

made by children in the *More at Four Program* indicate that they were developing at the expected rate or even greater than expected in some areas. They showed significant improvement in scores from the beginning to the end of the *More at Four* year for all outcome areas measured: language and literacy skills (receptive language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, story and print concepts); math skills (counting); general knowledge (social awareness and color naming); and behavioral skills (social skills). For children progressing at the typical rate, scores on standardized measures would remain constant over time, as they take into account expected changes related to age. In the present sample, however, children showed significant gains on two standardized measures (receptive language and social skills) and maintained their scores on the remaining two (applied math problems and behavior problems). Children also showed substantial growth on the non-standardized measures in all areas. While some growth in skills would be expected over the year as children become older, such growth is often more limited for at-risk children, with some research evidence suggesting that their scores on standardized measures may actually decrease over time without appropriate intervention programs.

### What factors were associated with better outcomes for children?

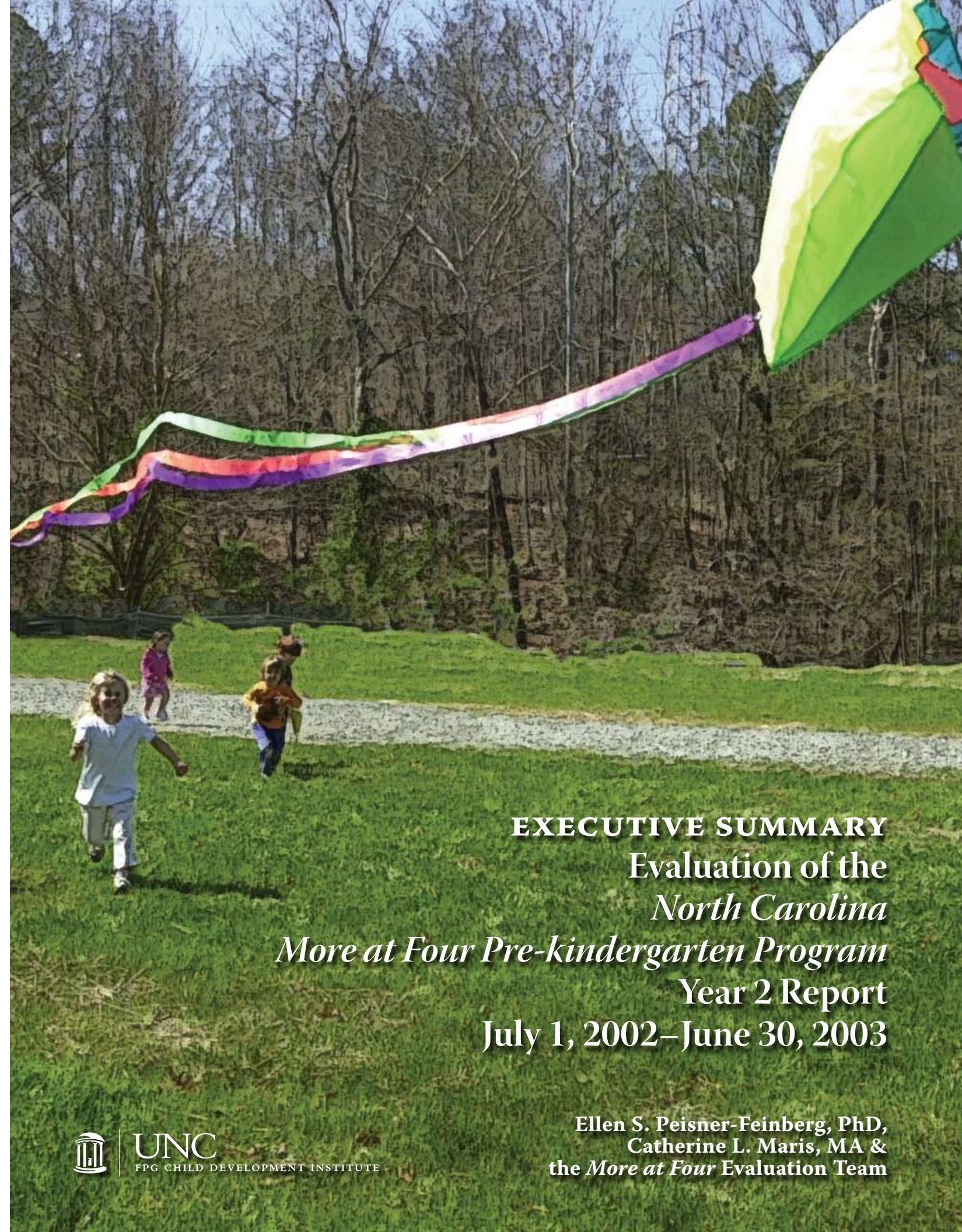
The *More at Four Program* had even stronger effects in some skill areas for children entering the program with greater needs compared to those with lesser needs. Greater gains were made over the program year for children at a higher level of service priority status (math skills), at greater overall risk (language and literacy skills and general cognitive knowledge), or at lower levels of English proficiency (language skills and general cognitive knowledge) compared to other children in the program. In addition, specific structural characteristics of the classroom—better teacher qualifications and a higher proportion of *More at Four* children in the classroom—were associated with greater gains on some measures of language and literacy skills. Differences in classroom quality were not associated with the amount of developmental growth exhibited by children; however, the scores on classroom quality were fairly high overall, suggesting that most children were in good quality programs.

