



School Readiness Outcomes for Illinois's State-funded Prekindergarten Program

This fact sheet summarizes findings from an evaluation by Erikson Institute in conjunction with SRI International concerning the school readiness outcomes of children attending PreK/PFA programs in Illinois outside the city of Chicago. The statewide evaluation does not include programs in the Chicago Public Schools because CPS conducts its own evaluations of its prekindergarten.

School Readiness Outcomes

- By kindergarten, participating children showed significant improvements in important school readiness skills. The findings included the following:
 - Increased language skills
 - Improved social skills
 - Reduced problem behaviors
 - Increased attention and task persistence skills
- These significant improvements were seen across income and risk groups, with children from low-income and high-risk groups making the intended gains that will better prepare them to succeed in school.
- Low-income children and those at risk were particularly likely to demonstrate improvements in attention and task persistence skills.
- Across all groups, early math skills did not show improvements over time.

Background

In 2008, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) funded Erikson Institute to conduct an independent statewide evaluation of all of its programs for young children outside the city of Chicago.

Illinois has been a national leader in supporting and funding high-quality programs to improve the school readiness outcomes of its young children. Two of those programs, administered by ISBE, have focused especially on those children at risk for failure in school.

- Established by the state in 1985, the *Prekindergarten Program for Children at Risk of Academic Failure* (PreK) focuses exclusively on serving children aged 3 to

5 years identified as being at risk for poor school readiness and subsequent struggles in their learning and academic performance.

- Established in 2006, *Preschool for All* (PFA) builds on the longstanding PreK program and aims to provide early education opportunities for preschool-aged children, with priority given to programs serving a majority of children from low income families or at risk due to home and community factors.

Participants

- A total of 684 children from PreK/PFA programs across the state participated; this is a representative sample of the population of children served outside of Chicago.

Information Collected

- Standardized measures of cognition, behavior, attention, and language development were used to assess young children's skills. In addition, observations of prekindergarten classrooms and surveys of teachers, administrators, and parents were conducted.
- Children were assessed at the beginning of their pre-school year in fall 2009 at age 4 and then again in fall 2010 as they entered kindergarten at age 5.

Conclusions

- PreK/PFA is improving school readiness for children from all backgrounds.
- PreK/PFA can serve to better prepare low-income and at-risk children for success in school.
- PreK/PFA teachers may need additional training and support to promote children's early math skills.

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