

# **Smart Start Kansas State Evaluation Five-Year Report**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Prepared for the  
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## Executive Summary

In 2001, The Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund awarded Smart Start Kansas grants to seven communities across the state.<sup>1</sup> These seven Cohort I grantees have implemented early childhood programs that address one or more of five Core Service Areas to improve school readiness among community children entering Kindergarten. This Executive Summary highlights select evaluation findings presented in the *Smart Start Kansas State Evaluation Five-Year Report* (2006). Although several important findings are available at this time, results related to school readiness are not expected until the Initiative's sixth year, i.e., 2006. The Initiative's "level of success" cannot be determined until analyses are conducted on the long-term outcomes related to school readiness.

Nevertheless, interim findings are presented related to community-level (intermediate) outcomes in Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care (Core Service Area 1), as well as annual programmatic impacts across four additional Core Service Areas (Availability and Affordability of Early Childhood Education and Care, Child Health, and Family Support). Primary (five-year) evaluation findings are summarized below.

***The seven Cohort I grantees served an average of 13,979 children aged 0-5 each year in their 19-county service area. As such, Smart Start Kansas programs reached approximately 11 percent of the targeted 125,250 children each year in these communities.*** As shown in Exhibit A, the percentage of targeted children served varies by grantee community and is not reflective of grant amount. Most often, the more rural grantee communities reached higher *percentages* of their target populations than the more urban grantee communities due, in part, to the large service populations of the urban grantees. In terms of *numbers*, however, Smart Start Wichita's programmatic efforts served more than twice as many children each year than any other grantee. Moreover, grantees who have a strong focus on programming related to Core Service Areas 4 and 5, Child Health and Family Support, tend to serve higher proportions of community children than those grantees whose programs are more concentrated in Core Service Area 1 (Quality).

Also, ***the average annual Smart Start cost-per-impacted-child (across all seven Cohort I grantees) is approximately \$209 per child per year*** (see Exhibit A). Among individual grantees, the cost-per-child ranges from approximately \$100 to approximately \$600 per child per year. For all but one grantee, the annual cost-per-child is less than approximately \$300 per child per year.

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<sup>1</sup>Ten additional communities were awarded Smart Start Kansas grants in 2005 (Cohort II grantees). Year-One evaluation results are presented for this group in the *Smart Start Kansas State Evaluation Five-Year Report* (2006), but the data and results included in this Executive Summary of the *Report* represent the first five years of program implementation for the seven Cohort I grantees.

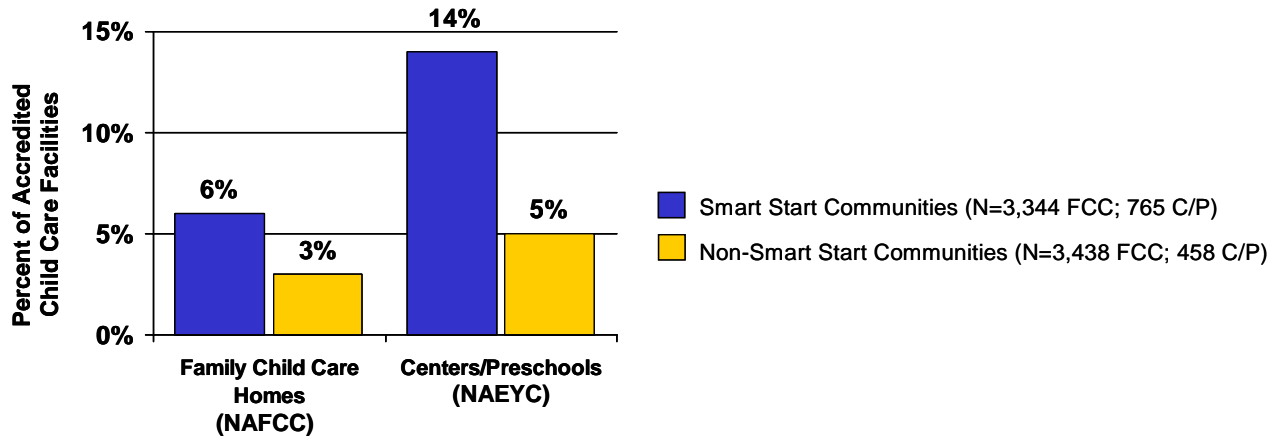
**Exhibit A**  
**NUMBER OF CHILDREN AGED 0-5 SERVED**  
**WITH ANNUAL COST PER CHILD**

