

Enhancing Children's Healthy Opportunities

"From Red Flags to Blue Ribbons"

ECHO

Program Evaluation Status Report Year One

Prepared for the
Community Foundation of the Ozarks
Advisory Board

by
Missouri State University's
Institute for School Improvement

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Enhancing Children’s Healthy Opportunities

The Community Foundation of the Ozarks (CFO) released reports titled *Community Focus: A Report of Springfield and Greene County* (2004; 2005). These reports provided information regarding successes known as “Blue Ribbons” as well as areas of concern known as “Red Flags” that warrant further investigation and attention by the community at large.

In response to the CFO reports, the *Enhancing Children’s Healthy Opportunities (ECHO)* project was developed by Springfield Public Schools, the Community Partnership of the Ozarks, Burrell Behavioral Health, and Missouri State University to address three community red flags. The overall goal of the ECHO project is to assist the community in moving from red flags to blue ribbons through the implementation of an integrated prevention-oriented program targeting two high-poverty elementary schools in Springfield.

The red flags addressed by ECHO include: (1) Children suffering from the lingering effects of poverty; (2) At-risk children lacking basic needs; and (3) Schools lagging behind state averages in per pupil expenditures. Together, ECHO partners work to address these specific red flags by providing programs and services that will: (1) Increase students' positive behavior and reduce violence and aggression. (2) Increase schools' development of positive behavior management skills. (3) Provide families with positive parent education activities. (4) Improve children and families' physical and mental health. (5) Develop pre-service teachers' behavior management skills. (6) Provide mental health assessment and intervention to improve the school environment & decrease student aggression.

In 2006, the Community Foundation of the Ozarks awarded the ECHO consortium \$1 million dollars to address these goals over a five-year period. Implementation of interventions began during the 2006-07 academic school year. This report provides an update regarding year-one implementation of the program with respect to student outcomes for the two ECHO schools.

The Institute for School Improvement at Missouri State University is conducting the evaluation of the ECHO project. The evaluation model on the following page depicts the conceptual approach used to guide inquiry.

ECHO Goals

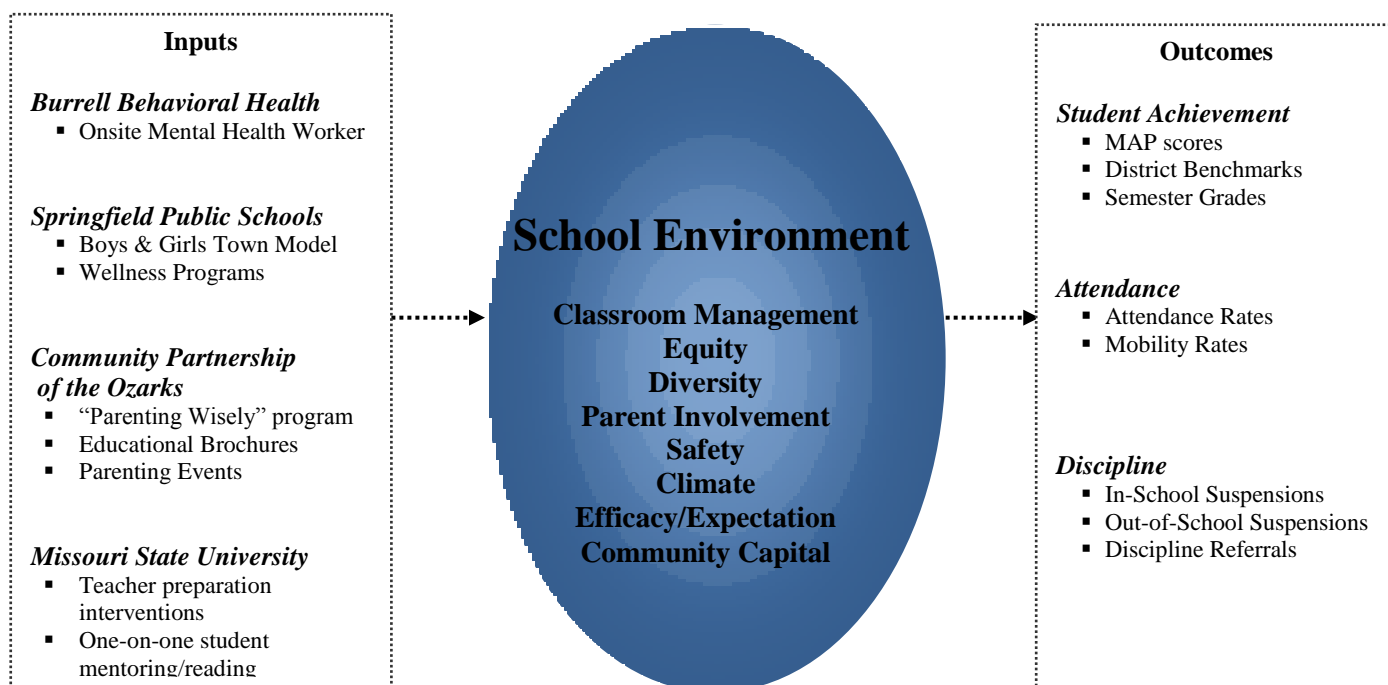
- 1 *Increase students' positive behavior and reduce violence and aggression.*
- 2 *Increase schools' development of positive behavior management skills.*
- 3 *Provide families with positive parent education activities.*
- 4 *Improve children and families' physical and mental health.*
- 5 *Develop pre-service teachers' behavior management skills.*
- 6 *Provide mental health assessment and intervention to improve the school environment & decrease student aggression.*

Partners

Springfield Public Schools
Community Partnership of the Ozarks
Burrell Behavioral Health
Missouri State University

Evaluation Model

Utilizing an outcomes-based evaluation model, various inputs (i.e. independent variables) from the ECHO partners are examined to determine their relative impact on school climate. Climate factors, as measured by the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) are also examined to determine the degree to which changes in school environments may be related to outcomes (i.e. dependent variables).



Target Schools’ Characteristics

The two schools targeted for participation in the ECHO project are Campbell and Robberson elementary schools in Springfield, Missouri. Both are designated Title I schools within the Springfield R-XII system with more than 75% of students qualifying for either free or reduced lunch. The comparisons made for this update examine student outcomes prior to program implementation (2005-06) for baseline data to be compared to outcomes after implementation of the ECHO project (2006-07). In addition, school level data are compared to other Title I schools within the district as well as Non-Title I sites to provide a more comprehensive examination of the unique characteristics of these two schools.

As Figure 1 shows, Campbell's student enrollment dropped by approximately eighteen students from 2005-06 to 2006-07 while Robberson's enrollment increased slightly. Both schools' enrollments (Campbell = 203; Robberson = 264) during the 2006-07 school year are lower than the average enrollment in other Title I schools ($M = 277$) and significantly lower than non-Title I schools ($M = 337$). Both project schools experienced an increase in the number of students receiving free or reduced lunches from the 2005-06 baseline year (Campbell = 86%; Robberson = 84%) to the project implementation year 2006-07 (88% and 87% respectively).

