization rates increased over the course of SFY08 from a low of 10,121 (July) to a high of 14,290 (May).



Average Hours of ELI Services Per Child Per Month

Children received ELI services for an average of 120 hours per month or 30 hours per week. This is essentially no change from SFY07. The lowest monthly average was 98 hours in December and the highest was 137 hours in October.

More children are receiving a preschool experience today because of the ELI program.



Reimbursement for services fall into the following funding categories:

- Full-time rate: 100 hours or more per month
- Part-time rate: 55-99.5 hours per month
- Hourly rate: 1-54.5 hours per month

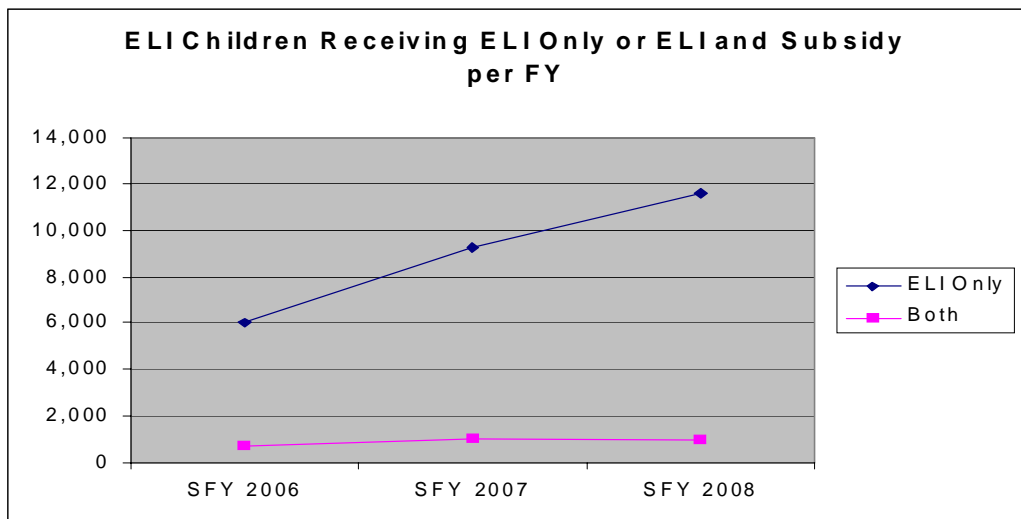
ODJFS is responsible for all aspects of the contract and reimbursement for services. ODJFS work includes the monitoring of all contracts and invoices, fiscal monitoring of all programs, development, support and maintenance of the automated Web-based time and attendance tool (KinderAttend), the automated child and family eligibility system, financial technical assistance, Help Desk support and all data inquiries related to allocation, authorization and utilization including the development of Ad Hoc reports.

Reimbursement for ELI Services

Reimbursement for services is as follows:

- \$98,831,484 in ELI attendance dollars.
- 77 of the contracted agencies used 70 percent or more of their allocated attendance dollars.

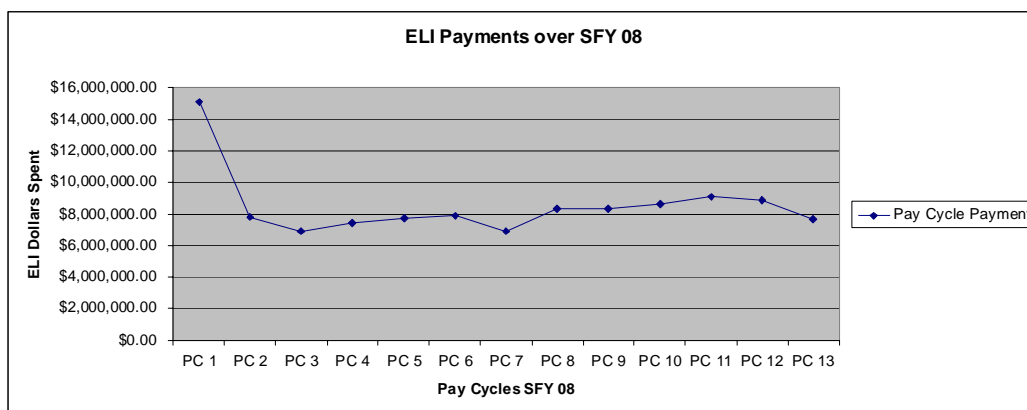
In addition, the contracted agencies received \$11,982,000 in enrollment awards.





Contract/Fiscal Monitoring

During SFY08, ODJFS ELI contract consultants conducted monitoring of all ELI contracted agencies. The monitoring assessed compliance with Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) rules, policies, regulations and the terms and conditions of the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) contract. Monitoring activities consisted of onsite desk reviews of expenditures, attendance records, provider payments, co-payment collections and Step Up To Quality requirements. The monitoring results revealed some opportunities for improvement specifically related to the accuracy and maintenance of attendance records and the recording of co-payments. ODJFS ELI contract consultants provided technical assistance and sought corrective action plans from 93 contracted agencies as warranted.



Conclusions

The school readiness gap before kindergarten is for many children a language and literacy gap. To have all children become school ready, an ambitious education agenda with three strategies is essential:

- 1) Assure that children’s health and developmental needs are met (Sices, “Developmental Screening in Primary Care: The Effectiveness of Current Practice and Recommendations for Improvement,” Dec. 2007);
- 2) Assure that children are receiving instruction by teachers who are knowledgeable of early learning content and competent in skill delivery using evidence-based teaching strategies (*Policy Matters*, Dec. 2004); and
- 3) Attend to the development of language skills as children’s ability to communicate and develop their growing awareness of print helps “overcome the effects of social risk on academic achievement” (*Early Developments*, Fall 2007).

The utilization data indicate that the original goal of the Early Learning Initiative is being met: *children of low income families seeking preschool and child care services are utilizing ELI.*

- ELI has provided increased opportunities for access to full-day, full-year education and care programs (Lucas County);
- With the change in the work requirement, parents who have lost their jobs and who are in higher education or technical programs now can “afford” preschool services (Defiance County);
- Parents are beginning to realize the benefits of ELI services: health and developmental screenings and “preschool” experiences (Cuyahoga County; Montgomery County)
- ELI has helped us raise the quality of care for children throughout our region.
- A huge benefit has been the quality of education given to the children because of the stipulation for teachers and the CORE classes.

*CDJFS—I’ve noticed
parents have been
more stable with the
child in a stable place.*

ELI is now being viewed as a preschool program and an important early care and education option for families. Equally important, it is being viewed as an opportunity for the community—another avenue to provide services that otherwise might not have been available.

The ELI program requirements, program monitoring, fiscal and program accountability are important features that are contributing to the success of ELI. In addition, the elimination of the work requirement for parents contributed to the increased number of children participating in ELI services for more than six months—an important factor for school readiness.

The staff of ODE and ODJFS extend a sincere thank you to all of the contracted agencies and the many sub-providers for their commitment to the work. It is because of your dedication that the children who participate in ELI will enter school healthier and more ready to succeed.

ELI Advisory Committee SFY 2008

Sherry Roush
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Carole Erdman
Carla Unkefer
Stephen Troendly
Kenneth Eberly
Tim Cahill
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Ohio Department of Education

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