Grantee	Average # Served Per Year	Percent Target Population Served	Average Dollar Award Per Grant Year	Approximate Annual Cost Per Impacted Child
Colby	1,838	66% (of 2,792)	\$282,785	\$154
Crawford County	1,537	54% (of 2,844)	\$462,731	\$301
Lawrence	1,247	19% (of 6,557)	\$231,947	\$186
Manhattan	1,543	37% (of 4,146)	\$255,045	\$165
Salina	1,698	39% (of 4,338)	\$470,844	\$277
Kansas City	1,136	2% (of 62,000)	\$687,584	\$605
Wichita	4,980	12% (of 42,573)	\$530,291	\$106
<b>Total (statewide)</b>	<b>13,979</b>	<b>11% (of 125,250)</b>	<b>\$2,921,227</b>	<b>\$209</b>

Statewide (2004) county-level data were available on certain measures of quality early childhood education and care and were analyzed with Smart Start Kansas State Evaluation data to render several community-level intermediate outcomes related to this Core Service Area. When data on certain indicators of quality were compared between “Smart Start Kansas communities” (i.e., those 19 counties that represent the Cohort I grantee service area) and “Non-Smart Start Kansas communities” (i.e., those 89 counties that had not yet received Smart Start grants as of 2004), some interesting differences emerged.

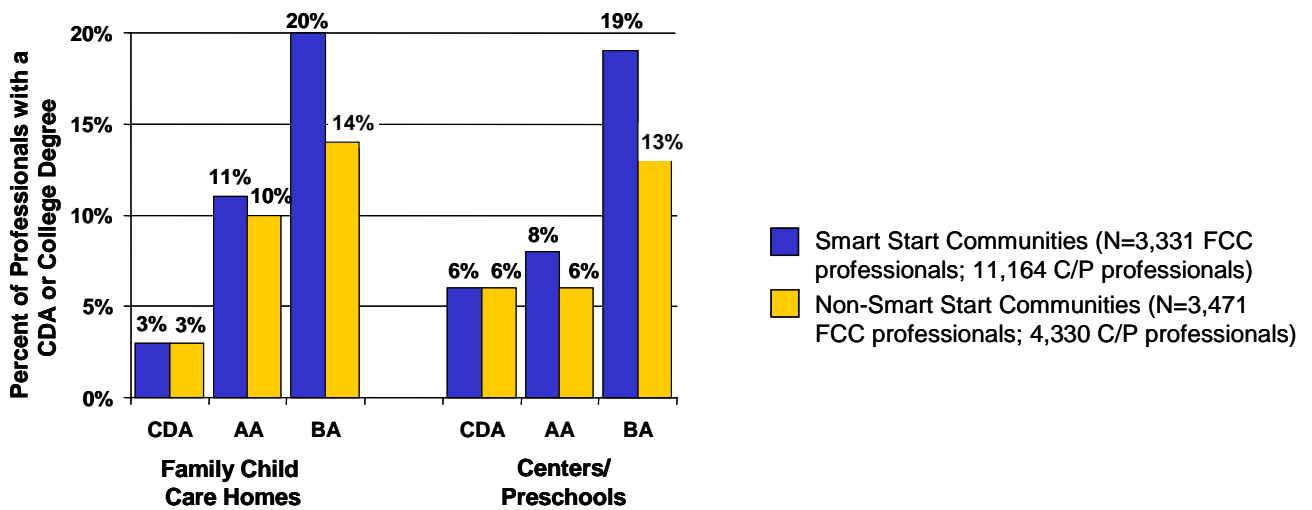
*In Smart Start communities, 14 percent of centers/preschools are accredited whereas only five percent of centers/preschools are accredited in Non-Smart Start communities. Also, in Smart Start communities, six percent more early childhood professionals hold a Bachelor’s degree (BA) or higher than in Non-Smart Start communities—both in family child care homes and in centers/preschools. Finally, the average annual salary of early childhood professionals is approximately 20 percent higher in Smart Start communities than in Non-Smart Start communities* (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). As detailed in *State Evaluation Five-Year Report*, some Smart Start programs are designed to address each of these quality issues (by providing assistance for: national accreditation of child care facilities; increasing education levels of early childhood professionals; and supplementing providers’ (low) salaries with incentive bonuses that reward higher levels of education and length of time in the field).