Figure 1. Number of Students Enrolled in ECHO Schools Compared to the Average Number of Students in Title I and Non-Title I Schools District-Wide 2006 and 2007

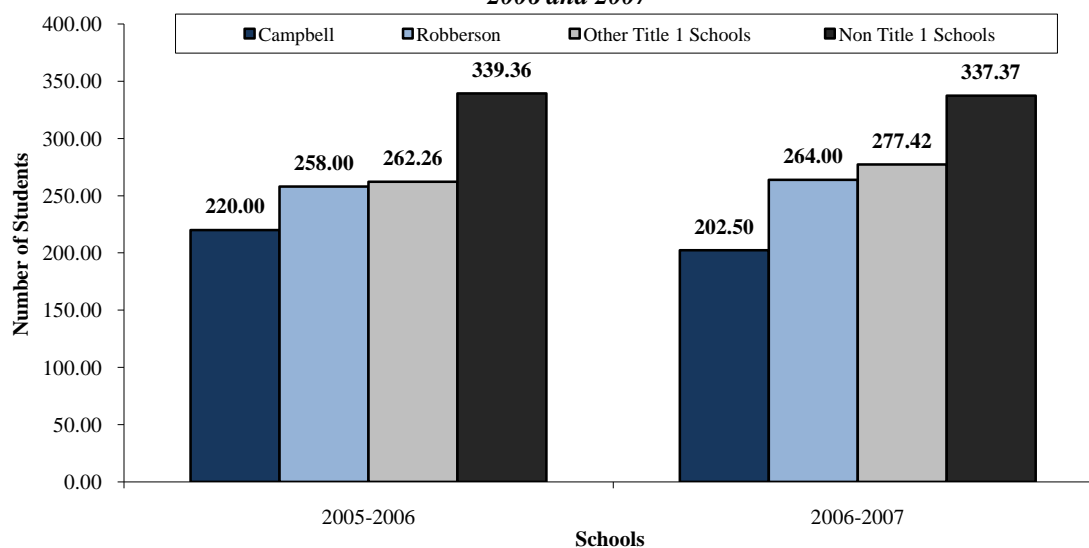
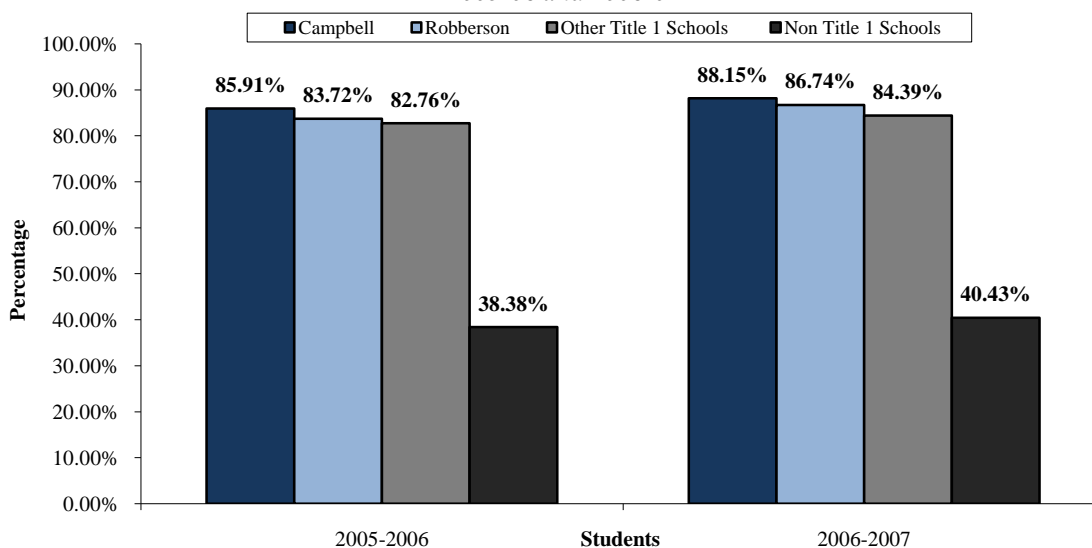


Figure 2. Percent of Students in ECHO Schools Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch Compared to Other Title I Schools and Non-Title I Schools in the District 2005-06 and 2006-07



As shown in Figure 2, the percent of students receiving free or reduced lunches in ECHO schools is greater than those in other Title I schools and significantly higher than the district-wide average for non-Title I schools. The percent of student ethnicity depicted in Figure 3 shows an almost equal representation across both project schools and other Title I schools (20%), compared to 11% for non-title I schools. While almost 65% of children in non-Title I schools lived with both parents in 2006-07, only about 50% of children in Title I schools lived with both parents; compared to 40% of Campbell students and 47% of Robberson children during the same academic year (see Figure 4). While the goal of the ECHO project is not to attempt to change school demographics, these data help define the student population targeted for interventions.

Figure 3. Percent of Student Ethnicity for ECHO Schools Compared to Title I and Non-Title I Schools District-wide 2005-06 and 2006-07

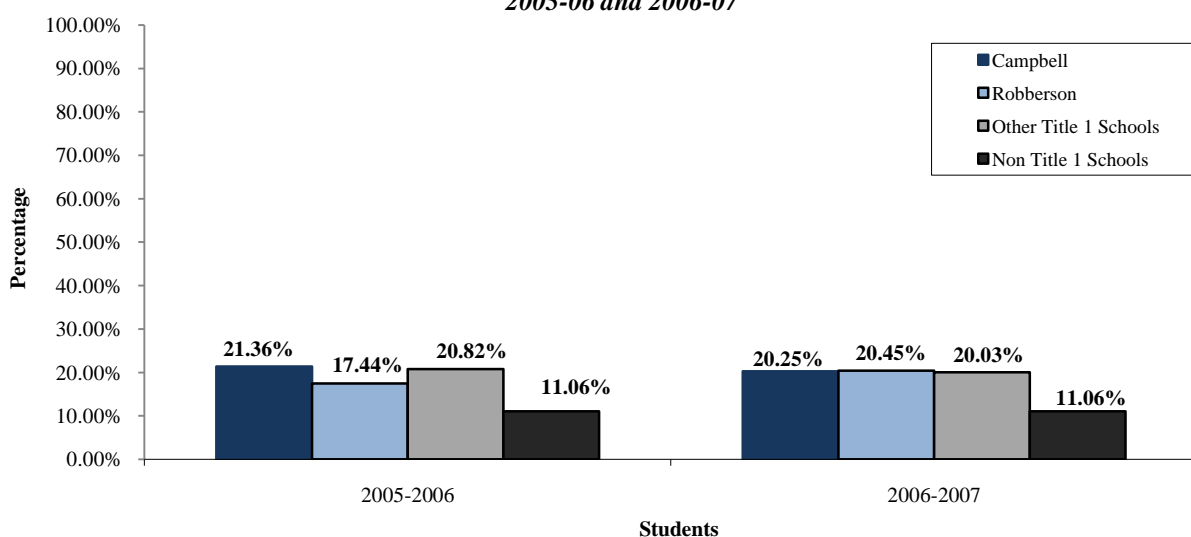
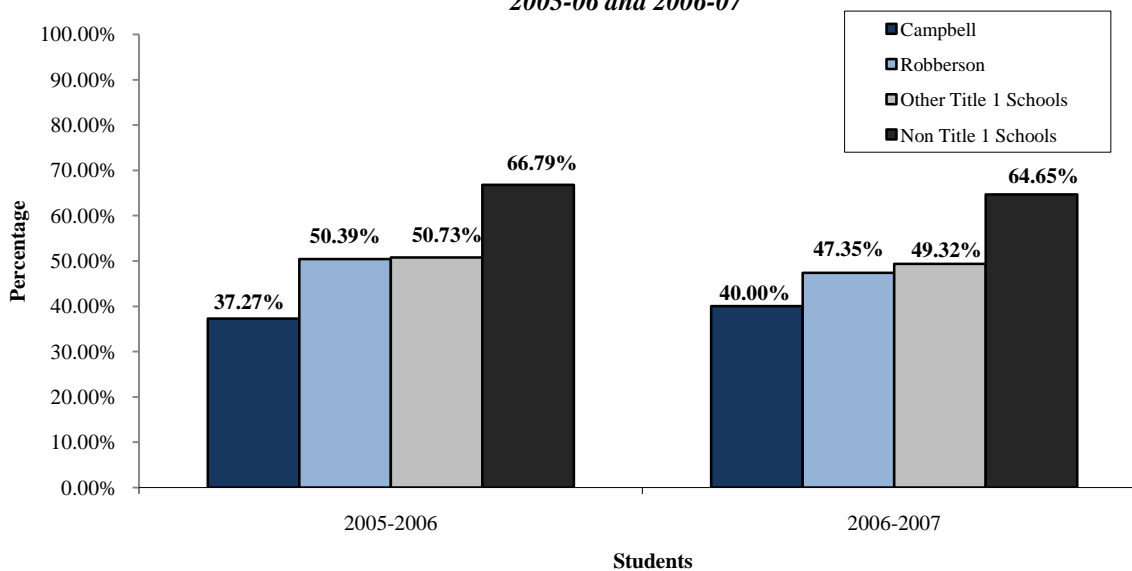


