

Highlights from the Evaluation of Georgia’s 2015 Rising Pre-Kindergarten Summer Transition Program

Background

Building on the success of Georgia’s Pre-K, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has been offering a program for children during the summer before pre-kindergarten since 2013. This Rising Pre-Kindergarten (RPre-K) Program was modeled on a previously established program for rising kindergarteners, but serves children the summer prior to the Pre-K year and is tailored to meet the needs of families and children who speak Spanish at home. In the summer of 2015, the third year this program was offered, there were 30 RPre-K classrooms in 13 counties, serving approximately 420 children. The overall goal of the RPre-K program is to support children’s transitions and development, particularly their early literacy skills, through the last few months prior to pre-kindergarten entry.

As in past years, in 2015, the RPre-K Program offered services for six weeks during the summer. All attending children were from low-income families and the services were free to participating families. Class sizes were small (maximum 14), and each class had both a lead and an assistant teacher. All classrooms used the Opening the World of Learning (OWL)¹ curriculum to support language development and school readiness. A half-time transition coach was hired for every class to help families meet transition needs and to offer parent educational activities.

Evaluation Design

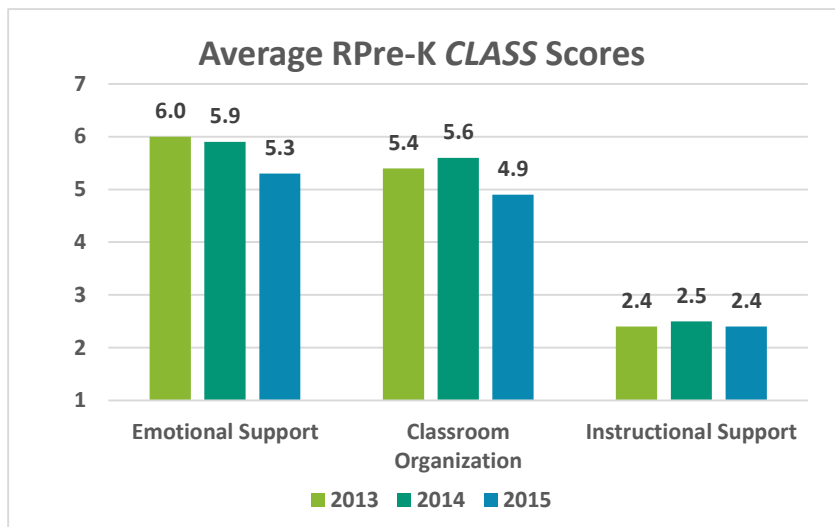
To evaluate the RPre-K Program, the early learning skills of four to six children in each classroom were assessed at the start and end of the program. Additionally, teacher-child interactions were observed in the 30 RPre-K classrooms using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).² Systematic observations of lead and assistant teachers’ use of English and Spanish were made. Lead teachers, assistant teachers, and transition coaches completed questionnaires about their education, experience, and services they provided.

Key Findings and Implications

Children’s Receptive Language skills in both English and Spanish increased across the six weeks, but remained low. At the start and end of the six-week program, children were assessed using the Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test – English Edition (ROW) and the Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test- Spanish-Bilingual Edition (ROW-SBE). These are both standardized measures, meaning the average child receives a score of 100, and 68% of children will score between 85 and 115. As seen on the table below, children’s scores increased significantly during the program, but their scores remained at the low end of the range where most children score.

	Pretest Mean	Pretest Range	Posttest Mean	Posttest Range	<i>p</i>	Effect Size
Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test – English Edition: Standard score	82.8	55 to 124	87.0	56 to 114	<.05	.17
Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test – Spanish-Bilingual Edition: Standard score	84.8	55 to 117	88.6	55 to 124	<.001	.25

In both programs, scores for CLASS Emotional Support and Classroom Organization were in the mid-range, lower than in past years ($p < .05$). Instructional Support scores remained low. Maintaining a warm, supportive and organized environment is critical for these young children as they start school, so even a small decrease is concerning. Effective teacher-child relationships that promote children's socio-emotional development are particularly important for young dual language learners (DLLs) as a means for promoting their classroom participation and enhancing their social status^{3,4}. Some research has suggested that Instructional Support is most closely linked to children's gains in academic skills⁵, so DECAL should consider providing supports and professional development to RPre-K teachers to strengthen that aspect of classroom quality, while continuing to promote Emotional Support and Classroom Organization.



Both Spanish and English were used regularly in RPre-K Classrooms. English was the predominate language in the average RPre-K classroom, but Spanish was also used for both instruction and behavior management by both the lead and assistant teachers. Use of both languages increases learning opportunities, as children may learn a new concept in either language. Also, it is important for young dual language learners to see both languages as valuable for learning, and use of home language in the classroom helps children build similar skills in English.⁶ Whole group reading activities took place in most classrooms, with about one-half using a mixture of English and Spanish. Ideally, all RPre-K classrooms should have books and labeled objects in both English and Spanish to increase children's exposure to print in both languages, teach specific skills (e.g., vocabulary, phonological awareness), illustrate differences between the languages, and stimulate conversation. All classrooms had many English books and labels and most had many Spanish books and labels, but a few classrooms had no Spanish labels (17%).

- ¹ Dickinson, D. K., Copley, J. V., Izquierdo, E., Lederman, J. S., Schickedanz, J., & Wright, L. (2011). *Opening the world of learning*. New York, NY: Pearson Education
- ² Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS): Pre-K Version*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- ³ Castro, D. C., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Buysse, V., & Gillanders, C. (2010). Language and literacy development in Latino dual language learners. Promising instructional practices. In O. N. Saracho and B. Spodek (Eds.), *Contemporary perspectives on language and cultural diversity in early childhood education* (pp. 65-93). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- ⁴ Gillanders, C., & Castro, D. (2007). Reading aloud to English language learners. *Children and Families*, 21(3), 12-14.
- ⁵ Mashburn, A. J., Pianta, R. C. Hamre, B. K., Downer, J. T. Barbarin, O. A. Bryant, D. B., ... Howes, C. (2008). Measures of classroom quality in prekindergarten and children's development of academic, language, and social skills. *Child Development*, 79(3), 732-749. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01154.x
- ⁶ LaForett, D. R., Fettig, A., Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., & Buysse, V. (2012). Recognition & Response for Dual Language Learners: Instructional adaptations for young dual language learners. *Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series*, 14, 115-132.