**FIGURE 1. NATIONALLY ACCREDITED CHILD CARE FACILITIES.**



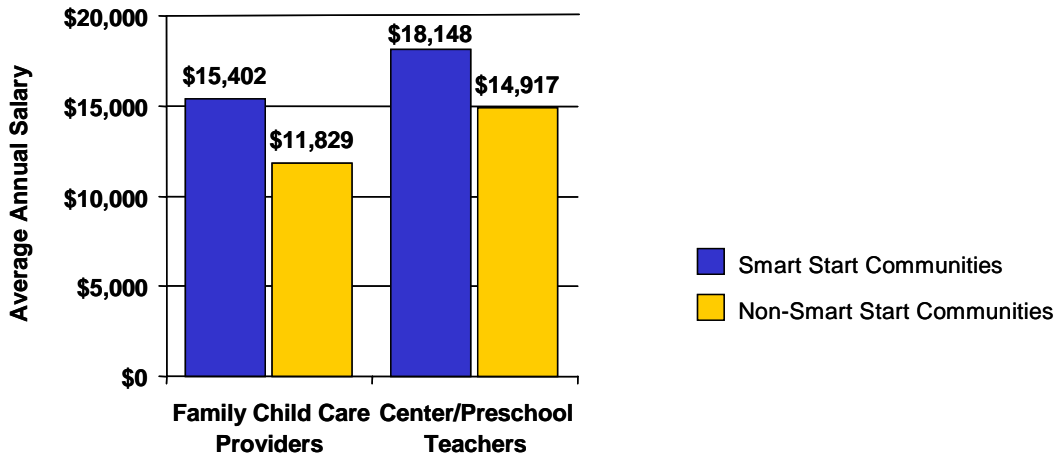
Data Sources: Smart Start Kansas 2004 State Evaluation Data and KACCRRRA 2004 Child Care Survey Data

**FIGURE 2. EDUCATION LEVELS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS.**



Data Sources: Smart Start Kansas 2004 State Evaluation Data and KACCRRRA 2004 Child Care Survey Data

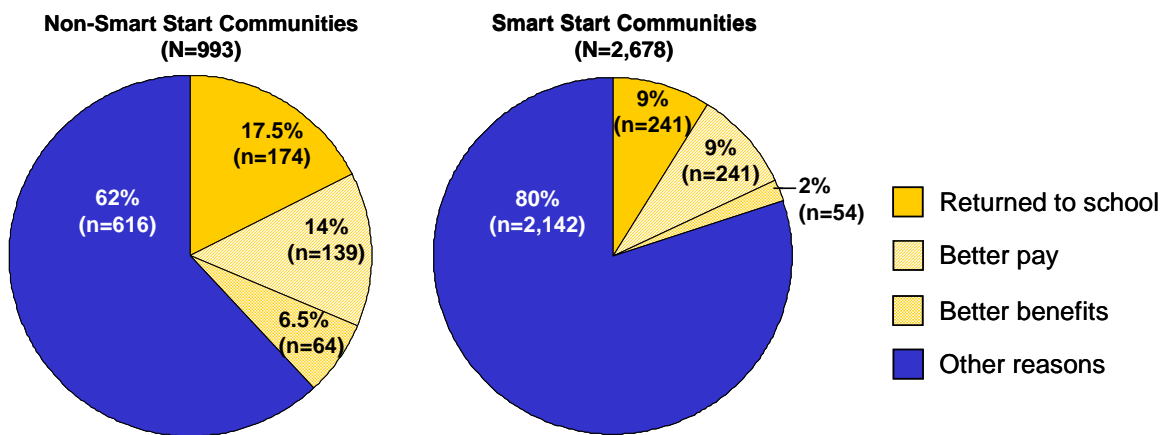
FIGURE 3. AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS.



