Georgia's Pre-K Program Evaluation Project

Children's Outcomes and Classroom Quality from Pre-K through Kindergarten

Findings from Year 2 of Georgia's Pre-K Longitudinal Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study Overview

In 2011–2012, the Georgia legislature funded a series of ongoing studies to evaluate Georgia's Pre-K Program. The primary research questions addressed by these evaluations have included: 1) What is the quality of Georgia's Pre-K classrooms and what factors are associated with better quality?, 2) What are the effects of participation in Georgia's Pre-K on children's school readiness skills?, and 3) What are the short- and long-term outcomes of children attending Georgia's Pre-K and what factors are associated with better outcomes?

The purpose of the current Longitudinal Study is to follow children from pre-k through third grade, in order to examine the short- and long-term learning outcomes for children who attended Georgia's Pre-K as well as the quality of their preschool and early elementary school experiences. This study, begun in 2013–2014, involves a longitudinal design to follow a sample of 1,169 children (139 Spanish-speaking DLLs) who attended 199 randomly-selected Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. These findings focus on results from the second year of the study, which included 1,034 of these children (118 Spanish-speaking DLLs) who were attending kindergarten. Researchers conducted individual child assessments near the beginning and end of pre-k and kindergarten to examine growth in children's skills, as well as factors associated with greater growth. The assessment measures covered multiple domains of learning, including language, literacy, math, and general knowledge, and teacher ratings of behavior skills. For the DLL subsample, assessments were conducted in both English and Spanish using parallel measures. Researchers also conducted observations of teacher-child instructional interactions in the pre-k classrooms and in a sample of kindergarten classrooms attended by children in the study.

Results

- **Children showed significant growth from pre-k through kindergarten on most measures across all domains of learning.** Children who attended Georgia's Pre-K made significant gains in the areas of language/literacy skills, math skills, self-knowledge, and social skills. Children's growth on most of these measures, which were norm-referenced, indicated that they progressed at a greater rate than would be expected for normal developmental growth.

- **Children made greater gains in pre-k on some measures of early skills, while they made greater gains in kindergarten on measures of more advanced skills.** Children made greater gains in pre-k than in kindergarten on some early literacy, math, and self-knowledge skills, as well as on social skills. Conversely, they made greater gains in kindergarten than in pre-k on more advanced literacy and math skills.

- **Children who were Spanish-speaking dual language learners showed growth on all skills in English and most skills in Spanish.** From pre-k through kindergarten, children in the DLL subsample exhibited significant gains on all English measures of language/literacy skills, math skills, and self-knowledge. They also showed gains for most of the same measures in Spanish. However, for two measures of language/literacy skills (letter-word recognition, vocabulary), children showed significant decreases in Spanish scores from pre-k through kindergarten.
- **Children's level of English language proficiency was the most consistent predictor of greater growth in skills.** Children at lower levels of English proficiency showed greater growth in most language/literacy, math, and behavior skills than children at higher levels of proficiency. Although they made greater gains on the various outcome measures, they generally entered pre-k with lower skills and still had not caught up to their peers by the end of kindergarten.
- **There were some effects of pre-k program type on children's growth in language and literacy skills through kindergarten.** Children who attended public-school settings in pre-k exhibited greater growth on some language and literacy skills compared to children who attended private settings. Scores were lower at entry into pre-k for children who attended public-school settings, but generally were similar to those who attended private settings by the end of kindergarten.
- **The quality of teacher-child instructional interactions varied across different domains, with slightly higher scores in pre-k than in kindergarten for some aspects.** Based on the CLASS, the quality of teacher-child instructional interactions was slightly higher in the sample of Georgia's Pre-K classrooms than in the kindergarten classrooms for Emotional Support and Classroom Organization. However, the pattern of scores across different domains was similar, with higher scores for Emotional Support and Classroom Organization and lower scores for Instructional Support.
- **Children who attended better quality pre-k and kindergarten classrooms had better learning outcomes in some areas.** Children in pre-k and kindergarten classrooms with better quality classroom organization and instructional support showed a consistent pattern of greater growth in phonemic awareness skills.

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Suggested citation: Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Garwood, J. D., & Mokrova, I. L. (2016). *Children's Outcomes and Classroom Quality from Pre-K through Kindergarten: Findings from Year 2 of Georgia's Pre-K Longitudinal Study. Executive Summary.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

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

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