

Highlights from the Evaluation of Georgia's 2014

Rising Kindergarten and Rising Pre-Kindergarten Summer Transition Programs

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 kindergarten since 2010. In the summer of 2014, this Rising Kindergarten (RK) Program was offered in 62 classrooms in 24 counties, serving over 1,000 children. The Rising Pre-Kindergarten (RPre-K) Program was modeled on the RK program, 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 2014, the second year this program was offered, there were 20 RPre-K classrooms in 10 counties, serving approximately 275 children.

In 2014, both programs 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 of 16 for RK and 14 for RPre-K), 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.

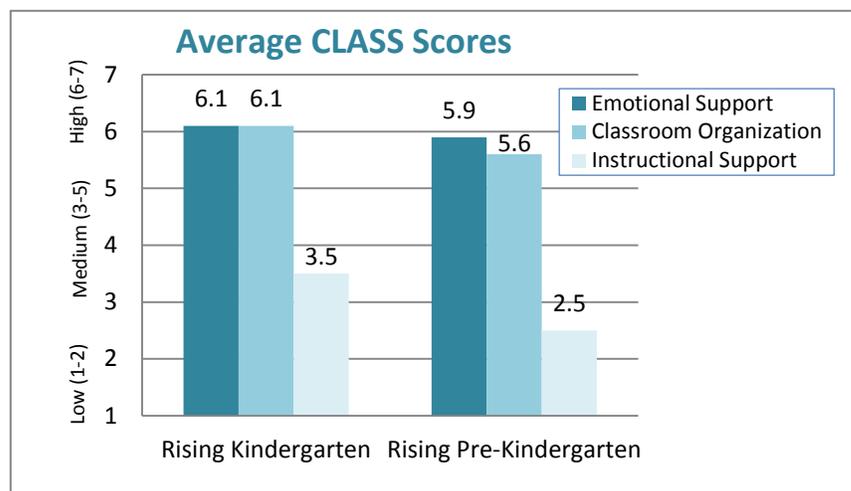
The overall goal of both the RK and the RPre-K summer programs is to support children's transitions and development, particularly their early literacy skills, through the last few months prior to kindergarten or pre-kindergarten entry.

Evaluation Design

To evaluate the RK and RPre-K Programs, teacher-child interactions were observed in the 62 RK and 20 RPre-K classrooms using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)². Lead teachers, assistant teachers, and transition coaches completed questionnaires about their education, experience, and services they provided. Additionally, parents of enrolled children were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their reasons for enrolling and experiences with the program. Systematic observations of lead and assistant teachers' use of English and Spanish were made in RPre-K classrooms.

Key Findings and Implications

In both programs, scores for CLASS Emotional Support and Classroom Organization were high. This means that the classrooms were warm and enjoyable, and time and behavior were managed so that children could participate in a variety of activities. Such environments provide children with an important basis for learning as they make the transitions to pre-kindergarten or kindergarten.



CLASS Instructional Support was typically in the middle range in the RK Program and the low range in RPre-k program. Instructional Support is important because past research has indicated that it is more strongly linked to children’s academic gains than other components of teacher-child interactions.³ Most studies find that it is in the low range and is significantly lower than Emotional Support or Classroom Organization. The fact that it is in the middle range in the RK Program is encouraging and will help these programs attain their goal of improving children’s school readiness skills. DECAL should provide supports and professional development to teachers to strengthen Instructional Support in both programs.

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.⁴ Whole group reading activities took place in the majority of classrooms, with approximately half

Parents were enthusiastic about the programs. When asked what they or their child liked best some responded:

“This program was invented for my child, so that she will be ready for kindergarten.”

“It really encouraged my daughter to enjoy school and learning.”

*“My daughter comes home very excited to show me what she learned at school. She speaks more English. She loves when I read her books.”**

*“I liked it a lot because my daughter has learned to get along with other children and the truth is it has helped in her development of learning.”**

“She has grown because of the wonderful teachers’ help in finding her way.”

* translated from Spanish

using some or all 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. A few classrooms had no Spanish books (14%) and two-thirds of them had no objects labeled in Spanish.

Parents were generally pleased with both programs and their child’s experiences. About two-thirds of parents in each program reported having attended at least one family workshop or activity, and those that did

attend reported positive experiences. Most parents indicated that helping their child learn new things and preparing for pre-kindergarten or kindergarten were their main motivations for enrolling. Many parents reported receiving support from transition coaches with activities such as preparing for the transition to pre-kindergarten or kindergarten and finding community events.

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 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

⁴ 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.