Data Sources: Smart Start Kansas 2004 State Evaluation Data and KACCRRRA 2004 Child Care Survey Data

Another significant issue across the state related to quality early childhood education and care is employee turnover among qualified early childhood professionals. *In Non-Smart Start communities, the percentage of early childhood professionals who left employment in 2004 for reasons addressed by Smart Start programs (i.e., “better pay,” “returned to school,” “better benefits”) is nearly double that of the Smart Start communities* (see Figure 4).

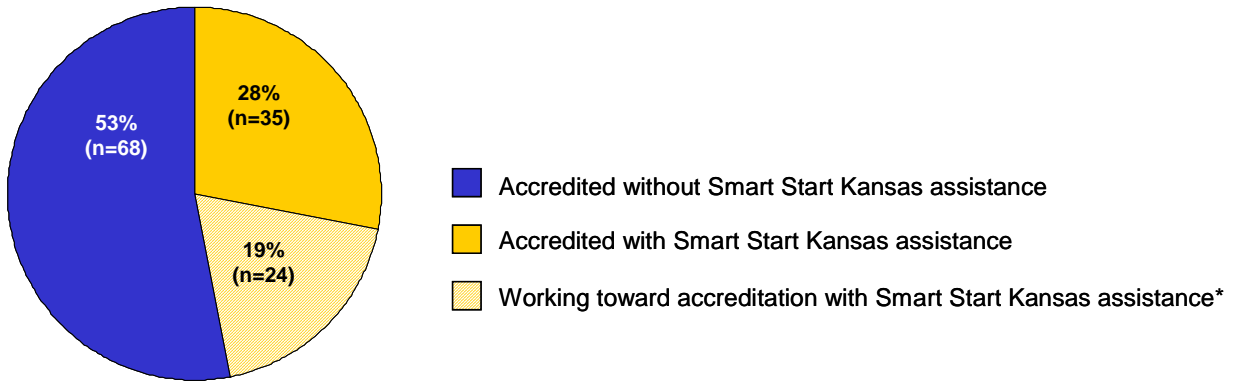
FIGURE 4. REASONS FOR EMPLOYEE TURNOVER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.



Data Sources: Smart Start Kansas 2004 State Evaluation Data and KACCRRRA 2004 Child Care Survey Data

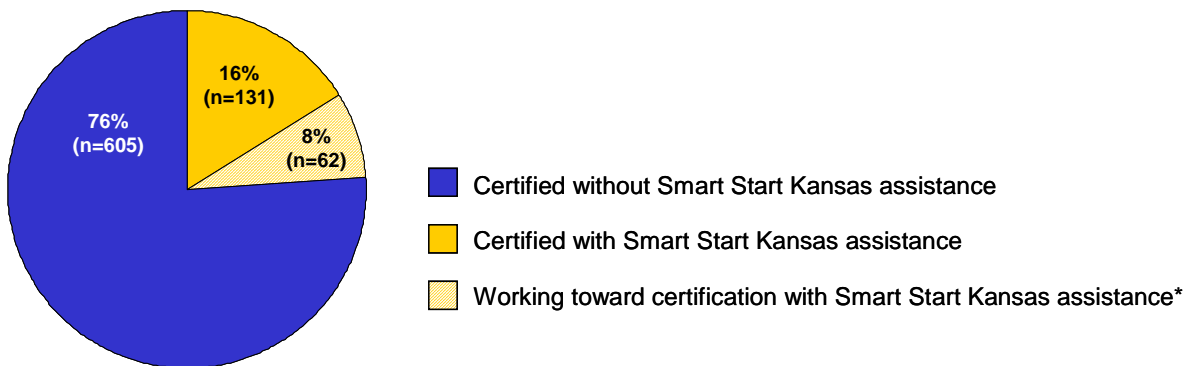
When data were examined for these same quality measures within the boundaries of the 19-county service area, Smart Start’s impact was clear. As shown in Figure 5, *more than one-quarter (28 percent) of the nationally accredited (or soon to be accredited) centers/preschools in the program service area received national accreditation assistance from Smart Start Kansas. In addition, among those early childhood professionals who hold (or will soon hold) a CDA, 16 percent of them received Smart Start assistance to obtain the certification* (see Figure 6).