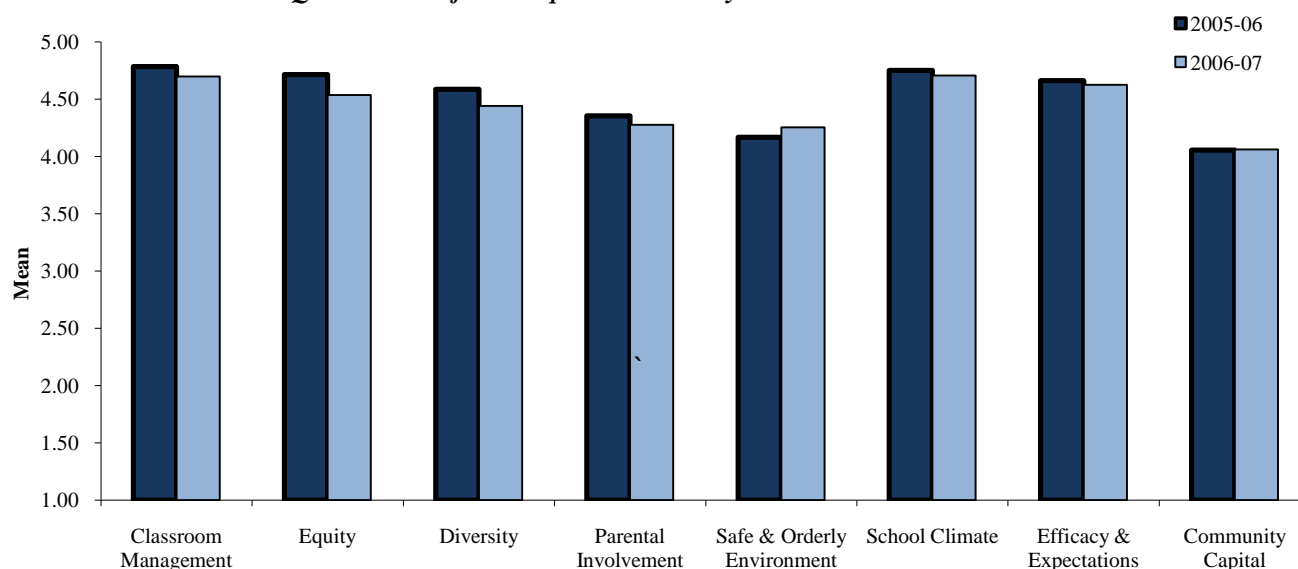
Figure 4. Percent of ECHO Students Living in Two Parent Households Compared to Title I and Non-Title I Schools District-wide 2005-06 and 2006-07



School Environment Factors

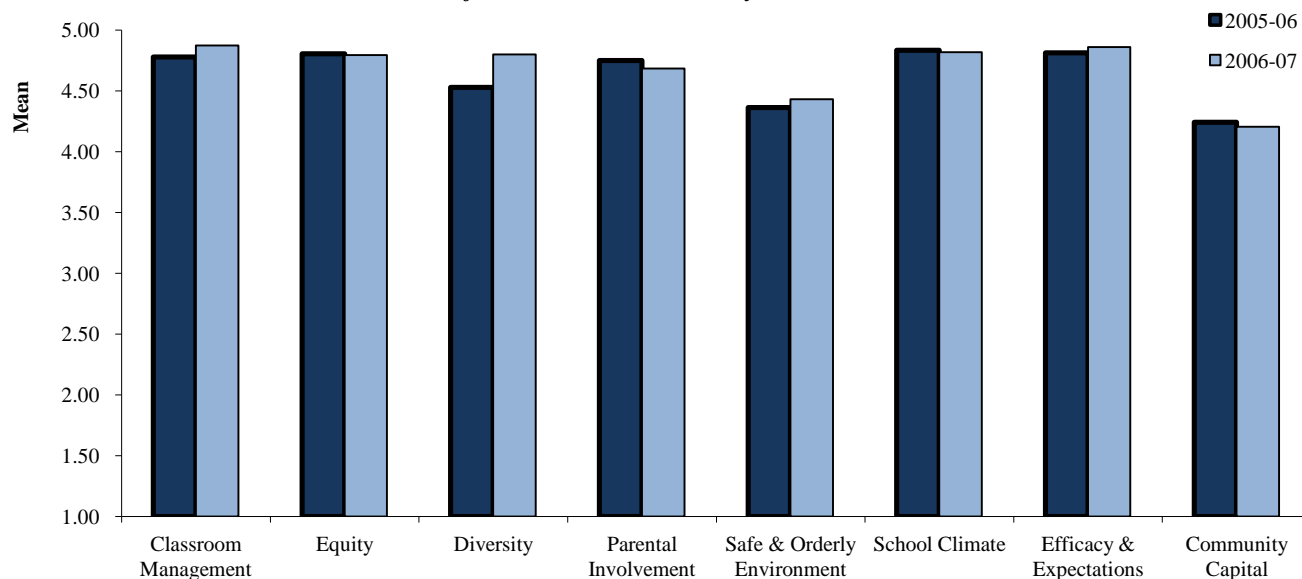
During the 2005-06 baseline year and the 2006-07 program implementation year, teachers across all Springfield elementary schools took part in the Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP) Advance Questionnaire which generates perceptual data from teachers regarding their school's environment. Scales derived from the Advance Questionnaire are presented below in Figures 5 and 6 for Campbell and Robberson. As program implementation continues over the next two years, these data will be examined in more detail to determine if changes in the school environment are occurring and whether or not these changes may be related to student outcomes.

