Children’s Progress During the 2011–2012 LAUP Year

Funded by First 5 LA, Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide access to high quality preschool education for the children of Los Angeles County. In keeping with this mission, First 5 LA contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to administer a battery of child assessments to track the early learning and development of a sample of children in LAUP programs as part of the Universal Preschool Child Outcomes Study (UPCOS). This brief describes the children’s development during the 2011–2012 program year. The assessments are shown in Table 1.

Important Findings:

• English-proficient children showed significant growth in English vocabulary concepts from fall to spring.
• English-language learners (ELLs) made significant progress in language and mathematics relative to their Spanish-speaking peers in nation.
• LAUP children demonstrated strong social-emotional skills in attention, activity level and sociability relative to the national average.

Table 1. UPCOS Child Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</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 concepts; the English version is scored relative to a sample of same-age peers who speak English; the bilingual version (SBE) is scored relative to a sample of same-age peers who are bilingual in Spanish and English and who live in the U.S.</td>
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<td>Rapid Letter Naming Task (RLN)</td>
<td>Assesses children’s literacy by measuring the number of letters that a child can name quickly and easily; the child receives credit if the letter is correctly named in English or Spanish.</td>
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<td>Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ-III) and Woodcock Muñoz Batería III (WM-III) Subtests</td>
<td>Assesses children’s fine motor and literacy skills (subtest used: Spelling/ Ortografía) and mathematics skills (subtest used: Applied Problems/ Problemas Aplicados) in English (WJ-III) and Spanish (WM-III).</td>
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<tr>
<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 setting.</td>
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Language, Literacy and Math Skills

Children Assessed in English Made Significant Progress in English Vocabulary Concepts

LAUP children who were proficient in English in fall 2011 did as well on average as children of the same age nationally in literacy (WJ-III Spelling) and in mathematics (WJ-III Applied Problems) when they entered preschool. However, LAUP children lagged behind the average preschoolers nationally in English vocabulary concepts (EOWPVT).

During the LAUP year, children who were assessed in English showed significant growth in their mastery of English vocabulary concepts (EOWPVT) (Figure 1); LAUP scores were at the 27th percentile for the national sample in the fall and the 33rd percentile in the spring. The spring percentile for language is equivalent to scoring about half of a standard deviation below the average for a national sample of same-age peers. The LAUP children's early written literacy (WJ-III Spelling) and mathematics (WJ-III Applied Problems) skills grew at about the same rate as that of other English-speaking preschoolers in the nation (that is, they had the same scores in the fall and spring). The LAUP children's scores were at the 50th percentile (the national average) for mathematics and at the 65th percentile (about one-third of a standard deviation above the national average) for written literacy.

Using the RLN as an additional measure of children's literacy skills, we found that children who were assessed in English improved significantly from fall to spring. They went from being able to name almost 17 letters to being able to name 22 (Figure 2), learning an average of almost 5 additional letters during the five and a half months between assessments.

ELLs Showed Greater Gains in Language and Mathematics Relative to Spanish-Speaking Peers Nationally

In the fall, LAUP children who were English-language learners (ELLs) and who were assessed in Spanish scored lower than did their Spanish-speaking peers nationally in language (EOWPVT-SBE), literacy (Ortografía), and math (WM-III Problemas Aplicados). Figure 3 shows that by the spring, however, the LAUP ELLs assessed in Spanish made significant progress in language and mathematics. The growth in their written literacy skills was similar to the developmental change expected for children of this age. By spring, however, their language and math skills continued to be below the national average, but their literacy skills were approaching the national average.

Children who were assessed in Spanish also made significant progress on the RLN from fall and spring, from being able to name about 6 letters to being able to name 12 (Figure 2), learning an average of almost 6 additional letters during the five and a half months between assessments. In both the fall and spring, the ELLs assessed in Spanish named fewer letters than did children who were assessed in English, although the improvement in both groups over the year was similar.
Social-Emotional Development

LAUP Children Had Strong Social-Emotional Skills in the Fall and Spring

Children’s social-emotional development was rated by assessors using the Leiter-R. At program entry, the percentage of children rated as demonstrating expected positive behaviors was above the national average for Attention, Activity Level, and Sociability. The percentage of children scoring in the expected range for Activity Level was significantly higher in the spring than in the fall (Figure 4). By spring, the percentage of children scoring in the expected range was nearly 100 on all three subtests.

STUDY PROCEDURES

In the 2011–2012 program year, UPCOS included a random sample of 39 center-based and family child care (FCC) programs; all children from one randomly selected classroom in each program were invited to participate in the study. Across all programs, 586 children were assessed in both the fall and spring. The response rates were 65 and 82 percent for programs and children, respectively. When weighted, the sample of children was representative of all LAUP children in 2011–2012.

Children whose home language was English were assessed in English. Children whose home language was other than English and who passed the English-language screener were also assessed in English. Children whose home language was Spanish and who did not pass the English-language screener were assessed in Spanish. If children assessed in Spanish in the fall were able to pass the English-language screener by the spring, they were assessed in English in the spring. This brief focuses on children who were assessed in the same language (English or Spanish) in both the fall and spring.

Although children spend eight or more months in their LAUP program, we looked at their progress over five and a half months. All of the standardized assessments described in this brief adjust for age; thus, LAUP children’s scores would be the same in the fall and in the spring if the children progressed at the same rate as other 4-year-olds in the nation. Higher scores in the spring indicate progress beyond what was expected given the fall scores. For the assessments of language (EOWPVT English and SBE versions), literacy (WJ-III Spelling and WM-III Ortografía), and mathematics (WJ-III and WM-III Applied Problems), the mean standard score for the nationally
Acknowledgments

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.

Endnotes

5. Children assessed in Spanish scored 92.0 on the measure of written literacy (WM III Ortografía) in the fall and 96.1 in the spring. This was not a statistically detectable change due at least in part to a small sample size.

CONCLUSION

Children who participated in UPCOS in 2011–2012 entered their LAUP programs with a diversity of skills. In the fall and spring, LAUP children performed on par with a national sample of children in some areas but below peers in others. Children assessed in English or Spanish made progress in English vocabulary concepts during the LAUP year but still scored below a national sample of peers in the spring. For both literacy and mathematics, children assessed in English progressed at a rate similar to what was expected for children of this age and ended the year performing at or above the national average. During the year, children assessed in Spanish (ELLS) in fall and spring progressed at a rate similar to or higher than their Spanish-speaking peers in literacy and mathematics; nonetheless, their skills in mathematics, when measured in the spring, continued to lag behind a national sample of their Spanish-speaking peers. All LAUP children made significant progress in letter naming, but ELLs lagged behind children who were assessed in English in both the fall and spring. Social-emotional development was a strength for children in LAUP. On average, assessors rated LAUP children in the fall and spring as having strong social-emotional skills relative to their peers nationally.

Overall, progress in LAUP during 2011–2012 points to some clear successes but they also indicate that there is room for growth. It appears that children may be particularly well served if teachers provide additional support in mathematics for ELLs and in vocabulary concepts for all children.

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