



Children's Outcomes through Second Grade

Findings from Year 4 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 to examine the quality of Georgia's Pre-K classrooms, the effects of participation in Georgia's Pre-K on children's school readiness skills, and the short- and long-term outcomes of children attending Georgia's Pre-K.

The purpose of the current Longitudinal Study is to examine outcomes for children who attended Georgia's Pre-K related to key academic skills as well as the quality of their classrooms from pre-k through fifth-grade. This study, begun in 2013–2014, involves a longitudinal design to follow a sample of 1,169 children, including 139 Spanish-speaking dual language learners (DLLs) who attended 199 randomly-selected Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. The 2016–2017 Georgia's Pre-K Program Evaluation focuses on the results of the fourth year of this longitudinal study through second grade, which included 951 of these children (116 Spanish-speaking DLLs).

The primary evaluation questions for the current study included: 1) What are the learning outcomes for children who attended Georgia's Pre-K Program?, 2) What factors predict better learning outcomes for children?, and 3) What is the quality of children's instructional experiences from pre-k through second grade?

Researchers conducted individual child assessments near the beginning and end of each year. The assessment measures, commonly used in research and evaluation, utilize standardized scores that are based on national norms. Increases in these scores over time suggest that children are growing at a faster than expected rate

for their ages, no changes suggest that growth is at the expected rate, and decreases suggest that growth is at a slower than expected rate.

The assessment measures covered multiple domains of learning, including language, literacy, math, executive function, and teacher ratings of behavior skills. For the DLL subsample, parallel assessments were conducted in both English and Spanish. Researchers also conducted observations in children's classrooms each year from pre-k through second grade to gather data on the quality of teacher-child instructional interactions using the CLASS. Child/family characteristics, classroom/teacher characteristics, and classroom quality were examined as predictors of children's growth in skills.

Results

- **Children who attended Georgia's Pre-K displayed a pattern of growth on most measures during pre-k and kindergarten that was not sustained through second grade.** The standardized scores were around the national mean on most measures at the beginning of pre-k and in a similar range at the end of second grade. However, the pattern of growth was not consistent over time for most language, literacy, and math measures. The standardized scores increased during pre-k and kindergarten and then decreased in later grades, with a relatively greater rate of gains in earlier grades compared to the rate of declines in later grades. For more advanced reading and math skills assessed only in first and second grades, standardized scores also showed decreases over time.

- **Children who were DLLs showed similar patterns of early growth for skills in English, but showed decreases over time for most language and literacy skills in Spanish.** The DLL subsample showed similar growth patterns to the full sample (early increases during pre-k and kindergarten and decreases through second grade) for most language, literacy, and math measures assessed in English. In contrast, for most language and literacy measures assessed in Spanish they exhibited decreases over time, with even greater decreases for children with lower levels of Spanish language proficiency.
- **Some child and classroom factors predicted differences in growth on these measures, including language proficiency, racial/ethnic background, pre-k provider type, and classroom quality.** For most measures, the patterns of early gains in skills during pre-k and kindergarten followed by decreases in later grades were stronger for children with lower levels of English language proficiency, Hispanic/Latino children, and those who attended public school pre-k sites. For children in the DLL subsample, attending better quality classrooms during pre-k or elementary school was associated with better outcomes for some skills.
- **The quality of teacher-child instructional interactions varied across different domains, with slightly higher scores in pre-k than in subsequent grades.** 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 children's subsequent kindergarten through second-grade classrooms. 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.

Conclusions

Overall, this large, representative sample of children who attended Georgia's Pre-K continued to perform near the mean on most standardized measures based on national norms by the end of second grade. Although children continued to learn and develop throughout this period, their growth was greater than expected from pre-k through kindergarten, but decreased during first and second grades for most measures. They showed gains on scores in the earlier grades (pre-k and kindergarten), followed by decreases in scores through second grade. These overall

findings of initial effects related to pre-k participation that are not sustained over time are consistent with results from most studies of the longer-term impacts of early childhood programs.

In this study, growth in skills for Spanish-speaking DLLs was measured in both English and Spanish. These results suggest that although children in the DLL subsample were continuing to develop across all domains of learning in English, they were not keeping pace with regard to some of these same skills in Spanish. It is important to note that the language of instruction in these classrooms was primarily English, and there may be few resources and little support for children's home language within their classroom and school settings.

For children with lower language proficiency, Hispanic/Latino children, and children who attended public school Georgia's Pre-K sites, these effects on learning outcomes were even stronger. These results offer further evidence that as children, particularly some more vulnerable groups of children, progress from Georgia's Pre-K through elementary school, they may be experiencing patterns of decreasing learning gains that are not being supported by optimal learning opportunities within the school setting. These findings have important implications not only for the understanding of pre-k in Georgia but also for the rest of the country. ■

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