

## **Great START (Strategies to Attract and Retain Teachers) Program Evaluation**

Great START is a legislated program that compensates child care practitioners in licensed facilities for educational attainment above licensing requirements and continued commitment to the early childhood field. The three main goals of the Great START program are: 1.) an increased education of practitioners in Early Childhood/Child Development, 2.) improved workforce retention, and 3.) improved quality of programs that serve young children and their families.

The legislation for the program required that an evaluation be conducted & implemented by June 2004. The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign conducted the study. A total of 1,858 telephone interviews were completed with 946 Great START participants who entered Great START between April 2001 and June 2003 to determine if the Great START program was achieving the set goals of increased education & retention; if it was being administered effectively and to determine what, if anything, is needed to improve the program. Highlights of key findings are outlined below.

### **Demographics of Participants Interviewed**

- Average age was 38 years
- 99% were female
- Worked average of 43 hours/week
- Region worked:
  - 20% in the City of Chicago
  - 27% in suburban Cook
  - 53% in remaining Illinois counties
- Type of Care:
  - 77% worked in child care centers
  - 23% in family child care homes
- Past Experience:
  - 61% had a past child care position
- Highest education level:
  - 17% had some college, no degree
  - 43% had an Associates degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE)
  - 10% had an Associate's degree, not ECE
  - 13% had a Bachelors/Masters degree, ECE
  - 18% had a Bachelors/Masters degree, not ECE
- Current credentials:
  - 26% had a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)

### **Does Great START Promote Retention?**

- Overall Attrition from Great START (did not renew):
  - 17% in FY02
  - 13% in FY03
  - This rate is much lower than that of the field in general
- Intent to Stay in Current Position
  - Over 90% of participants reported that Great START made them want to stay in their current position longer
  - Breaking this down by participants' education level, those with an ECE degree were the most likely to say that Great START made them want to stay in their current position longer
- Job Commitment
  - Over 90% reported that Great START made them more committed to their job
- Commitment to the Child Care Field
  - Over 90% reported that Great START made them more committed to the child care field
- Intent to Leave Current Position
  - Less than 15% of participants reported considering leaving their current position before being eligible for Great START as well as after being eligible; however, the reasons reported for considering leaving significantly changed after entering the program shifting from low wages to working conditions

Illinois Department of Human Services  
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**Does Great START Promote Education?**

- 87% of participants reported they were motivated by Great START to pursue additional education
- In their follow-up interviews, about 1 out of 5 reported they had enrolled or completed courses since their first interview. Of those, almost two-thirds reported they had pursued more education to move up on the Great START wage supplement scale.
- About 2 out of 5 participants reported they had encountered barriers to pursuing more education; but, barriers did not significantly affect educational motivations or pursuits

**What is Program Satisfaction Level?**

- 99% of participants reported having high satisfaction with the program
- Over 80% of center directors reported Great START made it easier to retain staff and the program improved staff morale
- Almost all participants (98%) felt more valued as a child care professional because of Great START