First 5 LA School Readiness Initiative Evaluation Findings: Parent and Child Outcomes

DRAFT FINAL REPORT

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BACKGROUND

The purpose of the School Readiness Initiative Outcomes Study conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is to explore the extent to which School Readiness (SR) programs supported by First 5 LA\(^1\) are meeting the key goal of ensuring that both children and parents are ready for children’s transition to kindergarten. Although SR programs have other goals as well (e.g., increasing schools’ readiness for children), the SR Outcomes Study focused exclusively on outcomes for parents and children. To assess SR grantees’ progress toward the goal of preparing children and parents for school, AIR partnered with Dr. Carollee Howes and her team at the UCLA Center for Improving Child Care Quality, and in collaboration with First 5 LA, developed a mixed-methods study design. The study was conducted primarily from January through August of 2007, and incorporated parent phone surveys and focus groups, program surveys, direct child assessments, and document reviews. AIR staff also consulted periodically with the “First 5 LA School Readiness Evaluation Workgroup,” comprised of grantee staff and their local evaluators, to reflect on study logistics and to assist with the interpretation of preliminary findings.

The following evaluation questions guided the study design:

1. How do program activities and services differ across grantees and for families with children of different ages (birth to 3 and 3 to 5 years)?

2. Is participation in SR programs associated with positive outcomes for children and families?
   a. Is participation associated with children’s readiness for school?
   b. Is participation associated with positive developmental outcomes for children birth to age 3?
   c. Is participation associated with families’ support for school readiness (including support for children birth to 3 years and 3 to 5 years)?

3. Are there differences in outcomes based on variations in program activities and services?

This document presents findings from the parent phone survey and focus groups, direct child assessments, and grantee report reviews.

Methodology

The primary data sources reported here are the parent survey, focus groups, and direct child assessments. In addition, grantees’ local evaluation reports from 2005-2006 were reviewed by AIR, and information from these reviews is included where relevant to the findings from the 2007 AIR/UCLA child and parent outcomes data collection. The methodology used for collecting each of these data sources is described below.

Parent Survey

Telephone surveys were administered to parents participating in First 5 LA School Readiness programs in the winter and summer of 2007 to assess changes in parents’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as well as changes in parent reports of children’s developmental status. The following methodology was used for data collection:

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\(^1\) School Readiness programs receive funding from First 5 LA as well as state-level matching grants.
Program staff at each of the 42 grantees completed “Data Capture” forms, which provided basic information on all program services and activities for parents. Sampling of parents was based on responses to the Data Capture forms.

Activities that involved the most parents were parent classes, parent-child activities, and home visits; parents were selected from these activities proportionate to reported enrollment.

Study liaisons at each site submitted lists to AIR of parents newly enrolled in these selected activities. (Newly enrolled parents were anticipated to be relatively new to the School Readiness program and not involved in activities previously.)

AIR randomly selected parents from these lists and returned the sample selections to liaisons for recruitment. Liaisons explained the study to parents and provided AIR with parent contact information.

Parent contact information was sent to Synovate, the phone survey center used for conducting the survey, and trained interviewers contacted parents and obtained informed consent for participation.

Calling for the Time 1 survey began in March 2007 and ended in the middle of April 2007. A total of 320 parents were surveyed at Time 1, for a response rate of 63 percent.

The same parents were contacted for the Time 2 survey, which began in June 2007 and ended at the end of July. A total of 205 parents were surveyed at Time 2, for a 67 percent response rate.

At both time points, 13 separate attempts were made to contact parents at different times of the day and week, including evenings and weekends. The telephone surveys took approximately 30 minutes to complete, and there was an average of four months and four days between the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys.

Analysis of the parent survey data was completed in several steps:

First, since many of the survey questions were designed to measure similar constructs, items were combined to form scales for data reduction as well as reliability purposes. Scales included in the final analysis have a Cronbach’s alpha of .70 or higher, which is considered high by educational research standards. When a scale was not considered highly reliable, or when it was not feasible to create a scale, the individual question items were analyzed.

Second, sampling weights were applied to all SR parent survey data presented here. Sampling weights are adjustment factors applied to the data to take into account differences in probability of selection and participation. These corrections allow us to draw generalizations from the sample to the population of parents participating in the three activity types selected.

Third, paired t-tests were performed to analyze mean differences in ratings at Time 1 and Time 2. Weighted means from these paired t-tests are presented below.

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2 The median time period between Time 1 and Time 2 was three months and twenty-eight days.
3 Significance values are based on change scores from Time 1 to Time 2 and adjusted standard errors not presented in this report.
Fourth, to investigate the influence of factors such as the type of activity the parent was participating in, the amount of time the parent spent in an activity, or the age of their children, we examined differences in mean scores by activity type, parent-reported intensity of participation in the activity or whether their child was in the birth-to-three versus the three-to-five age range. Results from these analyses are presented below where relevant. (Comprehensive results for all comparisons will be presented in appendices in the final report to be completed in March of 2008.)

Finally, when possible, comparison data from national, regional, and local studies were examined to provide context for the observed results of SR parent survey responses. Comparison data presented here includes data from three studies:

- Early Head Start Research and Evaluation (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2004) Parent Interviews conducted in 1996 through 2001. Parents in this study were less likely to be Latino (37% White, 35% African American, 23% Hispanic or Latino among the EHS sample), though education levels were more comparable with the SR parents (48% of EHS parents had less than a high school diploma, as compared to 56% in the SR parent survey sample).

- Evaluation of the First 5 LA Family Literacy Initiative (Quick, Rice, Makris, Parrish, Waugh, & González, 2005) Child Outcomes Study Parent Interviews conducted in Year 2 of the intensive parent-child initiative. Parents in this study were comparable to SR parents in terms of ethnicity (98% Hispanic or Latino, 1% African American, 1% Asian) but had somewhat lower incomes (79% earned a household income of $20,000 or less) and education levels (68% had less than a high school diploma).

- United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta Born Learning Campaign Evaluation (Phillips, Parrish & Manship, 2006) self-administered parent surveys conducted in 2005 with parents who received information on child development and parenting in the form of direct services, such as one-on-one parenting sessions, assistance in finding answers to their parenting questions, parenting workshops, and other training and technical assistance. Pretest and posttest surveys were administered approximately four to five months apart. Parents in this study were somewhat different in terms of ethnicity (56% African American, 36% Hispanic or Latino, 3% White, 3% Asian 1% American Indian, 1% Other) and had high education levels compared to SR parents (16% of the parents in the Born Learning study had less than a high school diploma, as compared to 56% of the parents in the SR parent survey sample).

**Parent Focus Groups**

For more in-depth information on parent experiences with the SR programs, five focus groups were conducted with a total of 41 parents at five First 5 LA School Readiness programs in August of 2007:

- Spanish bilingual interviewers facilitated the focus groups when Spanish-speaking parents participated.

