Children’s Outcomes in Los Angeles Universal Preschool

Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), funded by First 5 LA, seeks to make voluntary, high-quality preschool available to every 4-year-old in Los Angeles County. As part of the Universal Preschool Child Outcomes Study (UPCOS), Mathematica Policy Research administered a battery of child assessments and teachers completed a measure of social-emotional development to track the progress of a sample of children during their time in the program. This brief describes children’s development between fall 2009 and spring 2010.

Table 1 summarizes the assessments that were used.

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<th>Measure</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test: English (EOWPVT) and Spanish-Bilingual Edition (EOWPVT-SBE)</td>
<td>Assesses children’s expressive vocabulary; English version scored relative to a sample of same-age peers who speak English; SBE version scored relative to a sample of same-age peers who are bilingual (Spanish and English)</td>
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<td>Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ-III) and Woodcock Muñoz Batería III (WM-III) Subtests</td>
<td>Subtests used to assess children’s literacy (subtests used: Letter-Word and Spelling/Ortografía) and math (subtest used: Applied Problems) in English (WJ-III) and Spanish (WM-III)</td>
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<td>Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales-2 (PKBS-2)</td>
<td>Assesses social-emotional development; teacher rating scale designed to measure both positive and negative behaviors</td>
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<td>Leiter Examiner Rating Scales-Revised (Leiter-R)</td>
<td>Assesses overall social-emotional development and approaches to learning; assessors complete ratings on Attention, Activity Level and Sociability after having spent time with the child in the assessment situation</td>
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CHILDREN’S PROGRESS
Language, Literacy and Math Skills

Children Assessed in English Made Significant Progress in Literacy Relative to Peers Nationally
LAUP children entered their programs in the fall with average literacy and math skills in English. Overall, children who were assessed in English did as well as other children of the same age nationally in literacy (WJ-III Letter-Word Identification, Spelling) and mathematics (WJ-III Applied Problems) in fall 2009. However, children in this LAUP sample who were assessed in English lagged behind the average preschoolers nationally in expressive vocabulary concepts (EOWPVT).

Figure 1 shows that, over the LAUP year, children who were assessed in English showed significant increases in their early reading (WJ-III Letter-Word Identification) and early writing (WJ-III Spelling) skills. However, their skills in language (EOWPVT) and math (Applied Problems) did not increase significantly, suggesting that they grew at the same rate as other English-speaking preschoolers in the nation. Their language skills remained below the national average in the spring.

ELLs Gained More in Language Relative to Spanish-Speaking Peers Nationally
In the fall, LAUP children who are English language learners (ELLs) and took the assessments in Spanish scored lower than their Spanish-speaking peers in a national sample in language (EOWPVT-SBE), literacy (WM-III Letter-Word Identification and Ortografía) and math (WM-III Applied Problems). In the spring, the children who completed the assessments in Spanish made significant progress in language (EOWPVT-SBE). Their growth in literacy (WM-III Letter-Word and Ortografía) and math skills (WM-III Applied Problems) was similar to the developmental change expected for children of this age. Their skills in all areas continued to be below the national average for children assessed in Spanish in the spring. Figure 2 shows the changes between fall 2009 and spring 2010.

Fig 1. Progress during the LAUP year in language, literacy, and mathematics for children assessed in English

Fig 2. Progress during the LAUP year in language, literacy, and mathematics for children assessed in Spanish

*p<0.001  **p<0.01  ***p<0.05
Social-Emotional Development

Children’s Social Skills Improved During the LAUP Year

Children’s social-emotional development was assessed with two measures, the PKBS-2 (ratings by their teachers) and the Leiter-R (ratings by assessors). At program entry, both teachers and assessors rated children’s social skills positively. On the PKBS-2 (Figure 3), teachers rated children as having average positive social skills and fewer problem behaviors than other preschoolers in the nation. Approximately 80 percent of the children scored in the expected range on the Leiter-R for Attention, Activity Level and Sociability, which is similar to the national average (Figure 4).

Children’s scores improved on both the PKBS-2 and the Leiter-R. Teachers reported that children’s positive social skills increased from fall to spring and problem behaviors declined. Positive social skills were above the national average and problem behaviors were less frequent than the national average. By the spring, the percentage of children scoring in the expected range for Attention, Activity Level and Sociability on the Leiter-R had moved above the national average.

STUDY PROCEDURES

This study included a random sample of 107 programs in LAUP; however, children from the participating programs were not randomly selected. Thus, although the programs are representative of LAUP programs in 2009-2010, the children are not necessarily representative of the children in LAUP in that year.

All children with English as a home language were assessed in English. Children with a home language other than English who passed the English language screener were assessed in English. Children whose home language was Spanish who did not pass the English language screener were assessed in Spanish.

On average, five months passed between fall and spring assessments. Therefore, while children spent eight to nine months or more in their programs, child progress reported in this brief occurred over a five-month period. All of the standardized assessments described above adjust for child age; thus, if there was no statistically significant change in the score over the year, this indicates that, on average, the children made the amount of progress expected for children of their age. For the assessments of language, literacy and mathematics and the teacher-rated measure of social-emotional development, the mean standard score is 100
Acknowledgements

First 5 LA oversees the Los Angeles County allocation of funds from Proposition 10, which added a 50-cent tax on tobacco products sold in California. Funds raised help pay for health care, education and child development programs for children from the prenatal stage to age 5 and their families. First 5 LA’s mission is to increase the number of young children who are physically and emotionally healthy, safe and ready to learn. For more information, please visit www.First5LA.org.

for the nationally representative sample. Thus, scores above 100 in the LAUP sample would indicate that LAUP children are performing at levels above a national sample of peers. For the assessor-rated measure of social-emotional development (Leiter-R), scores indicate the percentage of children scoring in expected ranges; nationally, 84 percent of children score in expected ranges.

CONCLUSION

Children who participated in the Universal Preschool Child Outcomes Study displayed some growth in academic and social skills throughout the academic year. By the spring, children who were assessed in English continued to perform as well as or better than children of the same age nationally in literacy and math. Over the course of the program year, ELL children progressed at a rate similar to or greater than what is expected for children of this age; however, their skills in all areas continued to lag behind their Spanish-speaking peers in the spring. Social-emotional development was a strength for children in LAUP. On average, both teachers and assessors rated LAUP children as having more positive social skills and fewer problem behaviors than their peers nationally by the spring. Overall, children made progress in the course of their LAUP year, but they still have room to grow.

References