



Highlights from the Evaluation of Georgia's 2013 Rising Kindergarten and Rising Pre-Kindergarten Summer Transition Programs

Background

Building on the success of Georgia's Pre-K, in 2010 the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning began offering a program for children from low-income families during the summer before kindergarten. In the summer of 2013, this Rising Kindergarten (RK) Program was offered in 122 classrooms and served 1,948 children. In the summer of 2013, services were expanded to offer a Rising Pre-Kindergarten (RPre-K) Program for children who would be attending Georgia's Pre-K at the end of the summer and whose families were low-income and spoke Spanish at home. The decision to create the RPre-K Program resulted from an evaluation that indicated more supports may be needed for dual-language learners. In 2013, there were 19 RPre-K classrooms, serving 244 children. 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 Program, 126 RK children's skills were assessed at the start and end of the summer program. Additionally, observations of teacher-child interactions were made in 60 RK classrooms, using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). To evaluate the RPre-K Program, CLASS observations were made in all 19 classrooms, along with observations of English and Spanish use. In both programs, teachers and transition coaches completed questionnaires.

Key Findings and Implications

Children's skills improved during the RK Program. The pre-literacy and school readiness skills of children participating in the RK Program improved. Gains in children's skills had also been seen in three previous evaluations, and in 2013 some of the gains were moderate in size. For a six-week program to demonstrate moderate gains is somewhat unexpected and implies a successful implementation. These findings must be interpreted with caution, how-

ever, because there was no comparison group, so we cannot be certain that the gains resulted from participation in the RK Program.

In both RK and RPre-K, classroom quality was similar to other programs. Scores for CLASS Emotional Support and CLASS Classroom Organization were high, but scores for CLASS Instructional Support were low. This pattern is similar to that seen in other early childhood studies, both in Georgia and in other states.

Both Spanish and English were used regularly in RPre-K Classrooms.

Learning opportunities for dual-language learners are maximized when both languages are used in the classroom. Both English and Spanish were used commonly for explicit instruction and behavior management in RPre-K classrooms. The majority of the rooms had books in both English and Spanish, but one in three rooms had no Spanish books. Fewer rooms had labels in both English and Spanish. RPre-K teachers might benefit from professional development regarding how young children acquire language and literacy skills.