- Questions included topics such as:

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4 EHS programs are generally considered more comprehensive and intensive than many of the First 5 LA-funded SR activities.
Program impacts on parents (including changes in the way they feel about their role as a parent, in their understanding of how children learn, in their interactions with their child, and in their support for their child’s learning and readiness for kindergarten)

Program impacts on children (including children’s learning and other changes, and children’s readiness for school)

Parent’s knowledge about, comfort with, and involvement in their child’s school

Strengths and weaknesses of the SR program and suggestions for improvement

Focus group discussions took 60 to 90 minutes.

Data were analyzed using qualitative methods to identify common themes across groups. Highlights from these analyses are presented in this document.

Direct Child Assessments

Child assessments were administered to children participating in First 5 LA School Readiness programs in the spring/summer of 2007 to determine their developmental status on a variety of primarily cognitive outcome measures. The following methodology was used:

• Similar to the parent survey approach, program staff at each of the 42 grantees completed “Data Capture Forms,” which provided basic information on all program services and activities for children.

• Activities that had the most children were preschool programs, parent-child activities, kindergarten transition programs, and home visits. One or more activities within these categories (meeting a minimum level of participation intensity of at least eight activity hours per week) were selected from each grantee that offered such activities.

• Information about the study, consent forms, and short questionnaires about the child and family were distributed to parents of children participating in selected activities and collected by study liaisons.

• Trained assessors from UCLA’s Center for Improving Child Care Quality visited programs and assessed consented children who were present on the assessment day, which was scheduled as close to the end of the program activity as possible to enable children to have maximum exposure to the activity before the assessment.

• Assessments included:
  o Pre-LAS 2000 (Duncan and De Avila, 1998) for children whose home language is not English, as reported by teachers: Simon Says, Art Show, Human Body sub-tests. This screener allows for determination of which language to use (English or Spanish) for the rest of the assessment.
  o Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-III; Dunn and Dunn, 1989) and Test de Vocabulario en Imagenes Peabody (TVIP; Dunn, Padilla, Lugo, & Dunn, 1986). A non-verbal test of receptive vocabulary.
  o Letter naming, number naming, color naming, and counting (FACES research team, modified from Mason & Stewart, 1989).

Because of the prohibitive costs of assessing children in their individual homes, home visit activity participants were not included in the direct child assessments.
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- Name writing task (for four- and five-year-olds only)
- Story and Print Concepts (Zill et al., 1998; modified from Mason & Stewart, 1989). Test of emergent literacy, including print and book knowledge and story comprehension.
- Assessment Behavior Scale (FACES Research Team). Upon completion of the above assessment battery, the child assessor rated each child’s attitude and behavior during the assessment. Eight items covered task persistence, attention span, body movement, attention to directions, comprehension of directions, verbalization, ease of relationship, and confidence. The assessor also completed a seven-item checklist of special conditions that might apply: nonverbal responses, nonstandard English, English as a second language, limited English proficiency, child has difficulty hearing or seeing, and child’s speech is difficult to understand.

- In total, 240 children were assessed.
- To analyze the data, we examined mean scores on each of the assessments used, including standardized scores for the two normed assessments (the PPVT/TVIP and the Woodcock-Johnson/Woodcock-Muñoz).
- As with the parent survey analyses, we also compared groups of children to assess differential impacts of program participation. Specifically, we compared the performance of children from different activity types, and we calculated correlations between assessment scores and length of participation in the program.
- In addition, for comparison purposes, a Hispanic/Latino subsample was selected from two national studies with similar populations. The two comparison samples were from the State Pre-K (Early et al., 2005) and Early Head Start studies (Love et al., 2005). Significant differences between these Hispanic/Latino subsamples and the Hispanic/Latino subsample from the SR direct child assessments are noted in the text.

**Grantee Report Reviews**

In addition to the new data collected from participants in grantee programs, as described above, AIR also conducted an analysis of extant data – namely grantees’ summaries of their own evaluation findings in their 2005-06 year-end reports – as part of the SR Outcomes Study. In order to maximize the utility of the information collected by grantees through their own program-level evaluation efforts, AIR conducted a thorough review of grantees’ evaluation findings related to parent and child outcomes and highlighted common themes. These findings are highlighted in this report where relevant.

**Demographics**

Demographic characteristics for the parents and children who participated in the parent survey and the direct child assessment components of the outcomes study are presented below.
Parent Survey

- The majority of parents (94 percent) reported that they were Hispanic or Latino, and 79 percent spoke Spanish as their primary language.6
  - 94% Hispanic or Latino
  - 1% African American
  - 3% Asian
  - 1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  - 1% White

- Slightly more than half of the parents who were surveyed (56 percent) reported that they had an education level of less than a high school (HS) diploma.
  - 56% Less than HS diploma
  - 21% HS graduate
  - 17% Some college
  - 6% Bachelor’s degree or more

- The average age of parents participating in the survey was 32 years. Parents’ ages ranged from 18 to 66 years old, which included some grandparents who participated.
  - 16% ages 18-24
  - 26% ages 25-29
  - 29% ages 30-34
  - 18% ages 35-39
  - 11% ages 40+

- One child was randomly selected from each family to serve as the focus child7 for parent survey questions about children’s developmental status. Ages of the randomly selected children ranged from 4 months to 5 years and 11 months.
  - 2% Less than 12 months
  - 11% 12-23 months
  - 15% 24-35 months
  - 24% 35-47 months
  - 48% 48+ months

- Annual household incomes of the parents were generally low. Sixty percent of parents earned $20,000 or less, while only 11 percent earned $40,000 or more.
  - 23% Less than $10,000
  - 40% $10,000-$20,000
  - 21% $20,000-$30,000
  - 6% $30,000-$40,000
  - 2% $40,000-$50,000
  - 8% $50,000 or more

Direct Child Assessments

- The average age of children participating in direct child assessments was 60 months. Children’s ages ranged from 46-75 months. Half of the children were under 60 months old and half were 60 months old or older.

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6 It was only possible to conduct the parent survey in Spanish and English languages; therefore the findings presented in this report are only generalizable to parents who speak these languages.
7 The focus child is referred to as “[your child]” within the graphs in this report.
• 95 percent of children were identified as Hispanic or Latino and 50 percent were assessed in English, as determined by the Pre-LAS (the screener used to determine the language of assessment).

• On average, assessed children were in the program for 13 months.

• Parent reports revealed that 8 percent of children had been identified as having special needs or had an IEP or IFSP.

• Forty-two percent of the parents of the assessed children reported that they had an education level of less than a High School diploma.
  o 42% Less than HS diploma
  o 24% HS graduate
  o 24% Some college
  o 10% Bachelor’s degree or more

• Half of the parents reported that they were currently employed, working 34 hours per week, on average.