Figure 5. School Environment Scales from the MO DESE MSIP Teacher Advance Questionnaire for Campbell Elementary 2005-06 and 2006-07



Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree - (Note: 1 is a low measure; 5 is a high measure)

Figure 6. School Environment Scales from the MO DESE MSIP Teacher Advance Questionnaire for Robberson Elementary 2005-06 and 2006-07



Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree - (Note: 1 is a low measure; 5 is a high measure)

Program Activities

Springfield Public Schools

Prior to the beginning of the 2006-07 academic year, classroom teachers, administrators, counselors and other support staff from the two ECHO schools attended the “Well Managed Classroom” training sponsored by Girls & Boys Town. While many teachers (77.5%) noted they were already implementing some type of positive behavior management techniques, approximately two-thirds (66.6%) also indicated that the training would assist them in promoting positive behavior management in the classroom.

During the 2006-07 school year a principal and counselor from the ECHO project attended the 13th Annual Character Education Conference where participants heard from Dr. Hal Urban, author of *Life’s Greatest Lessons* and Dr. Phillip Vincent who spoke about the need to place more emphasis on school civility. School counselors at both sites received funding to expand their curriculum through the purchase of DVD materials that target problem solving, conflict resolution and other student coping skills. Teachers from Robberson Elementary attended a writing workshop with local author Judy Young who provided teachers with ideas and suggestions for integrating poetry through the curriculum. In addition, a permanent substitute teacher was hired at Robberson Elementary to assist classroom teachers in implementing small group instruction, tutoring, and assistance with behavioral issues.

Springfield Public Schools continue to assist children and families in efforts to help them improve their physical and mental health. School-wide wellness programs that promote healthy habits and lifestyle changes such as regular physical activity and good nutrition are aimed at reducing disease and obesity. In addition, the district continues to work on increasing parent awareness and use of community supports such as the Tooth Truck, Care Mobile and the Community Health Center.

Community Partnership of the Ozarks

As a partner in the ECHO project, the Community Partnership of the Ozarks (CPO) focuses on assisting families through positive parenting education activities. During the 2006-07 school year CPO provided “Parenting Wisely” classes to families of students attending Robberson and Campbell elementary schools and hosted “Caring Connection” parent events to provide families with information regarding parenting techniques and healthy lifestyles. CPO is also providing educational brochures for parents at each of the two school sites to further promote healthy practices.

A total of 54 parents either participated in or completed the Parenting Wisely program during the 2006-07 school year which focused on increasing awareness of appropriate parenting techniques. In addition, five Caring Connection Parenting events also took place during the 2006-07 school year. These events were well attended with more than 100 parents participating during the fall 2006 and approximately 200 attending spring 2007 parenting events. The Caring Connections program provided parents with information on Parent/Child Communication, Family Bonding, Health & Nutrition, Building Blocks for Healthy Youth, and Child and Family Safety.

Burrell Behavioral Health

Burrell Behavioral Health hired a full time master's level mental health therapist to serve as a school based clinician and consultant who assists teachers and school administration in the two project schools to work with children exhibiting behavior problems in the classroom. The goal of this behavioral consultation effort is to impact not only the child but also the larger classroom and school environment. As a classroom consultant, the therapist observes children who have been identified as exhibiting high rates of acting out and/or other forms of off-task behavior believed to be contributing to classroom disruption and/or their own poor academic performance or the academic performance of their peers. Information gathered during these observations is used to work directly in the classroom when the opportunities exist to intervene with the child during the course of the instructional day and/or to model alternative behaviors for the teacher. Observations may also be used as a tool to assist the larger school team (classroom teacher, other instructors, school principal) in planning strategies to improve on-task behaviors for the child in multiple school settings. Recommendations may include changes in the classroom teacher's behavior so that contextual antecedents evoke a more positive response from the child. In cases where behaviors are particularly troubling or severe, the clinician may also provide brief therapy that yields information on ways to effectively impact a particular child -- information that is also shared with the classroom teacher. In addition to this work, during the 2006-07 school year, the school based mental health therapist received funding from the ECHO project to attend a professional development workshop on "Play Therapy" to support work with children at both ECHO schools.

Missouri State University

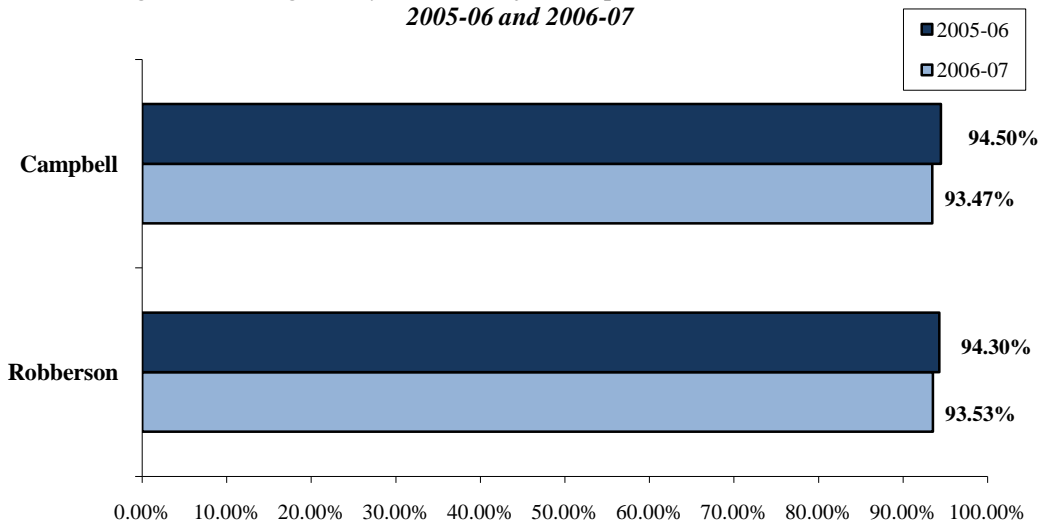
Missouri State University's College of Education and the Community Foundation of the Ozarks brought Dr. Jonathan Kozol to Springfield on April 20, 2007. Dr. Kozol has written extensively on the impact of poverty on American schools. His books include, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (1992), *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation* (1996), and *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (2006). In addition to speaking at the MSU Public Affairs conference, Dr Kozol visited Robberson Elementary school where teachers and administrators from the two ECHO schools met privately with Dr. Kozol to discuss a variety of topics pertaining to working with children living in poverty.

Beginning in the fall 2007, twelve College of Education students have been assigned to work with teachers and students at Campbell and Robberson elementary schools two days a week (8:30 am-3:30 pm) as a part of their teacher preparation "methods" coursework. These pre-service teachers have been engaged in activities aimed at supporting both teachers and students such as working one-on-one with struggling students, assisting with small group instruction, tutoring students after school, helping with the development of learning center activities and assembling learning packets for the classroom. These same pre-service teachers will remain at Campbell and Robberson throughout the 2007-08 school year where they will complete their student teaching in the spring 2008.

