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ABSTRACT

Findings of the evaluation of New York City's Project SAIL, an ungraded primary unit, located at Brooklyn's Public School 41, District 23, and intended for children 5-8 years of age, this report. Teachers reported that they found the first year of the program to be simultaneously exciting and frustrating. Over 80 percent of the teachers involved in the project believed that student achievement had improved and that they had noticed changes in children's attitudes toward school and learning. Most problems encountered by teachers related to their learning to work cooperatively with other teachers and to schedule the movement of children between classrooms. Although teachers planned a variety of activities to involve parents, relatively few parents attended. Children showed statistically significant improvement in social skills as measured by a teacher-administered Child Behavior Rating Scale. Although there was only a slight improvement in attendance, a larger percentage of children had an over 90 percent attendance rate in 1987-88 than in 1986-87. Kindergarten children scored slightly above grade level in language, and first-graders scored slightly below grade level in reading on the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Only 25 percent of second-graders scored at or above grade level on the second-grade city wide reading test. Recommendations for program improvement are offered. (RH)

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**OREA Evaluation Section Report
John Schoener, Administrator
July 1989**

**PROJECT SAIL
1987-88**

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A SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

FOCUS OF THE REPORT

Project SAIL, a collaborative project of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the New York City Board of Education, is an ungraded primary unit for children from ages five through eight located at P.S. 41, District 23 in Brooklyn. The project which was proposed by the UFT president at the union's 1986 Spring conference, was planned and managed by the teachers in cooperation with the school's administrators. The evaluation was planned and carried out by the school-based evaluation committee with technical assistance from the Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment.

FINDINGS

Teachers reported that they found the first year of the program both exciting and frustrating at the same time. Over 80 percent of the teachers believed that students achievement had improved and that they had noticed changes in children's attitudes toward school and learning. Most problems encountered by teachers related to their learning to work cooperatively with other teachers and/or scheduling the movement of children between classrooms. Although teachers planned a variety of activities to involve parents of the children, relatively few parents attended any of the events. Children showed statistically significant improvement in social skills as measured by a Child Behavior Rating Scale administered by classroom teachers in February and June. Although there was only a slight improvement in overall attendance, a larger percentage of children had attendance rates greater than 90 percent in 1987-88 than in 1986-87. Kindergarten children scored slightly above grade level (56th percentile) in language and first-graders scored slightly below grade level in reading on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) administered in the spring. Only a quarter of the second graders scored at or above grade level on the second-grade city wide reading test.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Project SAIL is a program which is still evolving. The planning committees should investigate some of the reasons why children do not attend school regularly and develop specific plans to help improve attendance. The planning committees should also make parent involvement a priority during the second year.

PROJECT SAIL

INTRODUCTION

Project Sail, located at P.S. 41, District 23 in Brooklyn, is both an ungraded primary unit for children from age five to eight and an approach for teacher decision-making and school-based management. Students are encouraged to progress at their own pace without the pressures of the graded system; teachers and administrators work together to formulate curriculum and to administer this program.

Project SAIL is a direct result of a proposal by the United Federation of Teachers (U.F.T.) President Sandra Feldman. At the 1986 U.F.T Spring Conference, Ms. Feldman called for an alternative to the existing primary program, which locks children into a prescribed curriculum that too often leads to early and persistent failure. "Children should be taught as individuals," Feldman urged, "with teachers sharing their knowledge with them and deciding when to move them on. The primary years should not be locked into year-long grade levels, nor should teachers be required to use prescribed texts or methodologies or programs they don't agree are right for children."

Teachers at P.S. 41 in District 23, located in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, accepted Ms. Feldman's challenge and volunteered to attempt to make her proposal reality. On March 1987, 37 staff members attended a weekend

retreat sponsored by the U.F.T. to begin planning the new program.

The participating teachers organized themselves into committees, each of which was responsible for planning a specific area. The following committees were formed:

- The School Organization Committee was responsible for adjusting the school's schedule and design to accommodate Project Sail.
- The Evaluation Committee worked closely with the Curriculum Committee to set standards and goals for each subject area.
- The Curriculum and Materials Committee developed a comprehensive curriculum for Project SAIL students and ordered basic supplies.
- The Staff Development Committee held workshops in planning individualized activities, using learning centers, and changing approaches to teaching.
- The Parental Involvement Committee held parent workshops, open houses, and other activities in order to interest more parents in Project Sail.
- The Comprehensive School Improvement Project (CSIP) Committee was responsible for coordinating Project SAIL's goals and those of the CSIP plan.

These committees worked individually and together to develop the proposal and budget for Project SAIL. The staff continued to meet for planning purposes throughout the school year. Meetings were held every Wednesday afternoon after school and once a month on Saturday mornings from 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. at the U.F.T. headquarters in Manhattan.