• Annual household incomes of the parents of the assessed children were similar to those of parents who participated in the parent survey. Just over half of the parents earned $20,000 or less, while 17 percent earned $40,000 or more.
  o 21% Less than $10,000
  o 32% $10,000-$20,000
  o 16% $20,000-$30,000
  o 13% $30,000-$40,000
  o 7% $40,000-$50,000
  o 11% $50,000 or more
PARENT OUTCOMES

As mentioned above, parent outcomes were obtained primarily through analysis of change scores from the parent phone survey. These results are presented below. Results from parent focus groups and grantee report reviews are also incorporated where relevant.

Parent Knowledge

Changes in parents’ knowledge and understanding of child development from Time 1 to Time 2 was assessed by asking parents about basic parenting information related to preparing their children to be ready for school. We found that even in this relatively short period of time, parents demonstrated modest increases in knowledge across several areas. Although small, changes noted are statistically significant. For example:

- On average, parents reported that they believed it was important to begin reading to children at an earlier age at Time 2 compared to Time 1. SR parents’ views on when to begin reading to children at Time 2 were not significantly different from parents responding to the Atlanta Born Learning Campaign survey at Time 2.

Figure 1: Parent Report on the Best Time to Start Reading to Children

![Bar chart showing percentage of responses to the best time to start reading to children.](chart.png)

What do you think is the best time to start reading to children? (All ages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2*</th>
<th>Comparison (BL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During a child’s first year</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a child is 2-4 years</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a child is in kindergarten</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Parent Survey

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
• Significantly more parents at Time 2 than at Time 1 reported that they believed a child’s experiences in the first year of life had a greater impact on school performance.

**Figure 2: Parent Report on First Year Impact on School**

Which statement do you agree with most? (All ages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage of Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The first year has no impact on school performance</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first year has a little impact on school performance</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first year has a major impact on school performance</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Parent Survey

• Parents also showed improvement in their understanding of the importance of monitoring their child’s development. On average, parents at Time 2 reported that one should begin discussing his or her child’s development with a health professional at an earlier age compared to the parent reports at Time 1.

We did not find significant growth in parents’ knowledge in the following areas, though parent responses at Time 1 were already close to the high end of the scale, making it more difficult to demonstrate growth at Time 2 (i.e., ceiling effects noted for these items):

• The learning benefits of involving children in everyday learning activities
• The importance of responding to children’s cues for showing children they care
• The importance of play for children at different ages

Parents in focus groups described improvements in their knowledge about child development in a number of areas. Twelve parents across the five programs visited said the program had taught them more about what to expect from their children at different ages and about how children learn. Parents

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8 Parents who reported having had more SR program participation at Time 1 rated the importance of play significantly higher than parents who reported receiving less service at Time 1.
reported learning that children start learning from a very young age, so stimulation in the early months is important. For example, one parent said:

I have learned that from a very young age a child is learning, and before we didn’t pay much attention like we do now... before I would say to myself, “Oh he is still young,” but one doesn’t realize their capacity from when they are in the womb.

Another parent also reflected on the importance of understanding the stage of child development in order to support their child’s learning:

When I understand their age and their development, then I will be able to guide them the right way and not give them hard things to do when actually [they’re at a different] developmental level. It is good for me to know what to give them to do, what they can do, this kind of stuff. [The program was] giving us this knowledge. They talk about lots of issues in Mommy and Me.

Although we did not see statistically significant growth in this area on the parent survey, focus group parents (five parents across three different programs) reported learning about the importance of playing with their children. Some parents mentioned that they have learned how to play with their children as a mechanism for teaching them. For example:

I’ve learned to play with them. And by their playing I know that they are learning, and it’s fun. Learning doesn’t have to be tough or serious stuff, especially at their age. It has to be lots of fun. And even though I’m much older than my kids, I have to have fun with them too.
Supportive Environments for Learning – Home Literacy Resources

Next, we explored resources available in the home to support children’s learning, particularly language and literacy development. We found small, but statistically significant, growth on each of the measures used to assess home literacy resources among parents surveyed. Specifically:

- Parents at Time 2 reported significantly more children’s books in the home, compared to the same parents’ reports at Time 1. When compared with parents participating in the intensive Family Literacy Initiative, SR parents at Time 2 reported similar numbers of books in the home.

Figure 3: Parent Report on Children’s Books in the Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Rating</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2**</th>
<th>Comparison (Family Literacy)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Source: Parent Survey
- We also considered use of the public library as an alternative to book ownership. On average, parents reported significantly greater frequency of use of the public library to borrow books or materials for their child at Time 2, compared to Time 1.

**Figure 4: Parent Report on Visits to the Library with Their Child**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a year</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a month</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week +</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Parent Survey

- Grantees also measured changes in home literacy materials in their year-end reports. In addition to considering the number of books in the home and trips to the library, grantees also assessed the availability of writing and other literacy materials in the home, such as crayons, paint supplies, paper, and so forth. All six grantees reporting on this area indicated increases in the use or availability of literacy resources among parents; four of the six reports highlighted statistically significant growth.
Support for Children’s Learning and Development – Parent-Child Engagement

In addition to creating a supportive learning environment at home, parents can also engage their children in interactive activities that support their learning and healthy development. We asked parents at Time 1 and Time 2 about the frequency with which they engaged their children in a variety of interactive activities. We found small, but statistically significant, growth in a number of areas:

- Among parents of children 2 to 5 years of age, we found statistically significant increases from Time 1 to Time 2 in the frequency with which they engaged their children in language and literacy activities such as telling stories, learning about rhyming words, and practicing the sounds that letters make.

Figure 5: Parent Report of Engagement in Literacy Activities with Their Child

![Graph showing parent report of engagement in literacy activities](image)

*Source: Parent Survey*

- In addition, when we consider a wide variety of activities, from language and literacy activities to playing games and working on art projects together, we found significant increases from Time 1 to Time 2 on interactive activities in general.

Parent focus group results supported the survey findings. Fourteen parents across the five programs visited said they felt the SR programs had taught them how to support their children in learning language and literacy skills. Learning by playing was the most common strategy reported by parents, but there were many other good examples of activities teachers have taught parents to use to support their children’s learning. For example, one parent said:
I remember in one of the workshops, the presenter said to speak 2500 words to your children everyday. I said “I think we already do that” and they said, "No, count your words.” So if [our children] ask, “Are we leaving?” instead of saying “Yes,” you should say, “Yes, we are leaving in 10 minutes. We are going here and doing that. Then we will come back.”

In cases where children have a speech delay, parents were told to motivate children to speak. For example, one parent said:

“They explained that we had to ask them why they are pointing – what it is that he wants. And then say, “This is called this – try to say it.” And, “What do you want it for? To look at it? To play with?” So he would say, for example, “Mom, I want that book to read,” and we motivated him to speak.

