

**T**HE NORTH CAROLINA MORE AT FOUR PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM is a state-funded initiative providing a classroom-based educational program for at-risk 4-year-olds designed to help them be more successful when they enter kindergarten. More at Four served nearly 34,000 children in the 2008–2009 school year, and has served over 133,000 children during the first eight program years (2002–2009).

Key findings from the eighth year of the statewide evaluation of the More at Four Program are described below. This report includes information about characteristics of the program statewide, classroom quality, and outcomes for children during pre-k and kindergarten. These results are based on data from monthly service reports from all sites; observations of the quality of classroom practices in randomly-selected pre-k (n=206) and kindergarten (n=268) classrooms; and individual assessments of growth in language and literacy skills, math skills, general knowledge, and social skills during pre-k and kindergarten for 3 cohorts of children (n=1,313).

The primary research questions addressed by this evaluation included:

- What were the key characteristics of the local More at Four programs and to what extent have they changed over time?
- What was the quality of the More at Four pre-k and kindergarten classrooms attended by children?
- What were the longitudinal outcomes from pre-k through kindergarten for children who attended the More at Four Program?
- What factors were associated with better outcomes for children?

## Key Findings

### Program Characteristics

- Although the More at Four Program has grown substantially each year, many characteristics related to program guidelines and educational quality have remained consistent through Year 8.
- Children have been served in a variety of early childhood settings, with approximately half in public school sites and half in private sites, including about 20% in Head Start, with most of the children in each classroom funded by More at Four.
- The majority of children (over 70%) have been unserved at time of enrollment, the highest service priority group. The children served are at-risk with most qualifying for free- or reduced-price lunch, and a substantial proportion demonstrating other risk factors, including limited English proficiency (19%) and developmental or educational need (30%).
- The program has made progress in improving the licensure and credential levels of teachers in community settings, with increases in the proportion of teachers with B-K licenses and decreases in the proportion with no credential.

## Evaluation of the North Carolina More at Four Pre-kindergarten Program



## A Look across Time at Children's Outcomes and Classroom Quality from Pre-k through Kindergarten. (2003–2009)



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For more information, visit the evaluation website at [www.fpg.unc.edu/~mafeval](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~mafeval).

- The quality of educational practices was generally higher in the More at Four pre-k classrooms than the kindergarten classes subsequently attended by children for most aspects that were measured:
  - ◆ Global classroom practices (Space and furnishings, Personal care routines, Language-reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program structure)
  - ◆ Instructional practices (Emotional support, Instructional support)
  - ◆ Literacy environment (Classroom quality observation, Literacy environment)
  - ◆ Teacher-child interactions (greater Sensitivity, lower Harshness and Detachment)
- Pre-k classrooms with B-K licensed teachers had better quality literacy environments than those with less highly qualified teachers.
- Kindergarten classrooms with smaller class sizes had better quality global classroom practices than those with larger class sizes.

### Child Outcomes

- Children who attended More at Four made substantial gains in pre-k and kindergarten in key domains of learning (receptive vocabulary, phonological awareness, print knowledge, letter/word knowledge, applied math, counting, social awareness, and social skills).
- For many basic skills (receptive language, applied problems, social awareness, social skills, problem behaviors) children maintained the same level of growth from pre-k to kindergarten. For other more academic skills (phonological awareness, print knowledge, letter/word knowledge, counting), children exhibited even greater growth in kindergarten. This pattern suggests that children gained foundational skills in pre-k that prepared them to develop more advanced reading and math skills in elementary school.
- Participation in the More at Four Program was beneficial for all children's learning and development, but had even greater benefits for children who entered pre-k with greater needs, especially those with lower English proficiency levels. These children scored lower throughout pre-k and kindergarten across domains of learning (language, math, general knowledge), but made gains at a faster rate.
- For Spanish-speaking children, gains were found in some skills in Spanish as well (math, general knowledge), even though the language of instruction was primarily or exclusively English.

In sum, these results indicate that as the More at Four Program has scaled up over the first 8 years of operation, it has continued to meet its goals and maintain services in accord with program guidelines. Overall, these results offer evidence that the More at Four Program provides children with opportunities to gain foundational skills during pre-k that prepare them to develop even more advanced academic skills in elementary school. Given that the majority of these children likely would not otherwise have participated in such a school readiness program, the provision of such experiences is of critical importance. The findings from the current evaluation, in addition to many other research studies, support the need for high quality early childhood education programs such as More at Four, especially for children who are at risk even before they enter school.