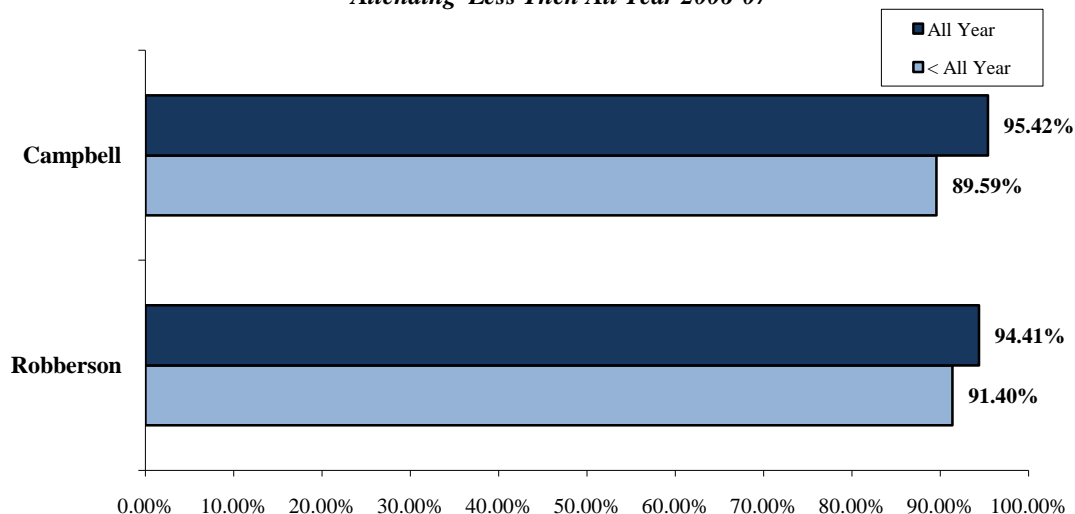
Student Outcomes

In addition to school climate/environment, supports provided to families and children through the ECHO program may also impact student outcomes such as attendance and achievement. Figures 7-9 below provide data on average daily attendance for both Campbell as Robberson. While overall attendance has decreased slightly from the 2005-06 baseline year to the 2006-07 implementation year for both sites, the high mobility within these two schools should be taken into consideration. As Figure 8 shows, when the 2006-07 data are disaggregated by students attending school all year versus those who have moved in/out of the school during the course of the school year (i.e. mobile students), those who attended the same school for an entire year have a much higher attendance rate than students who attended multiple schools.

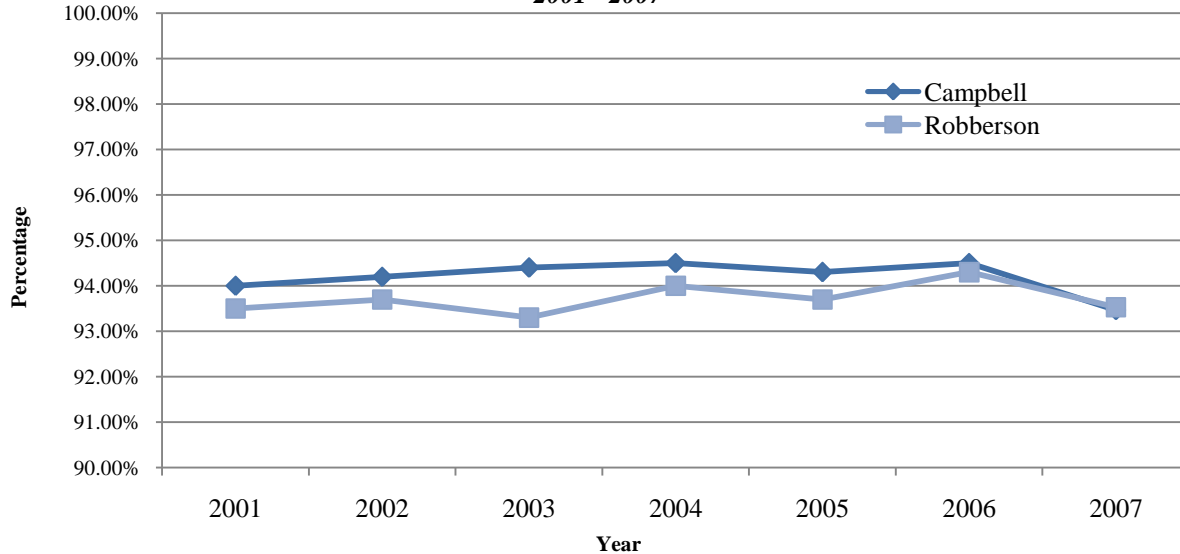
*Figure 7. Average Daily Attendance for Campbell and Robberson Students
2005-06 and 2006-07*



*Figure 8. Average Daily Attendance for Campbell and Robberson Students
Attending Their Respective ECHO School All Year Compared to Those
Attending Less Than All Year 2006-07*



**Figure 9. Average Percent Attendance for Campbell and Robberson Students
2001 - 2007**



In addition to attendance, student achievement as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores for Communication Arts and Mathematics was also analyzed for Campbell and Robberson to examine changes since program implementation. Figures 10-12 show the percent of students in ECHO schools scoring proficient and advanced on the MAP Communication Arts assessment for 3rd, 4th and 5th grades. These data are compared to other Title I schools in the district as well as non-Title I schools. Overall, the percent of students attending ECHO schools scoring proficient and advanced increased from 2005-06 to 2006-07 for each grade level. While the increase in 3rd grade communication arts achievement for Campbell students was approximately 4%, the increase in the percent of students scoring proficient and advanced at Robberson elementary nearly doubled from 22% (2005-06) to 42% (2006-07). This same pattern appears consistent for 4th and 5th grade communication arts scores as well. Overall, students in ECHO schools scoring proficient and advanced is greater than those attending other Title I schools in the district.

Figures 13-15 depict the MAP Mathematics achievement for grade three, four and five for ECHO schools as well as other Title I and non-Title I elementary schools across the district. While there was a slight decrease in the percent of Campbell 4th grade students scoring proficient and advanced, ECHO schools still saw a greater percent of their students scoring proficient and advanced in mathematics across all grade levels when compared to other Title I schools in the district. Again, the achievement levels at Robberson elementary during the 2006-07 school year are significantly greater compared to 2005-06. While it is premature at this point to conclude that the implementation of the ECHO project is directly related to these increases, the evaluation team plans to examine these data over time to see if this trend continues.

ECHO: Assisting our community in moving from “red flags to blue ribbons” by addressing areas of concern outlined in the “Community Focus Report” (2004) by implementing integrated prevention oriented services in two high-risk schools in Springfield.