We did not find consistently positive growth in parent-child engagement on other measures in the parent survey, however. For example:

- We did not find significant increases in the frequency with which parents of children birth to age five reported reading to their children. However, it is important to note that overall, parents reported relatively frequent reading with their children at Time 1, leaving little room for growth at Time 2. When asked how many times in the past week parents read to their child, parents reported an average of 1.86 at Time 1 and 1.87 at Time 2 where zero equals no reading during the week and two equals reading three or more times a week.

- In comparisons with parents from Family Literacy programs, SR parents read to their children significantly more at Time 2 (1.87 times per week) than Family Literacy parents who had an average of reading to their children 1.58 times per week.

- When comparing with Early Head Start samples, we looked at the percentage of parents who said they read to their child at least everyday. SR parents at Time 2 were significantly less likely than Early Head Start treatment group parents to report reading to their child at this rate, though they were no different from control group parents from the EHS study.

On the other hand, parents in focus groups talked about strategies learned for reading with their children. This was mentioned by four parents in two different programs. These parents talked about how they and their children learn together. For example:

With books for instance, before we would read books, but it wasn’t explained. I would read, “The strawberry is red. You eat it.” And that’s it. After taking parenting classes, we read, and [the teachers] would explain, “You should say, ‘The strawberry is good. Do you like to eat strawberries?’ And, ‘What color is the strawberry?’” To engage and open up the children’s minds. And my own mind opens up too because I didn’t know the strawberry was “red” [meaning the word red in English]. When I went to that class now I do that. If we go out somewhere, I ask things like, “What are you doing?” “Do you like it?” “What did you do?” and he asks me too. He will ask me more, and it has helped me a lot in the sense of opening up my mind.
In the parent survey, we also asked parents of children birth to age 3 about activities in which they engage their children. Specifically:

- We asked parents about the likelihood that they would engage their children in a variety of activities (including singing to them, reading to them, and playing with them) in the next week. Although changes were in the positive direction (from 8.58 at Time 1 to 8.71 at Time 2), we did not find statistically significant growth among these parents from Time 1 to Time 2; but again, ratings were very high at Time 1.

![Figure 6: Parent Report on Likelihood of Engaging Their Child in Activities](image)

**Figure 6: Parent Report on Likelihood of Engaging Their Child in Activities**

- Parents of children birth to age 3 who participated in program activities that involved parents and children interacting together (such as “Mommy and Me” classes) did demonstrate statistically significant growth on this measure, reporting increased likelihood of engaging in these activities at Time 2 when compared to Time 1.

**Parenting Style**

We asked parents about their parenting style, including their use of routines for their children, their approach to discipline, and their role as a parent. We found some mixed results in this domain.

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9 It should be noted that these particular items ask about the *likelihood* of doing a particular activity with their child. This type of question may lead to more socially desirable responses than questions that ask whether the activity was actually done in the past week.
Routines

We asked about parents’ use of regular routines with the children through the parent survey but did not find significant changes from Time 1 to Time 2. Specifically:

- Parents appeared to be slightly more likely to report that they had a consistent bedtime routine for their children at Time 2, compared to Time 1. However the difference was not statistically significant.

- When comparing these results with those in the Family Literacy and Early Head Start samples, we considered the number of parents who said they had a routine and followed the routine 4 or 5 days during the work week. No differences were found when SR parents were compared to these samples.\(^\text{10}\)

- This topic was also not a major focus of grantees’ own evaluation efforts. Only two grantee year-end reports measured parents’ use of regular routines, though both reported positive change over time. Only one of these reports discussed their findings in terms of statistical significance; that grantee did report statistically significant growth in parents’ use of regular routines.

Discipline

Although learning about discipline was one of the most commonly cited benefits of parents’ participation in School Readiness programs in focus group discussions with parents at all five sites, we did not find significant changes in parents’ reported use of or dispositions regarding discipline.

- There were no changes in parent reports of their ability to stick to their rules or feeling that they had the “energy to make [their] child behave” from Time 1 to Time 2. Parents rated their behavior on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “exactly like me” and 5 is “not at all like me,” mean scores at Time 2 on these items were 2.62 and 2.87 respectively.

- There was also no change in parent reports of spanking their children when they misbehave or act up from Time 1 to Time 2 among parents of children 1-5. Less than one quarter of parents at each time point reported spanking their child. Similar percentages of parents participating in the Family Literacy Initiative reported spanking their children.

Change in discipline strategies was a major theme in parent focus group discussions. Eighteen parents across five programs mentioned that they have learned effective techniques for supporting their children by teaching them with appropriate discipline techniques and by becoming more patient themselves. One strategy parents described for becoming more patient with their children was to develop their understanding of the way children communicate. Many parents proudly talked about how they now are able to talk to their children in a way that will help control their child’s frustration when they are having trouble expressing themselves. Parents also mentioned being able to control their own temper and frustration with their children. For example, one parent said:

\[\text{Now I try to calm down and calm him down. I let him know I am there for him and would like to know what the problem is and maybe show him how to solve it.}\]

\(^\text{10}\) Significantly more SR parents had a regular routine compared to the parents of 24-month-old children in the control group of the Early Head Start study.
Parents also reported learning about how to discipline their children in a different way. They mentioned cultural differences between the U.S. and their home countries in the ways that children’s misbehaviors are handled. Parents talked about the process of incorporating techniques from the new culture:

The truth is, and I think it happens to many of us is that we are used to doing things differently in our own countries and disciplining in a different way. One thing we do is we spank them, and we speak to them harshly so that they recognize and differentiate the tone of voice when we are mad or even happy so that they understand what we want from them. Here I have learned to be more patient and understanding when they cry and when they throw a tantrum…. I was very impulsive with my first child. When I brought him, I would get mad at him very suddenly. I would yell and spanked him. Here at the [SR] program they would explain to us that instead of yelling and spanking, to put ourselves in their place, to speak to them and try to understand them. They are not able to express themselves, so they throw tantrums, but we need to be able to differentiate their behavior to know what they want – attention, if they are hungry or want to play.

Nine grantee year-end evaluation reports assessed parent growth in patience and discipline. All but one reported positive change over time; two reported statistically significant growth (the other reports did not share such analyses). The ninth report found no change from pre- to posttest.

**Parent Role and Disposition**

Parents in focus groups had much to say about their changing views on their role as a parent. Fifteen parents across four programs mentioned that they feel their role as a parent has changed after being in the program. Some parents thought the way they interact with their children has changed since they started participating in SR activities. For example, one parent described her increased level of involvement with her child:

I think it taught me to pay more attention to my child, to play with him, help him, and show him more things. Before I would sit him down and let him do things on his own. But we do have to show them things and help them out.

Focus group parents also reported that they felt they were learning how to become a role model for their children. For example, one parent described it this way:

I learn that it’s not what I say – they learn from what I say and actually from what I do.