Program Implementation

Project SAIL opened in September 1987. Program goals as

determined by the school staff were to provide children with successful scholastic experiences, to help children develop a positive self-image, to improve children's peer relationships, to promote self-discipline, to develop the ability to function independently, to promote the ability to adapt to new situations, to improve attendance, to reduce lateness, to help teachers identify children's individual talents and giftedness, to promote professional growth of teachers and administrators, and to increase parental involvement.

Project SAIL consisted of 24 classes of 18 to 22 children. Children were grouped homogeneously for reading and mathematics instruction and heterogeneously for all other curriculum areas. A set of three classes comprises a "core." Each core was named after a famous ship in American history. Each Project SAIL teacher was responsible for teaching reading and mathematics to his or her own class and one curriculum specialty to all classes within the core. This specialty was in the teacher's strongest curriculum area. Teachers within each core had the same preparation and lunch periods in order to facilitate planning, evaluation, and articulation for the core. Each day was divided into seven periods, six teaching periods and one lunch period. Classes rotated within their core four days a week. On Thursday the classes remained in their "homeroom" where they participated in enrichment activities and special projects. Weekly, each class spent a total of twenty periods in its own homeroom and five hours in each of the two other core classrooms.

Children who participated in the after-school center at P.S. 41 attended classes in music, art, games, sewing, reading enrichment, mathematics, storytelling, and cooking on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:00 to 4:00 P.M.

Staff development had two components. First, workshops were held during lunch or after school. These workshops were based on needs that had been identified by the committees, and included Literature-Based Reading, Open Court Reading Program, Learning Centers, Thematic Approach, and Arts and Crafts. In addition, a teacher-trainer visited classrooms, gave demonstration lessons, made observations, answered teachers' questions, and helped to make materials for individualized instruction.

Activities for parents included parent teas to discuss the program, a Thanksgiving dinner, a Chinese New Year party, St. Patrick's Day fair, cake sales, etc.

The Evaluation Study

In December 1987, the Project SAIL school-based evaluation committee contacted the Early Childhood Evaluation Unit to request technical assistance in assessing child outcomes. As a result of participation in Project SAIL, school staff expected that a) children would exhibit improved peer relationships and improved organizational skills, b) children would have improved attendance, and c) teachers would be better able to identify children's individual skills and talents.

After several meetings with the evaluation committee and Marjorie Wilkes, the U.F.T. representative assigned to Project SAIL, procedures were worked out for collecting data on children's socialization skills and attendance. Since the five- and six-year-old children were administered the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) in October and May as part of Project Child, and the seven- and eight-year-olds were tested as part of the citywide testing program in April, it was decided that information about pupil achievement would be included in the evaluation report as well. At the end of the school year, the teachers completed a questionnaire designed to collect information about their perceptions of the program after its first year.

Socialization Skills

To assess socialization skills, teachers completed a Child Behavior Rating Scale in February and again in June 1988. The 34-item scale was developed by ABT Associates to rate children on their social skills with peers in the classroom, their social skills with adults in the classroom, and their task orientation and task strategies. The completed checklists were delivered to the Early Childhood Evaluation Unit for scoring and analysis.

Completed sets of rating scales were received for 391 children. In February, the average score on the rating scale was 71.5 (S.D. = 20.5) out of a maximum of 132 and in June the average score was 83.7 (S.D. = 24.3). A comparison of the change in average teacher ratings from February to June shows a

statistically significant improvement ($p > .001$) in children's social skills.

Attendance

Pupil attendance for 1986-87 and 1987-88 was collected from children's cumulative records kept in the schools. Information was available for 413 children; more than half (249) had attendance data for both years. To assess improvement, attendance in 1986-87 was compared to attendance in 1987-88 for those students for whom two years of data were available. Average attendance in 1986-87 was 84.3 percent and average attendance for 1987-88 was 86.3 percent. As shown in Table 1, while there was only a slight increase in overall attendance, a larger percentage of children had attendance rates greater than 90 percent in 1987-88 than in 1986-87.

TABLE 1
Attendance Rates for 1986-87 and 1987-88

| <u>Attendance Rate</u> | <u>School Year</u> | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| | <u>1986-87</u> | | <u>1987-88</u> | |
| | <u>N</u> | <u>Percentage of Students</u> | <u>N</u> | <u>Percentage of Students</u> |
| Less than 50% | 6 | 2.4% | 6 | 2.4% |
| 51% - 60% | 5 | 2.0 | 4 | 1.6 |
| 61% - 70% | 16 | 6.0 | 11 | 4.4 |
| 71% - 80% | 37 | 14.5 | 32 | 12.9 |
| 81% - 90% | 93 | 37.3 | 87 | 34.5 |
| More than 90% | <u>93</u> | <u>37.3</u> | <u>110</u> | <u>44.2</u> |
| Totals | 249 | 100.0% | 249 | 100.0% |

Achievement

Increased student achievement was not an expected outcome identified by the school-based evaluation committee. Since testing was required as part of Project Child and the citywide testing program, however, it was decided that the children's achievement test scores would be examined as part of the program evaluation.