**FIGURE 5. PERCENT OF NATIONALLY ACCREDITED (OR SOON TO BE ACCREDITED) CENTERS/PRESCHOOLS THAT RECEIVED SMART START KANSAS ASSISTANCE (N=127).**



\* Number of centers/preschools working toward accreditation without Smart Start Kansas assistance is unknown.  
Data Sources: Smart Start Kansas 2004 State Evaluation Data and KACCRRRA 2004 Child Care Survey Data

**FIGURE 6. PERCENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS WHO HOLD (OR WILL SOON HOLD) A CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE (CDA) CREDENTIAL (N=798).**



\* Number of early childhood professionals working toward certification without Smart Start Kansas assistance is unknown.  
Data Sources: Smart Start Kansas 2004 State Evaluation Data and KACCRRRA 2004 Child Care Survey Data

In the remaining four Core Service Areas, select programmatic accomplishments include:

- *Establishing new infant and toddler slots in the earlier grant years that remain available to community parents in 2005 (Availability);*
- *“Subsidizing” tuition costs for nearly 100 infants and toddlers (and their families) each year (Affordability);*
- *Serving over ten thousand children through varied programmatic efforts related to children’s health issues and services (Child Health);*
- *Providing hundreds of early childhood trainings each year for community parents of children aged 0-5 (Family Support); and*
- *Providing early identification of families’ needs, timely referrals, and effective service delivery for more than 350 families each year (Family Support).*

In addition to programmatic results, a key component of the Smart Start Kansas Initiative has been the emphasis on community involvement and inter-agency collaboration in early childhood planning and programming. *Since 2000, grantees have utilized the Smart Start Kansas framework to develop/strengthen (early childhood) partnerships in their communities and sustain those partnerships over time through a system of continual interagency collaboration on behalf of young children.* The numerous collaborative efforts over the past five years (detailed in the *State Evaluation Five-Year Report*) have helped advance each grantee community’s early childhood system to be more efficient and less duplicative regarding service delivery.

Each year, grantees project programmatic goals (or benchmarks) to be accomplished by the end of the calendar/fiscal year. These goals are grantee-specific and are projected locally through community-level strategic planning efforts. Grantees are accountable for meeting their annual projections. *From 2002 to 2005, 85 percent of programmatic goals set by the seven Cohort I grantees were either met or exceeded (229 out of 270).* For those goals that were *not met* at year’s end (only nine percent of all goals were not met), most often, the goal attainment was prevented by unforeseen and/or unique circumstances. That is, when goals were not met, it was rarely because of poor planning or poor implementation on behalf of the grantees.

For four consecutive years, early childhood professionals who participated in Smart Start Kansas programs have reported significantly benefitting from the following efforts and resources that improve quality of care in their centers and classrooms:

- *Knowledge of child development (physical, social, cognitive);*
- *Knowledge of safe, healthy, and child-appropriate environments;*
- *Training workshops sponsored or funded by Smart Start Kansas;*

- *Funds to attend training activities; and*
- *Increased morale and pride related to the profession.*

With these efforts highlighted each year by early childhood professionals, one can see the grantees' programmatic emphasis on quality of early childhood education and care. Interestingly, one of the "top five" reported benefits each year is "increased morale and pride related to my profession"—with more than 60 percent of respondents reporting this personal benefit each year. This finding is particularly important because it confirms separate (interview) reports of many early childhood professionals who said they viewed themselves as "babysitters" prior to their participation in Smart Start activities.