Another parent added:

If I say something, it doesn’t mean [anything], but if I do it, they see that I do it, [and] they will learn from me. That’s what I learn here too – it’s not just talking.

Parents in focus groups also discussed how they have learned to support their children emotionally, by helping them become ready for the separation with their mothers when their
children go to preschool or kindergarten.

[The program has helped me] to let him to be independent – that I don’t have to be there taking care of him all the time.

I learned to let go a little bit. To not be so possessive. I have always been overprotective.

Parent Involvement and School Comfort

We examined parents’ “school readiness” by exploring their comfort with and involvement in school (and program) activities as well as their concerns and beliefs about what it means for their child to be ready for school. To assess parent involvement and comfort, we asked parents how comfortable they felt visiting their child’s school or program, how comfortable they felt talking with their child’s teacher, and the extent of their involvement in volunteer activities at the school or program.

- We found no significant change from Time 1 to Time 2 in parents’ reported involvement and comfort with the school among parents whose children were 3 to 5 and attending preschool or childcare. However, parent responses at Time 1 showed they already reported “a lot” of comfort with the school and their child’s teacher, leaving little room for continued growth on this item at Time 2.

Figure 7: Parent Report on Comfort Level with School and Teachers

![Bar chart showing parent level of comfort with the school and teachers](chart.png)

Source: Parent Survey
• We did find that parents who received more SR program service during the period between Time 1 and Time 2 surveys showed a significant difference on this scale. That is, even though the average change among all parents who were asked these questions was small, parents who participated more showed significantly greater growth compared to those who participated less.

In the review of grantee reports, seven grantees that assessed parents’ feelings about, and involvement in, their child’s school or program reported positive change overall; two reported statistically significant growth. Two of these grantees also reported mixed results. None of the grantee reports included an analysis of changes in comfort with the school system or parent involvement for parents of children from birth to age 3.

Parents in focus groups were also eager to talk about what they had learned about the K-12 public school system in Los Angeles. Seven parents mentioned learning about how to talk to the school staff to support their child academically or emotionally. For example, one parent said:

Right now I don’t have children in the school, but what I have learned is that if I see that my child is sad [and] he doesn’t like to go to school, then something is wrong. And [I learned] what I can do to approach the school. I can’t simply walk up to the teacher, because there is a process to find out what is going on with my child. ...[I learned] how I can ... set up an appointment, what rights I have as a parent to know what is going on with my child, to get him to school so that he gets the education he needs.

Parents in focus groups at two sites mentioned they received specific workshops about how to participate in school and why it is important. Parents felt these workshops had given them useful tools to help them feel more confident when participating in their children’s school. For example, one parent said:

The director [of a local pre-school] even gave us his mobile phone number. He gave the workshop and now many of us are not afraid of speaking to the teachers because here they teach us we have rights and obligations. ...The workshop leader also gave us a letter for the parents who might feel intimidated speaking to the teacher.

Another parent added:

[The director] said she didn’t want us to see them as inaccessible. Maybe for outgoing people who are not afraid to speak up that is good, but for those who are still afraid, the letter was an excellent way. They show us how to communicate.

Another parent spoke about what she had learned in the program:

To always communicate with our children’s teacher. And if you have questions, to make sure and set up meetings with the teacher to see your child’s progress and not wait until it’s too late.
Surveyed parents were also asked about their understanding of expectations for kindergarten entry and their level of comfort with their child’s readiness for school at Time 1 and again at Time 2. No significant changes were observed. Specifically:

- Although parents appeared to be somewhat less likely to express concerns about their child’s readiness for school at Time 2 compared to Time 1, suggesting increased comfort levels with expectations for kindergarten entry, this difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 8: Parent Report on Their Concerns about Child’s Kindergarten Readiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Parents</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: Parent Survey
• When asked to rate the importance of various child-level skills for being ready for kindergarten (such as being able to count to 20, take turns, sit still, and pay attention), parents reported lower ratings at Time 2 compared to Time 1. Although the absolute difference in ratings over time was small, it was a statistically significant change. According to input received from the grantees and their local evaluators who comprise the “School Readiness Evaluation Workgroup,” this finding may relate to parents’ development of somewhat more realistic (and appropriate) expectations for what a child should know and be able to do by kindergarten entry through their participation in SR programs.

Figure 9: Parent Report on Importance of Specific Child-Level Skills for School Readiness

![Parent-Reported Importance of Specific Child-Level Skills for School Readiness (Scale of 8 items) (All ages)](image)

- In addition, only the two most academically focused individual items that comprise this scale – being able to count to 20 and knowing most of the letters of the alphabet – showed a statistically significant decline in parents’ ratings of importance from Time 1 to Time 2. Again, this may suggest that parents’ expectations (especially with regard to academic skills) were becoming more realistic through their participation in the program.

Parents in focus groups had more to say on this subject. Eleven parents from four sites stated that their program taught them about what their children needed to know before going to kindergarten. Ideas parents had about what their children needed to know varied widely. Some examples were related to physical and motor skills (e.g., knowing how to use the scissors, going to the bathroom on their own, washing their hands, putting on their shoes and clothes). Others talked about academic skills like knowing colors, shapes, and the alphabet. Other ideas involved language and literacy skills, such as improving their speech, knowing and being able to write their own name, knowing
how to interact with books, and knowing their address and phone number. Some ideas were more social-emotional, like knowing how to share. For example, one parent said:

I think that because when I took classes [the teacher] let us know what they needed to know to enter kindergarten, such as knowing and writing their own name, know their address, phone number, parents names, knowing and recognizing the alphabet, and knowing what each letter means. And, well, my son knows all this!

Two parents from the same program reported they did not receive this kind of information from their program, but that they would like to in the future.

Maybe it is something I would like added to the program, if they could to prepare something about who to speak to and things they need to learn before they go to school. These would be things we need to work on with them specifically and maybe something we can add.

Parent Support and Resilience

Another important outcome for parents involved changes in the support system that parents have around them to ensure that they will be able to continue to support their children’s learning and healthy development even without program services. We found positive changes on two measures of social support:

- When asked about supports available to them if they had a problem and were feeling depressed or confused about what to do, parents named more support people at Time 2 (2.2 people on average) compared to Time 1 (1.8 people), and the difference was statistically significant. This finding held up for parents in parenting classes as well as those participating in parent-child activities, but not for parents receiving home visits, suggesting that parents may be increasing their peer networks through participation in on-site program activities.

- In addition, when asked who they could go to for advice or information about the care of their child, parents named significantly more support people at Time 2 (1.6 people) compared to Time 1 (1.3 people).

Parent focus groups also reflected this finding. Five parents across four sites reported seeing their programs as a support network. Parents said that they feel they can bring their problems to the school and figure out how to solve them together as a group. Some examples that describe this feeling:

It’s like a support group. You learn from other parents what to do and what not to do

One thing is that here aside from learning we help each other out like family. We make new friends. It is overall good for our children, like for their birthday parties, we will call each other up and the children see each other again and they are so happy. So, it is like part of our family.