Kindergarten children were administered the Preprimer level of the MAT Language test as a pretest in October and the Primer level in May as a posttest. Matched pre- and posttest scores were available for 59 children. The mean percentile score increased from the first percentile in the fall to the 70th percentile in the spring. For the kindergarten children, the pretest was their first experience with a group-administered standardized test. As a result, the extremely low mean pretest score may have been caused by their inexperience with standardized testing formats rather than lack of knowledge. Posttest scores only were available for all 109 kindergarten children. The average posttest score was at the 56 percentile. Based on the posttest score, the majority of children finished kindergarten with the language skills needed to succeed in first grade.

The Primer and Primary I levels of the MAT Reading test were administered to first grade students. Matched scores were available for 78 children. The mean percentile score increased from the 30th percentile in the fall to the 47th percentile in

the spring. Posttest scores only were available for 109 first grade students. On the posttest they scored at the 43rd percentile. As a group, the first graders scored slightly below grade level on the reading test in the spring.

Second grade children took the Primary II level of the MAT Reading test in April as part of the citywide testing program. Scores for 134 children were obtained from central citywide test tapes. The mean percentile score was 25, indicating that only a quarter of the second graders scored at or above grade level in reading.

The children in the third grade were given the Degrees of Reading Power (D.R.P.) test in April. Mean scores obtained from central citywide test tapes indicate that 49 percent of the 144 third graders who were tested had scores at or above grade level. However, scores for third grade students should not be compared to those of children in the lower grades since they are based on different tests.

Teacher's Perceptions of the Program

Seventeen of the 24 Project SAIL teachers (71 percent) completed and returned the teacher questionnaires. According to information on the questionnaires, at the inception of the program, the teachers had varying degrees of experience and expertise. More than 85 percent of the teachers had at least five years of teaching experience and over half of the teachers had taught for ten years or more. About a third of the teachers

reported they had had previous experience working in experimental programs which involved team teaching.

According to the teachers they found the first year of the program both exciting and frustrating at the same time. In general, teachers felt that the program had been successful in achieving its goals for children. Almost 90 percent of the teachers believed that students' achievement had improved as a result of the program. A majority of teachers (82 percent) stated that they also had noticed changes in their students' attitudes toward school and learning. They said that the children were more enthusiastic about school, displayed an eagerness to take on more challenging work, and were willing to work on extra projects. They seemed more cooperative with adults and had better relationships with other children.

While the majority of the teachers believed that the children had benefitted from the program, 82 percent stated that they had encountered some problems during the first year. Most problems related to learning to work cooperatively with other teachers and/or scheduling the movement of the children between classrooms within the cores. At the beginning of the school year teachers were assigned to the cores by the school administrators. By February 1988, three sets of three teachers decided to maintain the cores as originally established, two sets of three teachers restructured their cores, and six teachers abandoned the core system entirely and returned to self-contained classrooms.

Teachers also reported that they had trouble getting parents involved in Project SAIL. Although they planned a variety of activities to involve parents of the children, relatively few parents attended any of the parent activities.

The teachers had a variety of recommendations to improve the program. They requested help in setting up and managing small group instruction, assistance in working with children who had emotional problems or were disruptive, and specific curriculum guidelines. They also recommended more time for planning and preparation, monthly meetings between teachers and parents, and more classroom supplies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Project SAIL is a program which is still evolving. During its first year a great deal was accomplished. The teachers successfully planned and implemented ungraded primary level classes. As a result of their efforts the children showed improvement in socialization skills. Although the project did not focus on academic achievement during its first year, by the end of the school year kindergarten children scored above grade level in language skills as measured by the MAT. The first grade children made large and significant gains in reading and finished the school year slightly below grade level on the MAT reading test. On the other hand, as a group, the second grade students scored far below grade level in the spring. Because no pretest was administered in the fall it is not possible to determine growth for this grade.

Overall attendance remained a problem. About 20 percent of the children attended school less than 80 percent of the time. It is recommended that the planning committees investigate some of the reasons why these children do not attend school regularly and develop specific plans to help improve their attendance.

Numerous studies have shown that children whose parents are knowledgeable about their schooling are more successful in school than similar children whose parents are not involved. Relatively few parents were involved in Project SAIL during its first year. It is recommended that the planning committees make parent involvement a priority during the second year.