

THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

First Class Pre-K

Issue Brief 3, December 2016

School Readiness and Growth among Students in First Class Pre-K Teaching Strategies GOLD Performance, Fall 2015 and Spring 2016

Background

The mission of the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education is to provide state leadership that identifies, promotes, and coordinates services for children, their families, and communities. Housed within the Department of Early Childhood Education, the Office of School Readiness administers Alabama's diverse delivery, voluntary, high quality Pre-K program. Classrooms are funded through a grant process in which sites must meet specific quality standards and abide by rigorous operating guidelines. Alabama's First Class Pre-K program has been awarded the highest quality rating by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for the past 10 years.

Introduction

To support high quality learning environments and alignment of effective instruction to student success, all children in First Class Pre-K classrooms are assessed using Teaching Strategies GOLD®, an ongoing, observation-based, research-validated assessment system. Grounded in current research related to child development and learning, the Teaching Strategies GOLD® assessment includes 38 objectives across six domains of development (social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and math) that are associated with school success based on school readiness standards.¹ The purpose of this issue brief is to examine school readiness and growth among students who received First Class Pre-K during the 2015/2016 school year.

Methods

All students in Alabama First Class Pre-K classrooms who received both a Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 assessment were included in analyses. Performance was compared with widely-held expectations (WHE) for four-year-olds as provided by Teaching Strategies GOLD® for each time point; results were dichotomized to "below expectations" and "meets or exceeds expectations." An assessment of meeting expected growth over time was based on normed scaled score ranges established by Teaching Strategies GOLD® and calculated as the difference between the Spring and Fall time point assessments for each developmental domain.² Subset analyses of meeting growth expectations were conducted for low income children (free or reduced lunch status), English Language Learners (primary language other than English), and students receiving special education (has Individualized Education Program).³

Findings

At entry into First Class Pre-K programs in the 2015/2016 school year, one- to two-thirds of children were performing below WHE for their age across all domains of school readiness (range = 31.1% for literacy to 63.2% for math). After completing the year of First Class Pre-K, the majority of children were meeting or exceeding WHE across all domains (range = 92.8% for math to 98.1% for literacy). The domains with the largest increases in the percentage of children meeting or exceeding WHE were math (56 percentage points), cognitive (42.9 percentage points), and social-emotional (41.4 percentage points). See Table 1.

The majority of children in subgroup analyses met established expectations for growth for each domain (low income: range = 85.9% for language to 92.9% for physical; students receiving special education: range = 83.4% for language to 90.5% for physical; English Language Learners: range = 88.6% for language to 95.6% for physical). See Table 2.

Table 1: Child Development Compared to Widely-Held Expectations; all First Class Pre-K; Fall 2015 – Spring 2016.