I don’t have any family here, so I like the support that they give me.

Not only have relationships with other parents been crucial for participants to feel supported, parents also feel they can trust staff and receive the support they need to become confident in their environment. Eight parents across three sites stated that they feel supported by staff and encouraged by them to be better parents. For example, parents said:
They have really qualified staff, not only the teachers, but also the people working in the offices. They are amazing – they know everything. You can ask them any question, and they always have an answer: ‘Yes, I can hook you up with somebody for that issue.’

I like the professionalism that the personnel demonstrate through the classes. The trust we have in them, the fact that they make us feel at ease and confident that we can talk and ask questions, and focus and participate

I speak to the teacher about my concerns, and she gives me encouragement and lets me know that all children learn at a different pace.

Some other parents also said they feel more confident as mothers now. For example, one parent said:

I used to judge myself, ‘Oh, I’m a bad mom. I’m not doing it right.’ But I realize that we’re figuring it out together.

CHILD OUTCOMES

To assess child outcomes, we used two approaches. The primary approach involved direct assessments of 240 children close to the end of their participation in School Readiness program activities. To supplement the direct assessments, which focused primarily on cognitive outcomes for 4- and 5-year-olds, we also asked parents participating in the parent survey to report on the developmental status of their children. Findings from these two study components are highlighted below.

Cognitive Development

We assessed children’s cognitive developmental status – their language and emergent literacy skills and early mathematics skills – through the direct child assessment component, and we asked parents to report on their children’s status as well.
Language Skills

Direct child assessments included a measure of children’s English language skills, as well as their receptive vocabulary in English (for those children who passed the language screener) or Spanish.

- Of the children that were identified by the teacher as having Spanish as their home language, approximately half of the children passed the Pre-LAS language screener, (a score of 31 or higher out of 40) which indicated they were proficient enough in English to be assessed in English. Pre-LAS scores for children in SR programs were, in fact, significantly higher, on average, than scores for a demographically similar population of children enrolled in State Preschool.

Figure 10: Mean Pre-LAS Scores for SR and State Pre-K Samples

![Mean Pre-LAS Scores for SR and State Pre-K Samples](chart.png)

Source: Direct Child Assessments
Average receptive language scores on the PPVT/TVIP were below age norms, though this is not surprising for this population. Just over half of the children assessed in English scored above 85 percent, which is the cutoff for a child not being considered “at risk”; just under half of the children assessed in Spanish scored above this mark. Mean scores on both the English and Spanish versions of this assessment were comparable to scores for similar populations of children enrolled in State Preschool and those participating in the Early Head Start study.11

**Figure 11: Mean Standardized Scores for SR, State Pre-K, and EHS Children on the PPVT and TVIP**

![Bar chart showing mean standardized scores for Receptive Language on PPVT and TVIP for School Readiness, State Pre-K, and Early Head Start children.]

Source: Direct Child Assessments

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11 Only Hispanic/Latino SR children are compared to Hispanic/Latino State Preschool and Early Head Start subsamples.
We found positive and developmentally appropriate growth in children’s language development as reported by parents on the parent survey:

- When asked to characterize the way their child communicates (ranging from mostly communicating needs by making sounds or pointing, to talking in long and complicated sentences), we found parents of children 6 months to 4 years reporting significantly more complex communications from Time 1 to Time 2.

**Figure 12: Parent Report on Description of Their Child’s Communication**

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

Source: Parent Survey

- Significant growth in parent-reported communication strategies was found for children in both age groups, 6 to 35 months and 36 to 47 months.

These results were also reflected in the parent focus groups. Six parents from five programs mentioned that their children have learned to communicate better and have improved their vocabulary as a result of the SR activities.

*And more than anything she has developed in many areas. She speaks very well…I am sometimes surprised at how she is able to relate and associate different ideas. This is thanks to her participation in the program. At home I wouldn’t be able to do this...*
Emergent Literacy Skills

Direct assessments of children’s emergent literacy skills included several measures, including children’s ability to name letters and colors and their understanding of basic story and print concepts.

- On average, SR children were able to name approximately 15 letters, nine out of ten colors, and seven out of ten numbers. This is significantly more than demographically similar children participating in State Preschool, who were able to name ten letters, eight colors, and six numbers. In addition, a small but statistically significant correlation suggests children who had been participating in SR programs for a longer period of time could name more letters and numbers than children who had participated less.

Figure 13: Mean Letters, Numbers, and Colors Named for SR and State Pre-K Children
• Children’s awareness of story and print concepts, such as how to hold a book and where to start reading, as well as basic story comprehension, was lower for SR children as compared to demographically similar children participating in the Early Head Start study.

**Figure 14: Mean Scores on Story and Print Concepts Scores for SR and EHS Children**

![Figure 14: Mean Scores on Story and Print Concepts Scores for SR and EHS Children](chart)

Source: Direct Child Assessments

As for children’s emerging literacy skills reported by parents on the parent survey, we found no significant growth from Time 1 to Time 2 in survey responses for parents of children in the birth-to-three age range.

• When asked about pre-literacy skills such as taking an interest in books by playing with them or listening while parents read, parent reports of the frequency of emergent literacy behaviors among their young children – those birth to age 3 – did not show significant growth from Time 1 to Time 2.
Early Mathematics Skills
Children’s early mathematics skills were assessed using the Woodcock-Johnson (and its Spanish version, the Woodcock-Muñoz) Applied Problems subtest, as well as a measure of counting objects.

- Children who were assessed in English scored relatively high on an assessment of their problem-solving skills (Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems), scoring very close to the national norm, with more than 90 percent scoring above the “at risk” cutoff of 85 percent.
- Children who were assessed in Spanish scored somewhat lower; half scored above the 85 percent “at risk” cutoff, and half scored below 85 percent. However, SR children outperformed children attending State Preschool on the Spanish version of the Applied Problems subtest. In addition, results suggest a significant correlation between the number of months spent in the SR programs overall and children’s scores on the Applied Problems subtest, at least for Spanish speakers.

Figure 15: Mean Standardized Scores on Applied Problems for SR and State Pre-K Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Woodcock-Johnson III</th>
<th>Woodcock-Muñoz**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Readiness</td>
<td>97.40</td>
<td>96.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Pre-K</td>
<td>83.88</td>
<td>79.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Direct Child Assessments

- SR program children were able to count 17 objects on average, comparable to the counting skills of children in State Preschool programs.
Social-Emotional Development

Children’s social-emotional development was assessed primarily through parent responses on the survey.

- Parent reports of children’s social-emotional development (as measured by behaviors such as sharing toys with other children, paying attention well, and comforting other children who are upset) showed small but statistically significant increases from Time 1 to Time 2 among parents of children ages 2 to 5 years.

