

Executive Summary

Children's Pre-K Outcomes and Classroom Quality in Georgia's Pre-K Program: Findings from the 2013-2014 Evaluation Study



Ellen S. Peisner-Feinberg, Ph.D.
Jennifer M. Schaaf, Ph.D.
Lisa M. Hildebrandt, M.A.
Yi Pan, Ph.D.

Georgia's
Pre-K
Program
Evaluation
Project

Study Overview

Georgia's Pre-K Program is a state-funded universal pre-kindergarten program for 4-year-olds, serving over 80,000 children per year in a variety of settings, including public school systems, private providers, and blended Head Start/pre-k classrooms. The program operates on a school-year model, with class sizes of 20-22 children and a lead teacher with a bachelor's degree (or above) and an assistant teacher with a CDA credential (or above).

In 2011, the Georgia legislature funded a series of ongoing studies to evaluate the Georgia Pre-K Program. The first study (2011-2012) was designed to examine children's learning outcomes during pre-k, the factors that predict better outcomes, and the quality of children's experiences in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. The second study (2012-2013) was designed to investigate the effects of participation in Georgia's Pre-K on children's school readiness skills, and whether those effects are similar for different groups of children using a regression discontinuity design (RDD). The third study (2013-2018) involves a longitudinal design to follow a sample of children from pre-k through third grade, in order to examine the short- and long-term learning outcomes for children who attended Georgia's Pre-K as well as the quality of their preschool and school experiences.

The 2013-2014 study reported here provided the baseline year for the longitudinal study. This study included observations of teaching practices in a random sample of 199 Georgia's Pre-K classrooms and assessments of the language, literacy, math, general knowledge, and behavior skills of a sample of 1,169 children attending these classrooms, including parallel assessments in English and Spanish of 139 dual-language learners (DLLs). Classroom/teacher characteristics were examined as predictors of the quality of classroom practices, while both classroom quality as well as child/family and classroom/teacher characteristics were examined as moderators of children's growth in skills. In addition, comparisons with data from the first study were conducted, as appropriate.

The primary evaluation questions addressed by this study were: 1) What are the learning outcomes for children attending Georgia's Pre-K Program?, 2) What factors predict better learning outcomes for children?, and 3) What is the quality of children's experiences in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms?

© September 2015 by Ellen S. Peisner-Feinberg, FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Suggested citation: Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Schaaf, J. M., Hildebrandt, L.M., & Pan, Y. (2015). *Children's pre-k outcomes and classroom quality in Georgia's Pre-K Program: Findings from the 2013-2014 evaluation study, Executive summary*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

This study was funded by Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the funding agency.

The Executive Summary and full report of this study are available at <http://fpg.unc.edu/projects/georgia-pre-kindergarten-evaluation> or at www.dec.state.ga.us



UNC

FPG CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Key Findings

WHAT ARE THE LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WHO ATTENDED GEORGIA'S PRE-K?

- **Children made significant gains on almost all measures during pre-k, including all domains of learning.**

Children who attended Georgia's Pre-K made significant gains from the beginning to the end of the pre-k year in the areas of Language/literacy (Naming Letters, WJ III Letter-Word Identification, WJ III Sound Awareness, WJ III Word Attack), Math (Counting, WJ III Applied Problems), General knowledge (Social Awareness), and Behavior (SSiS Social Skills). Children's growth on most measures, which used standard scores, indicated that they progressed at a greater rate during the time they participated in Georgia's Pre-K than would be expected for normal developmental growth. Two areas that showed no changes in standard scores were WJ III Picture Vocabulary and SSiS Problem Behaviors, both of which had scores around the population mean at both time points. When these results were compared to a previous cohort of children who attended Georgia's Pre-K during 2011–2012, there was little difference in the pattern of results.

- **Children who were Spanish-speaking dual language learners showed gains on all skills in English and most skills in Spanish.**

For the English measures, children in the DLL subsample exhibited significant gains on all measures of Language/literacy, Math, General knowledge, and Behavior skills. For the Spanish measures, they exhibited gains in some areas of Language/literacy skills (Naming Letters Task, Bat III Sound Awareness, Bat III Word Attack), Math skills (Counting Task, Bat III Applied Problems), and General knowledge (Social Awareness Task). For two areas of Language/literacy skills (Bat III Letter-Word Identification, Bat III Picture Vocabulary), children showed significant decreases in their scores in Spanish during pre-k.

WHAT FACTORS PREDICTED BETTER LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN?

- **Children's level of English language proficiency was the most consistent predictor of greater growth in skills.**

Children at lower levels of English proficiency made greater gains in most Language/literacy (Naming Letters, WJ III Letter-Word Identification, WJ III Picture Vocabulary), Math (WJ III Applied Problems), General knowledge (Social Awareness), and Behavior skills (SSiS Social Skills) than children at higher levels of proficiency. The one exception was phonological awareness skills (WJ III Sound Awareness), a higher-order set of skills, which showed the opposite pattern with more proficient children making greater progress. In addition, children who attended public school programs made greater gains on some Language/literacy skills (Naming Letters, WJ III Letter-Word Identification, WJ III Word Attack) compared to children in private programs.

WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES IN GEORGIA'S PRE-K CLASSROOMS?

- **Classroom practices generally were in the medium to high range across the different aspects of quality that were measured.** The global quality of classroom practices was generally in the medium quality range, as measured by the ECERS-R, with a mean Total score of 3.7. The quality of classroom practices related to teacher-child interactions, as measured by the CLASS, was stronger in Emotional Support (5.7) and Classroom Organization (5.5), with average scores in the middle to high quality range, than in Instructional Support (2.5), with an average score in the low to middle range. Georgia's Pre-K classrooms scored in the basic to strong range on both General Classroom Environment (3.5) and Language and Literacy (3.4), as measured by the ELLCO. When the 2013–2014 sample and an earlier 2011–2012 sample of classrooms were compared, the pattern of results was quite similar, with no differences in overall quality. Further, this pattern of scores across the different scales is similar to what has been found in other pre-k samples.
- **Beliefs about teaching practices was the most consistent factor predicting differences in classroom quality.** Teachers who scored higher on a measure of developmentally appropriate beliefs about teaching practices had classrooms that were rated higher on measures of broader aspects of quality (ECERS-R Total and ELLCO General Classroom Environment) as well as on measures of more specific aspects (CLASS Emotional Support and Classroom Organization). Private sites also scored higher than public sites on two broader measures of quality (ECERS-R Total and ELLCO General Classroom Environment). Other factors that were not significant included lead teacher certification and years of experience teaching pre-k, class size, and percentage of non-English-speaking children in the classroom.

Conclusions

In sum, these results suggest that children who attend Georgia's Pre-K Program are participating in a good quality educational experience, resulting in positive outcomes across all domains of learning. Further, the findings were fairly consistent when comparing the results with those from an earlier study. As a universal program, Georgia's Pre-K accepts applications from all age-eligible 4-year-olds in the state. Given all of these findings, it may be worthwhile to consider expanding the program to provide these educational benefits to a wider population, such as by increasing the available slots.