### How do these findings compare to other studies of similar programs?

During its second year of operation, the *More at Four Program* was performing at least as well as or better than other more established large-scale pre-kindergarten programs, both in terms of program quality and child outcomes. We compared the findings from the present study of the *More at Four Program* to the results from a national study of the Head Start Program and a national study of state pre-kindergarten programs in six states. The *More at Four Program* in its second year was of similar quality and had similar outcomes for children when compared to Head Start, a federally-funded early education program for children of low-income families which has been in operation for nearly 40 years. When compared to other state pre-kindergarten programs, *More at Four* was operating at higher level of quality in terms of teacher qualifications and classroom practices, although some of the setting characteristics were similar. Comparison of children's scores at entry into the program (the only available comparison data) indicates that children in the *More at Four Program* were performing similarly to poor children in the other statewide pre-kindergarten programs, a population consistent with that of *More at Four*. ♦

FPG Child Development Institute at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is one of the nation's oldest multidisciplinary centers devoted to the study of children and families. Our mission is to cultivate and share knowledge that enhances child development and family well being.

FPG.  
Advancing knowledge.  
Enhancing lives.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY Evaluation of the *North Carolina More at Four Pre-kindergarten Program* Year 2 Report July 1, 2002–June 30, 2003



UNC  
FPG CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Ellen S. Peisner-Feinberg, PhD,  
Catherine L. Maris, MA &  
the *More at Four* Evaluation Team





# Executive Summary

**T**HE NORTH CAROLINA MORE AT FOUR PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM is a state-funded initiative for at-risk 4-year-olds, designed to help them be more successful when they enter kindergarten. *More at Four* began in 2001–2002, with a partial year of services available in 26 counties/regions during the first year (January 2002–June 2002). The second year of *More at Four* provided the first opportunity for programs to offer a full year of services for children, although there was ongoing start-up in 55 new counties/regions and expansion in continuing sites throughout this period as well. A statewide evaluation of the *More at Four Program* during its second year of operation (July 2002–June 2003) was conducted to address a series of questions about the operations of the program, the quality of the program, and the outcomes for participating children.

## What were the characteristics of the local programs?

The *More at Four Program* experienced dramatic expansion from the first year to the second year, with a nearly five-fold increase in the number of children served from year 1 (1,244) to year 2 (6,125), and expansion from 26 to 81 counties/regions across the state. Children were served in a variety of service delivery settings, including public schools, for-profit and nonprofit private child care centers, Head Start, and various other combinations. Half (50%) were in public school settings and about one-third (31%) were in for-profit child care settings. There was a great deal of variation among the different counties/regions in local program characteristics, including program size, types of settings, and children's risk factor status. Most individual sites met the guidelines for program operation, including class size and operating hours. Given the ongoing expansion, there was greater variation in the length of the program year, with many sites beginning operation throughout the year. The *More at Four* program guidelines include standards for staff qualifications (education, credentials, and licensure), which programs have 4 years to attain, as well as specifications for provisional approval during this period. By the second year, some staff met the standards for education, credential, and licensure qualifications outlined in the program guidelines, and nearly all program staff met at least some specifications for provisional approval. Moreover, the level of qualifications held by program staff (lead teachers, assistant teachers, and site administrators) was fairly high compared to other pre-kindergarten or child care samples.