Figure 16: Parent Report on Frequency of Their Child Demonstrating Social-Emotional School Readiness Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Rating</th>
<th>Frequency of Child Demonstrating Social-Emotional School Readiness Skills (Scale of 9 items) (24+ months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- On the other hand, for younger children (birth to 3 years), parent reports of social and interpersonal skills (such as showing interest in other children by turning toward them, by watching them while they play, or by reaching for a toy they are playing with) did not show significant change from Time 1 to Time 2.

Parents also reported on their child’s social-emotional development during focus groups. Twelve parents from all 5 sites visited reported that SR activities have helped their children to be more independent and gain more confidence. Parents spoke about how their children have become more comfortable being away from them:

My daughter is almost three so she’s going to start preschool. Now she is more comfortable, she can stay there by herself, she doesn’t need me as much. She knows that she’s going to be
with more kids. I don’t think she’s going to be crying like in the beginning. She didn’t want to be a part of it.

Three parents from three different sites specifically reported that their children have learned how to share as a result of their participation in the program.

My daughter didn’t know how to share toys. Now when her cousins come to the house and they start fighting for toys, she is the first one to say, well we have to share. She starts telling the kids to share, I was surprised, and everyone would say, “Oh, she’s so little and she knows this.” She learned that and she’s trying to share it with her cousins...[She learned this in] Mommy and Me... she remembered the song, ‘Sharing.’

Nearly all (20 out of 22) of grantee year-end reports reviewed for children’s outcomes reported on positive changes in children’s social-emotional development, including children’s self-awareness, social and interpersonal skills, self-regulation, and communication and language skills. Seven grantees included findings related to self-awareness and self-concept. Six of these seven grantees reported positive changes among children; two of these reported statistically significant growth. Seven grantees also presented positive findings related to children’s social and interpersonal skills. Three of these reported statistically significant growth in this area. Four grantees addressed positive results in self-regulation in their evaluation reports. One grantee reported statistically significant growth.

A significant focus of those grantee reports that addressed social-emotional development was on communication and language. Fourteen grantees reported such a focus with positive changes over time. Five reported statistically significant growth among children. One grantee reported some mixed results.

**SUGGESTIONS FROM PARENTS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT**

The focus groups provided some important feedback for SR programs. All parents across all five focus groups conducted reported that they were very satisfied with the services received through their SR programs. However, several suggestions for program improvements came up during focus group discussions. The most striking proposals for program improvement were about the length of the classes. When asked for suggestions, 19 parents across all five programs said they thought classes should be longer in terms of the frequency of meeting times or the hours of the classes. This sentiment was also reflected in the Time 2 parent survey, where 18 percent of the parents said that they would like the program to expand more in terms of days, hours, or frequency of classes.

Parents across all sites included in the focus groups also indicated that they wanted additional classes to be offered, such as classes for husbands, classes for older children (six years of age or older), or summer classes.

Some parents also offered suggestions for changes in program operations and infrastructure. For example, four parents across two sites talked about the need to improve their building by either having the program in its own building or being able to put multiple activities in different rooms.
Three parents across two programs mentioned that the way information is communicated regarding current and upcoming SR program activities should be improved.

Other issues that some parents mentioned related to the difficulties in finding transportation to get to the activities, the need for more staff to conduct or assist in activities, and cancellations of activities that parents had enrolled in.

**IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR GRANTEES**

The following is a summary of the major findings about parent and child outcomes from this evaluation, with suggested implications for program practice:

**Parent Outcomes**

- At Time 2, we found increased frequency of library use by parents to borrow books or materials for their children. Programs should continue to encourage library use on the part of parents so that they and their children have ready access to literacy resources in the home.

- While we found statistically significant increases from Time 1 to Time 2 in the frequency with which parents of children from 2 to 5 years engaged their children in language and literacy activities overall, such as telling stories, learning about rhyming words, and practicing the sounds that letters make, programs should consider greater encouragement of parents’ daily reading (or reading at least 3 times or more per week) to their children, as this is an evidence-based practice that supports positive child outcomes.

- Parents of children birth to age 3 who participated in program activities that involved parents and children interacting together (such as “Mommy and Me” classes) did demonstrate statistically significant growth on the reported likelihood of the parent playing, reading, or singing with their child in the next week. This suggests that actively involving parents in interactive literacy activities (and providing good models and coaching for such interactions) may have a greater impact than other activities in increasing the likelihood of parents engaging in such activities on their own at home.

- We did not find significant changes with regard to parents’ reported use of regular routines and discipline strategies, so these areas of focus may benefit from increased attention on the part of programs. The consistent use of routines by parents (i.e., feeding, bedtime, etc) is associated with improved child outcomes. (APA Press Releases, 2002)

- Parents’ participation in SR program activities including parent classes, parent-child activities, and home visits, appears to be contributing to parents’ perceived comfort with the school environment and their teachers, along with their sense of agency to intervene on behalf of their child when they have a concern. Parents who participated more in SR program activities between Time 1 and Time 2 showed significantly greater growth compared to those who participated less. This foundation of familiarity and comfort with the school culture will likely be an asset to parents as they interact with K-12 school systems. Programs should continue to foster parents’ feelings of comfort and self-advocacy within the school context. In particular, programs should examine how they might increase (or optimize) parent participation in
program activities, as the intensity of their involvement appears to be related to stronger outcomes in this area.

- Programs appear to be helping parents to have realistic and appropriate expectations for what their child should know and be able to do by the time of kindergarten entry. Parent surveys and focus groups suggest that parents who participate in SR activities including parent classes, parent-child activities, and home visits, are learning about appropriate expectations. This knowledge on the part of parents can help them to guide their children appropriately, which in turn, can smooth the transition to kindergarten and alleviate potential anxiety on the part of both children and families. Programs should be encouraged to continue to provide parents with information and training in this area.

- We found positive changes on two measures of social support among parents in parenting classes and those participating in parent-child activities, suggesting that parent participation in these activities may be related to their perception of increased social supports available to them. This finding did not hold up for parents receiving home visits, suggesting that parents may be increasing their peer networks through participation in on-site program activities. Programs may wish to explore ways in which parents receiving home visits might also have access to social supports, such as by networking with other parents as well as by facilitating interactions with staff or other professionals whom they could go to for advice or information about the care of their child.

**Child Outcomes**

- Pre-LAS scores for children attending School Readiness program activities including preschool programs, parent-child activities, kindergarten transition programs, and home visits were significantly higher, on average, than scores for a demographically similar population of children enrolled in State Preschool. In addition, mean scores of receptive language, as measured by the PPVT/TVIP (English and Spanish versions) were comparable to scores for similar populations of children enrolled in State Preschool and those participating in the Early Head Start study, although in all three cases, children scored just over 10 points (out of 100) below the age norms for these measures. The data from a single point in time – close to the end of their participation in SR programs, suggest that the programs may be helping children to keep pace with their counterparts in other state and federal programs, but due to the limitations of the SR study design, we cannot estimate how they would have performed had they not attended SR programs. Nonetheless, SR programs should continue to focus on and support children’s acquisition of English, and receptive language.