Figure 10. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on MAP Communication Arts - 3rd Grade 2005-06 and 2006-07

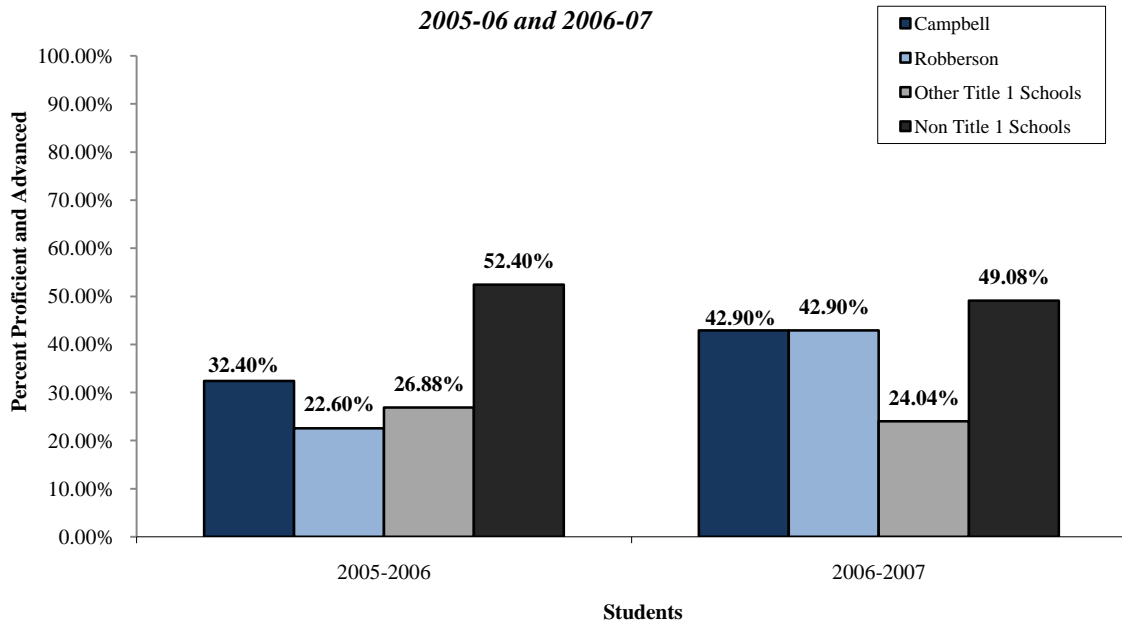


Figure 11. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on MAP Communication Arts - 4th Grade 2005-06 and 2006-07

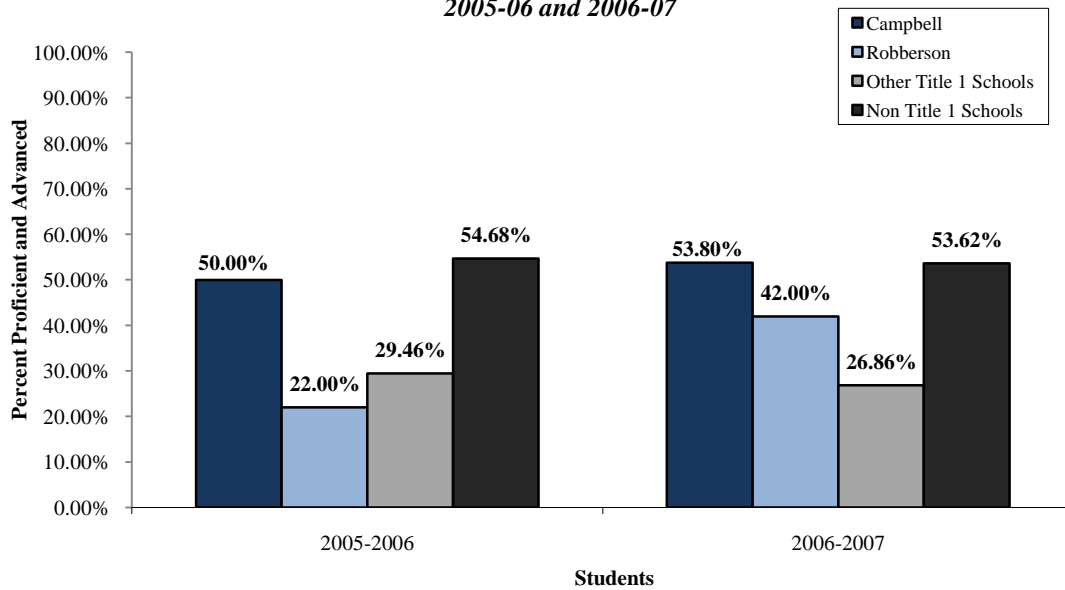


Figure 12. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on MAP Communication Arts - 5th Grade 2005-06 and 2006-07