Finally, early childhood professionals (who were Smart Start program participants) have reported for four consecutive years that one of the primary areas of significant need—in their communities, centers, and classrooms—is related to *availability* of quality early childhood education and care. ***Each year, higher percentages of respondents report that the need for available infant, toddler, and special needs slots in their communities is paramount.*** Other areas of significant need reported each year by most respondents include: improved services for special needs children; new equipment and/or facility renovation; funds (for providers) to complete college courses; and enrichment programs for children.

At this time, four primary recommendations are offered to The Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund. The first two recommendations are grounded in important patterns that emerged in these five-year evaluation findings. The last two recommendations are more general in nature and are based, in part, on information gathered over time from grantees and other Initiative stakeholders.

***Recommendation 1. Consider identifying priorities related to the Initiative's programmatic reach.*** The significant variations found in percentages of target populations reached among grantees (ranging from two percent of target population served per year to 66 percent served) may signal a need to identify expectations related to each grantee's programmatic reach. The proportion of community children served (by each grantee) will be most important during the assessment of long-term school readiness outcomes. If only five percent of the community children have been exposed to Smart Start Kansas programs and services, one can only expect minimal, if any, community-level increases in school readiness scores. The Children's Cabinet may want to consider revisiting the requirements (or lack of requirements) related to grantee-level program reach. This may involve identifying priority areas or specifying targeted expectations related to "community penetration" of Smart Start Kansas activities.

***Recommendation 2. Consider promoting or favoring program implementation plans that include more efforts to address Core Service Area 2 (Availability of Quality***

**Early Childhood Education and Care).** For four consecutive years, early childhood professionals (who participated in Smart Start programs) have reported that availability of infant, toddler, and special needs slots is a significant need in their communities. Although “availability” of quality early childhood education and care is one of Smart Start’s five Core Service Areas, only a few programs have been implemented by some grantees that address this concern. Moreover, the highest concentration of programs were implemented in the Initiative’s first two years. Based on these evaluation findings, the Cabinet should consider encouraging—or even favoring—grant proposals that include programs to address this ever-present gap.

**Recommendation 3. Consider Offering Planning Grants As Standard Precursors to New Smart Start Grants.** The Smart Start Kansas Initiative and its community-level grants do not begin immediately with program implementation upon award. The Initiative’s framework mandates extensive community input and collaboration prior to program implementation. This level of strategic planning is necessary for communities to identify their specific early childhood needs and select appropriate programming to address those local gaps. This type of planning effort (that includes a formal community-level early childhood needs assessment) requires time and money. The majority of the ten Cohort II grantees (awarded Smart Start grants in 2005) had the benefit of receiving one-year planning grants prior to submitting their Smart Start grant applications. In that planning year, (future) grantees were able to conduct community needs assessments, hold local stakeholder meetings, and deliberate and collaborate to develop a thoughtful early childhood strategic plan prior to applying for (and receiving) Smart Start grants. As a result, once awarded, the Cohort II grantees were “in the field” with their programs staffed and implemented earlier in the grant year, compared to the Cohort I grantees five years earlier, who had no such benefit of (funded) prior planning efforts. Because community input, collaboration, and planning are so integral to the Smart Start Kansas framework, the importance of offering communities the resources to effectively conduct such planning efforts—in advance of receiving the grant—is significant, and even cost effective.

**Recommendation 4. Begin preparing for next year’s long-term outcome analysis of school readiness indicator data.** A brief recommendation is offered to begin necessary procedures for next year’s evaluation that will include an analysis of long-term school readiness outcomes. In the coming year, the first signs of community-level improvements in school readiness indicators are expected among children entering Kindergarten in the Smart Start (Cohort I) communities. Data will need to be compiled (from various sources), analyzed, and reported for *current and previous years* on several measures identified at the state level as appropriate indicators of school readiness. In order to have initial school readiness outcomes by 2007, collection and analyses of the appropriate data should begin no later than summer 2006.