- Parents also reported changes that were statistically significant with regard to their child’s use of increasingly sophisticated communication strategies at Time 2 compared to Time 1. In focus groups, parents echoed these findings, commenting on the growth in their child’s use of vocabulary and communication strategies as a result of their participation in SR programs. Programs should be encouraged to continue to focus on children’s vocabulary development and their growing communication skills.

- SR programs appear to be preparing children well – and on average, better than State Preschools – to know the names of numbers, letters, and colors. While this finding is encouraging, SR programs could be doing more to help children learn story and print concepts (concepts of print and basic comprehension), where their performance was lower than that of
demographically similar children participating in the Early Head Start study. Thus, programs may want to focus more heavily on developing these types of early literacy skills, which go beyond naming of numbers, letters, and colors.

- Results also suggest a significant correlation between the number of months spent in SR programs overall and children’s scores on the Applied Problems (math) subtest, at least for Spanish speakers. Children who were assessed in English scored very close to the national norm on this measure, with more than 90 percent scoring above the “at risk” cutoff of 85 percent, with scores very comparable to demographically similar children in State Preschool programs. Given these results, programs should continue to support children’s development of math and problem-solving skills.

- Although direct measures of children’s social-emotional development are limited (and are for the field, in general), parent survey results include small but statistically significant changes between Time 1 and Time 2 on a scale comprised of 9 items related to social-emotional status. In focus groups, parents also reported important developments that they attributed to SR programs in areas such as children’s growing independence, confidence, and interpersonal skills, such as the ability to share with others and develop friendships. Clearly, parents reported being very satisfied with SR program activities; the overriding suggestion that many of them offered was to increase the frequency or length of SR classes. From their responses, it appears that many parents would be receptive to offers of supplemental hours or days of program services.

CONCLUSIONS

Even though the time period for this evaluation was relatively short, a number of modest but encouraging results were found in the areas of parent and child outcomes that support school readiness. For parents, we found small but statistically significant gains on knowledge measures such as the parents’ knowledge of the best time to start reading to children and the importance of a child’s experiences in the first year of life. There were also small but statistically significant gains on parent’s home literacy resources for children, such as the number of books in the home and the frequency of library visits, as well as parents’ engagement in literacy and other activities with their 2- to 5-year old children, such as telling stories, teaching songs and letters, playing games and working on art projects together. Parents of children from birth to 3 who participated in parent-child oriented school readiness activities also showed significant growth in the frequency of parent-child activities which they engaged in (such as playing, singing, or reading to their children). Parent reports of their social and advisory support networks also showed a statistically significant gain from Time 1 to Time 2, and this finding was especially strong for parents participating in center-based as opposed to home-based services.

When looking at results for parents in relation to the intensity of participation in the SR program or the activity type we found few significant differences, however we found that parents who participated more in SR activities between the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys showed significant growth on measures of parent comfort and involvement with their children’s school (or program) and teachers, although a large proportion of parents expressed “a lot” of comfort with their child’s school and teachers at Time 1. In addition, parents who had participated more in SR activities prior to Time 1 rated the importance of play as a learning opportunity for young children significantly higher than those who had participated less. As discussed earlier, it was somewhat challenging to examine associations between parents’ intensity of participation and their outcomes because consistent and
reliable data on hours of attendance were not available at the participant level other than through the estimates provided by parents themselves.

For children, parents reported small but statistically significant gains in their child’s communication skills and their social-emotional school readiness skills. When children were assessed directly using standardized measures (in English and Spanish only), we found small but statistically significant differences for SR children compared to similar samples of children on the same measures. SR children had higher scores in English proficiency and could name more letters, numbers and colors than comparison samples. Spanish speaking SR children also had slightly higher scores on applied problems (math) assessments than comparison samples. Story and print concept scores were slightly lower for SR children compared to similar samples. There were also small but significant correlations between children’s intensity of participation in SR programs and their emergent literacy skills such as naming letters and numbers, and, for Spanish speakers, their scores on the applied problems measure.

**NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EVALUATION WORK**

We have examined the relationships between levels of parent participation in School Readiness program activities and changes in parent reports of their own beliefs, their behaviors, and their child’s development. Parents who participated in more hours of service through the School Readiness programs between Time 1 and Time 2 (or on average, 4 months between Time 1 and Time 2 surveys) do not seem to demonstrate greater growth at Time 2, as was hypothesized. However, given the relatively high Time 1 ratings on many of the survey items and thus relatively low (but often significant) levels of change observed between Time 1 and Time 2, it is not surprising that we did not see strong relationships between growth and intensity of participation for most items. In addition, although we attempted to exclude parents who were identified by program staff as having been long-time participants, a moderately large number of survey respondents at Time 1 had actually been involved in School Readiness programs for some time. One might expect these parents to have experienced some growth prior to the Time 1 survey. Some of the noteworthy relationships we did see between growth and intensity of participation were related to parents’ reported level of comfort with their child’s school and teacher and in parents’ ratings of the importance of playing with their child.

In comparing SR parents to similar parents from other studies, we found that SR parents’ responses were generally similar compared to parents who participated in the Family Literacy Initiative, Early Head Start, or the Atlanta Born Learning Campaign.

Although the parent survey analysis has yielded some useful findings, future evaluation efforts could be improved in a number of ways. First, the very short timeframe for this study posed significant challenges for data collection. Study design, gathering of basic background information, instrument development, and parent recruitment all had to occur within a period of two months. The short timeframe also impacted our ability to survey parents at the true beginning of their participation and follow up with them at a later point in time to allow more opportunity for growth. Observed growth may also have been greater had we been able to track parents’ attendance in school readiness programs from the point of their initial entry into the programs, and well-documented data on any prior program experience would have enabled more fine-grained analyses based on individual-level intervention dosages.
A second recommendation for future evaluation efforts is to integrate a program quality assessment component into the study. Given timeline and resource limitations, we did not collect data on the quality and characteristics of program activities, such as the focus and goals of the activities, the curriculum used, and the quality of teacher-child interactions. The addition of this information would strengthen models of growth over time.

Finally, future evaluation efforts might incorporate grantee data collection efforts to a greater degree. Grantee program staff could administer a common parent survey, for example, to all parents upon entry and again at the end of the activity. This would yield cleaner “pre/post” results and would enable the inclusion of all parent participants. In addition, if programs could document additional information about parents’ hours of involvement in various program activities over time, a clearer picture of parents’ history and total level of service received could be captured and incorporated in analyses.

REFERENCES