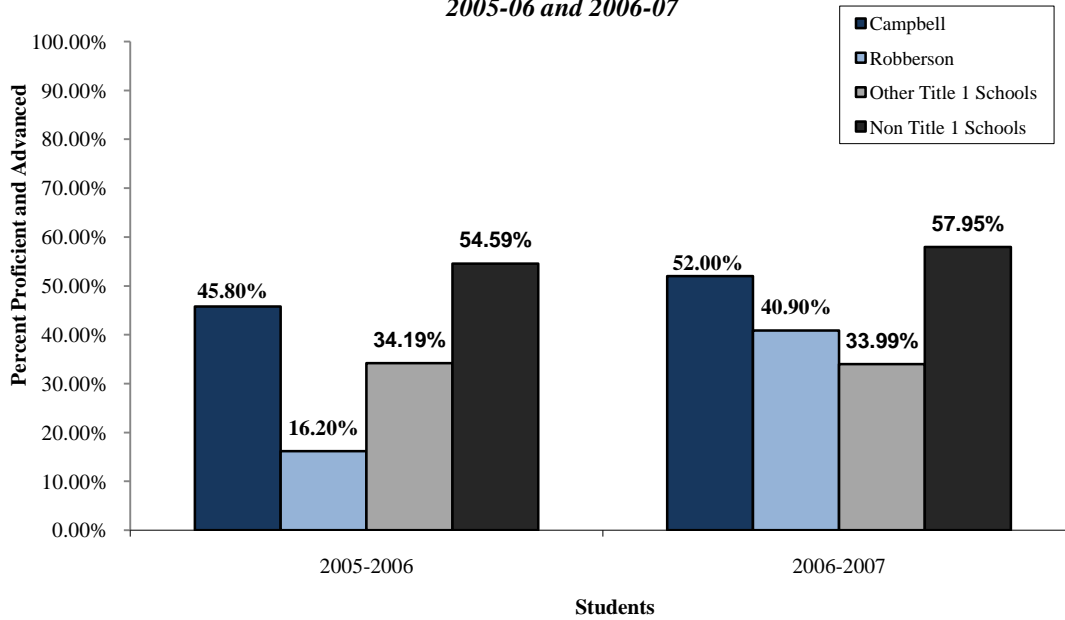
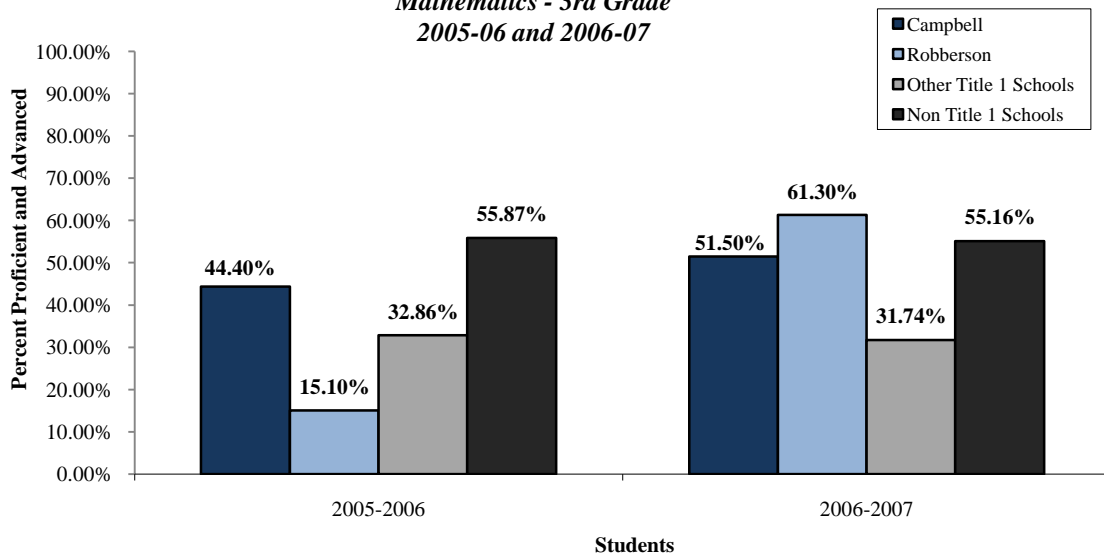
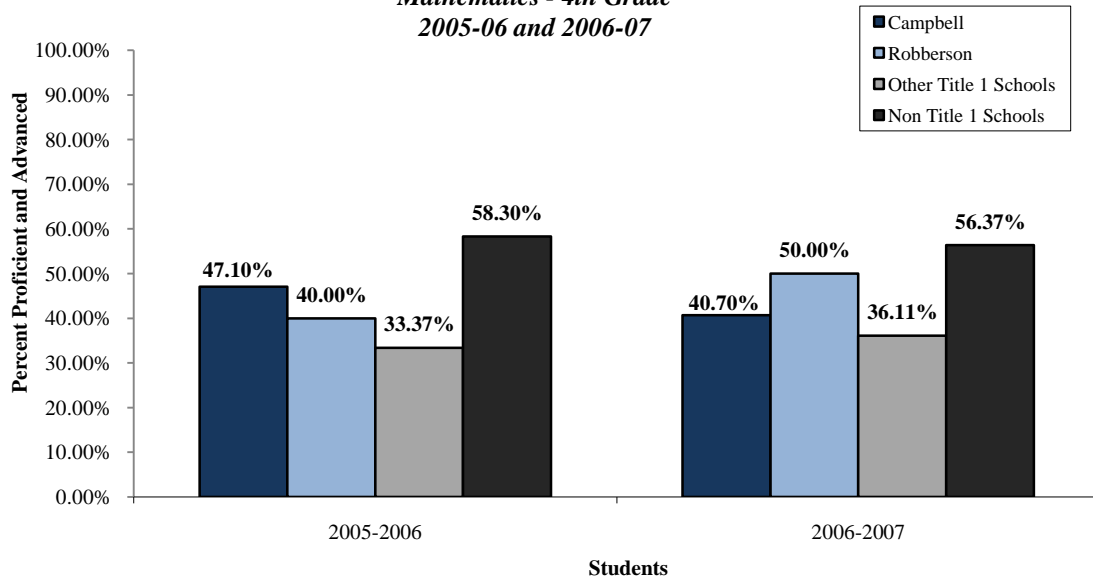


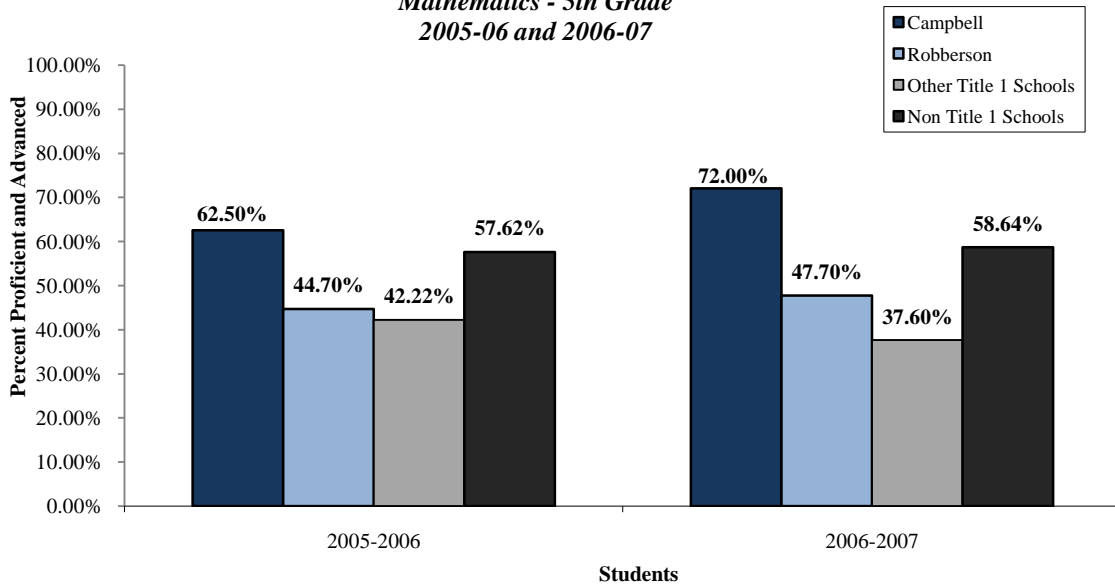
Figure 13. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on MAP Mathematics - 3rd Grade 2005-06 and 2006-07



**Figure 14. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on MAP
Mathematics - 4th Grade
2005-06 and 2006-07**



**Figure 15. Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on MAP
Mathematics - 5th Grade
2005-06 and 2006-07**



As with attendance, the evaluation team was interested in examining student achievement in relation to student mobility. In doing so, data were disaggregated based on students' attendance at Campbell and Robberson all year versus those attending only part of the year (i.e. moving in/out of the school). As Figures 16 and 17 show, and as many would intuitively suspect, students who are enrolled in one school for an entire year tend to achieve at a higher level than those who move in and out of schools during the school year. The issue of mobility is one that warrants further investigation given the targeted population for the ECHO project.