## Who was served by the *More at Four Program*?

The *More at Four Program* continued to serve a diverse group of children in the second year. A significant proportion of the children served in *More at Four* had an identified disability (9%), more than the estimated US population average (6%). The program served the intended population based on certain risk factors (as described in the program guidelines), with the majority of children designated at significant or potential risk on the factors of family income and parental employment, and substantial proportions of children at risk on the factors of parent education, family composition, housing stability, and minority status. Programs also were serving the intended population based on service priority status, with almost three-quarters (71%) of the children not previously served in a preschool or child care setting, the highest service priority group.

## What was the quality of the services provided?

Observations of the quality of classroom practices in 139 classrooms indicated that the *More at Four Program* provided a good quality preschool experience based on generally accepted standards for best practice. In addition, 85% of the classrooms met or exceeded the *More at Four* program guidelines in this area. Overall scores on the measure of classroom practices (ECERS-R) were in the highest (good) quality range for slightly over half of the sample and in the medium quality range for the remaining classrooms, with no classrooms scoring in the poor quality range. Average scores met or exceeded the program guidelines for total scores in six of the seven areas of classroom practices, with scores in the highest quality range for four areas (interactions with and supervision of children, language and reasoning experiences, program structure and organization, and provisions for parents and staff) and in the medium quality range for the remaining three areas (daily activities, space and furnishings, and routine care). While the overall quality scores were high, there were a few individual items in the poor quality range, which potentially may compromise children's health and safety, including space for gross motor play, meals/snacks, toileting, and safety practices.

Observations of the level of curriculum implementation in 48 classrooms indicated that they partially met the criteria for implementation of the particular curriculum used, but typically did not fully meet these criteria. There were moderate associations between the quality of classroom practices and curriculum implementation, suggesting that somewhat different training may be needed to improve the global quality of classroom practices and to improve the level of curriculum implementation. Two structural characteristics were associated with differences in the quality of classroom practices, but not with the level of curriculum implementation. Classrooms in community settings were somewhat more likely to have better practices compared to those in public school settings, as were classrooms with teachers licensed in early childhood (B-K or preschool add-on licenses) compared to those with teachers licensed in other areas.

## How satisfied were families with the *More at Four Program*?

Based on survey responses from 1,499 families, most parents (78%–87%) were very satisfied with all aspects of the *More at Four Program*. Nearly all parents (92%–98%) reported that their children always or often had positive experiences in the program. Parents also were pleased with how well the program helped their children develop skills related to kindergarten success, with most (82%–95%) reporting their children were very well or fairly well prepared across the different skill areas. Parents reported involvement with the *More at Four Program* in a variety of ways, with most parents involved in several activities (average=4), and almost all parents (95%) participating in at least one program activity.

## What were the outcomes of children attending the *More at Four Program*?

Children demonstrated substantial growth in skills related to kindergarten readiness over the *More at Four* program year, based on individual assessments of 271 children at the beginning and end of the program year. As expected for an at-risk population, these children entered the program with skills below average. However, the gains

© 2005 by Ellen S. Peisner-Feinberg, FPG Child Development Institute, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Photographs: Don Trull, FPG Child Development Institute  
Design & Layout: Gina Harrison, FPG Publications Office

Suggested citation: Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., & Maris, C. L. (2005). *Executive summary: Evaluation of the North Carolina More at Four Pre-kindergarten Program year 2 report July 1, 2002–June 30, 2003*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute.

Research funded by the North Carolina More at Four Pre-kindergarten Program, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and Governor's Office, as part of the statewide evaluation of the North Carolina More at Four Pre-kindergarten Program.

For more information about the Evaluation of the North Carolina More at Four Pre-kindergarten Program including a full version of this report, visit the web site at [www.fpg.unc.edu/~mafeval](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~mafeval).

1000 copies of this document were printed at a cost of \$691 or 69¢ each.