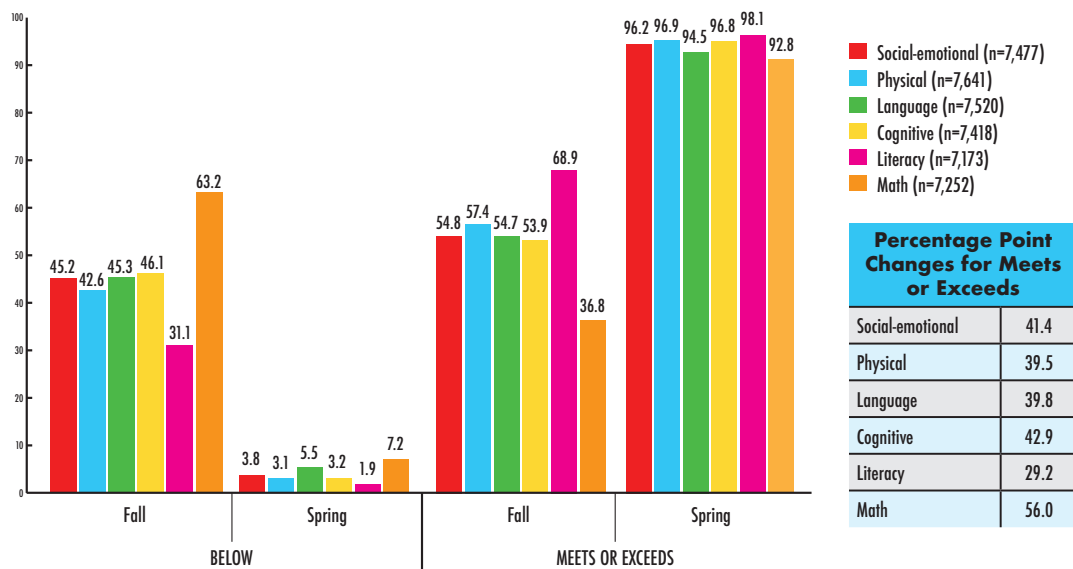
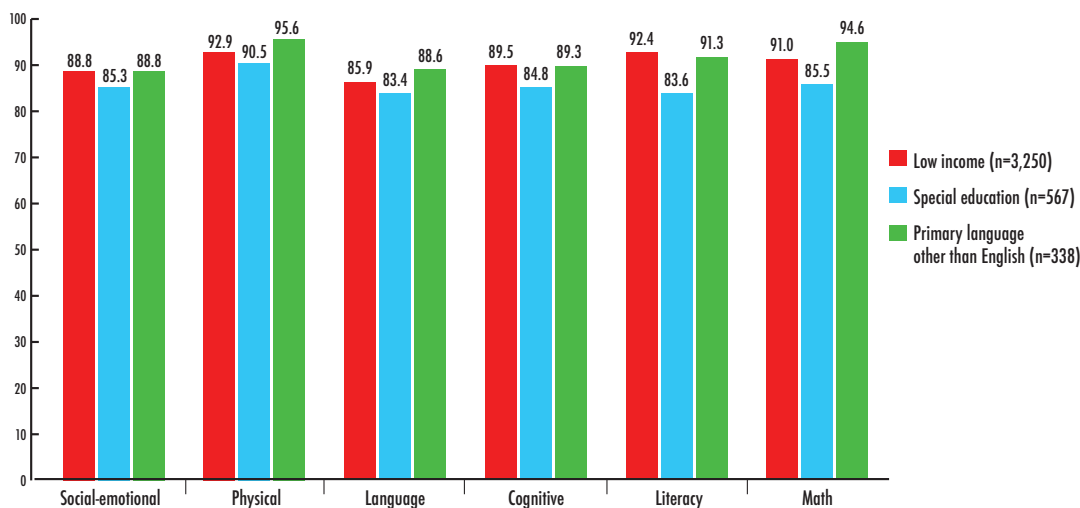


Table 2: Meeting Expected Growth Targets; Selected Sub-Groups; First Class Pre-K; Fall 2015 – Spring 2016.



Implications

Across all domains of school readiness, many children who entered First Class Pre-K programs in the 2015/2016 school year were performing below widely-held expectations (WHE) for school readiness for their age. However, after completing the year of First Class Pre-K, nearly all children – **over 90%** – were meeting or exceeding WHE across all domains. Without First Class Pre-K, many of these students would arrive to kindergarten below expectations for school readiness, threatening their future school success. Further, the largest gains were observed in math skills, an important finding as research suggests early math skills not only predict math achievement through high school, but also are a better predictor of later reading achievement than even early reading skills.⁴

Among vulnerable populations, more than eight in 10 children who received First Class Pre-K met growth targets by the end of the Pre-K year. Meeting expected growth targets is an especially important outcome for children in vulnerable groups who may not meet WHE for their age, yet make expected growth gains that show progress and reflect closing the achievement gap.

These findings demonstrate that First Class Pre-K supports a strong foundation for school success and school readiness and is helping close the achievement gap for vulnerable children in Alabama.

References:

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- Clements D.H. & Sarama, J. (2013). Math in the early years: A strong predictor for later school success. *The Progress of Education Reform*, 14(5), 1-7. Available: <http://www.du.edu/kennedyinstitute/media/documents/math-in-the-early-years.pdf>