Figure 16. Percent of Campbell Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced: Students Attending All Year Compared to Students Not Attending All Year 2006-07

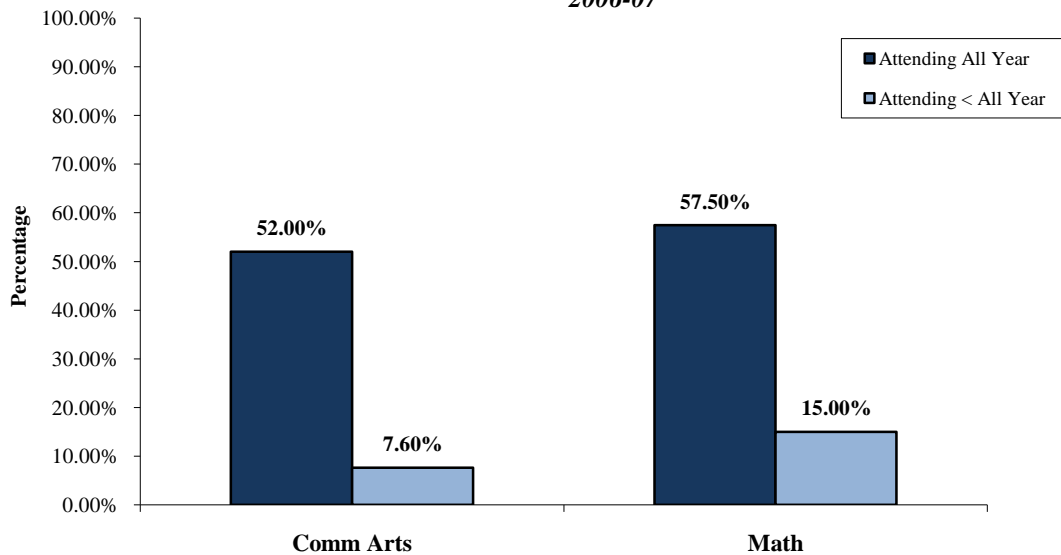
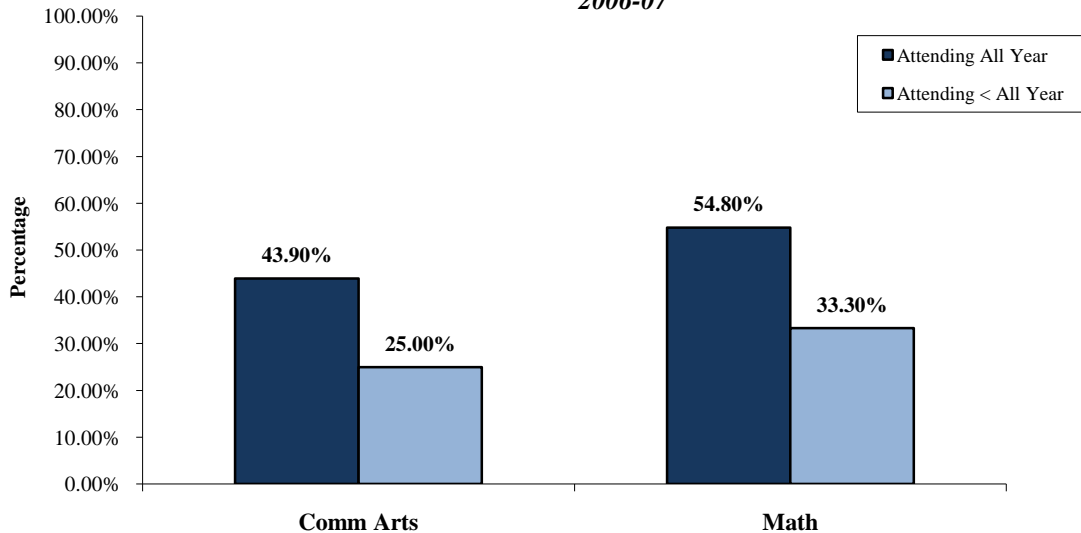


Figure 17. Percent of Robberson Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced: Students Attending All Year Compared to Students Not Attending All Year 2006-07



Focus Group Interviews

During the spring 2007, evaluation team members conducted focus group interviews that took place at each of the ECHO project schools. Overall, 40 participants including teachers (Campbell = 14; Robberson = 5), students (Campbell = 3; Robberson = 7), and parents (Campbell = 6; Robberson = 5) provided qualitative data regarding their unique perspectives of the ECHO project. Informed consent for participation was obtained prior to each interview and parental consent was obtained for student participation. In addition to focus groups, individual interviews were also conducted with the school principal at Campbell and Robberson. Both focus group interviews and individual principal interviews followed a semi-structured protocol developed by the evaluation team. The purpose of this method of data collection was to gather qualitative information regarding awareness of the program as well as feedback pertaining to program implementation.

Individual Principal Interviews

According to the school principals, school personnel were not involved in the initial stages of the grant development process and did not have much interaction with the program director when implementation began in the fall 2006. However, with the hiring of a new project director in the spring 2007 program leadership is much more visible and partner meetings are now held at the school sites. Principals agreed that the overall goal of ECHO is to overcome the adverse effect of poverty by providing families and children targeted interventions and supports. To help families transcend the detrimental effects of poverty, schools can provide essential tools such as learning outcomes and social skills development

“ECHO has brought us all to the same table...”

“We are serving the needs of kids and families in a way that we had not before.”

Teacher Focus Group Interviews

Teachers from Campbell and Robberson took part in focus group interviews during spring 2007 prior to full program implementation. While several indicated that they did not initially have much interaction with the project director, they have become more aware of program personnel and the partners involved. Overall, teachers noted that ECHO is now helping them become more aware of the needs of both children and families and providing them with supports to be more effective in working with children and families within their respective schools. While teachers believe that overall student behavior has improved, they are not sure whether or not it is the direct result of the ECHO program or the influence of a variety of different programs/activities taking place within the schools (e.g. Character Education). Teachers also suggested that ECHO could be improved by providing more opportunities for parent involvement and examining ways to incorporate physical fitness as a component of healthy living.

The best part of the program is that “teachers, parents, students, and the community are working together...”

Student Focus Group Interviews

While listening to students, it was apparent they were not aware of a program called “ECHO”; however, they were very much aware of the activities supported by ECHO. When asked what they were learning at school, students responded that they were learning to “solve problems” and “be safe” along with typical academic responses such as reading and math. Students at both sites tended to talk about their teachers, principal and counselor when discussing what they enjoy about attending school. In addition, students indicated that when they are “having a bad day” or needing someone to talk with about a problem there is always a place for them to go. Students also discussed how their parents are now helping them with school work at home and becoming more interested in what they are learning at school. Overall, students were positive about their respective schools.

Favorite thing about school....

“teachers and principal”

“principal”

“everything”

“our school counselor”

“teachers and friends”

Parent Focus Group Interviews

Awareness among parents regarding the name “ECHO” appears to be limited; however, much of what parents did discuss were programs / activities that are related to the ECHO program. While ECHO may not be a familiar term to parents, they were familiar with after school programs and parenting events targeting health and safety. They also discussed learning techniques for disciplining their children and how these types of supports have assisted them at home and during family interactions. Parents also discussed the opportunity to discuss / share issues and problems with other parents during parenting events. The interaction with other parents and school personnel was noted as a positive outcome for parents. In addition, parents believe they are spending more time with their children as a result of the program and finding out new ways to have free, fun family entertainment at parks and other recreational facilities.

“I’m doing a lot more with my kids now than I used to...”

Conclusion

While it is much too early to evaluate the relationship of ECHO activities to school, family, and community outcomes; a number of positive inputs and indicators of success have already been identified. ECHO program implementation and management continue to increase and support student-based efforts to address the ill effects of poverty for children and families in the Campbell and Robberson communities. Over time, the project seeks to determine both direct and indirect relationships between inputs and outcomes identified in this first preliminary report. The true measure of success rests in continued and future endeavors.