

Seattle Preschool Program: 2016–17 Impact Report Overview

In 2014, voters approved a four-year \$58 million levy to increase children’s access to affordable, high-quality preschool and to close the kindergarten readiness gap. With this funding, the City began enrolling children in preschool who could otherwise not afford it and made strides toward increasing access to high-quality classrooms throughout Seattle.

After its second year of operation, an independent evaluation of the Seattle Preschool Program has found classroom quality in the 2016-17 school year improved while, at the same time, more than doubling the number of classrooms (from 15 to 33). The evaluation found that Seattle compares favorably to the early years of other successful pre-K programs across the country.

The Seattle Preschool Program is currently undergoing a four-year evaluation intended to provide an assessment of the program’s quality and its impact on children over time. The 2016-17 school year study, conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and the University of Washington, observed 32 Seattle Preschool Program classrooms and 7 non-Seattle Preschool Program comparison classrooms. As the Seattle Preschool Program is still in the formative stages of program development, these findings should be interpreted with caution because research indicates that the impact of a preschool program cannot be reliably evaluated until it is fully implemented.

The demonstration phase of the Seattle Preschool Program (2015-2019) has three purposes: (1) to demonstrate the viability of the program design; (2) to demonstrate that the design produces positive outcomes for Seattle children by improving preschool quality; and (3) to engage in continuous quality improvement through evaluation. Key findings are summarized below.

FINDING 1: The Seattle Preschool Program produced gains in vocabulary, literacy, and math

The study assessed children as part of a comparison group to estimate Seattle Preschool Program impacts. Researchers found evidence suggesting the Seattle Preschool Program promotes positive effects in vocabulary, literacy, and math, though the comparison group statistically outperformed the Seattle Preschool Program sample in one measure of executive function.

On average, children of color and those from non-English speaking or low-income homes made the largest gains in vocabulary, literacy, and math compared their counterparts who were identified as White, children from non-low-income families, and children whose primary language is identified as English.

FINDING 2: The Seattle Preschool Program outperformed comparison programs and saw improvements in classroom quality from year 1.

When compared to the early years of other successful preschool programs across the country, the Seattle Preschool Program showed similar or higher average scores in Emotional Support and Classroom Organization than Boston (assessed in 2009), New Jersey (2013), and Tulsa (2009); scores similar to the first years of the San Antonio programs (2014, 2015).

The Seattle Preschool Program increased average scores on an assessment related to classroom quality and adult-child interactions¹ in Emotional and Instructional Support, while maintaining a high-level average score in Classroom Organization.

The 2016-17 Emotional Support score ranked in the top three when compared to eight comparison pre-k programs across the country. Classrooms also substantially raised their average Instructional Support score (3.06). Though lower than some comparison programs that have been continually operating for years, this score is higher than the national average.

Scores on a new assessment related to the display and use of classroom materials and classroom routines increased from year 1 to year 2 across all six measured areas.ⁱⁱ Seattle Preschool Program had higher average scores than three state pre-K programs (Georgia, Washington and Pennsylvania), but is out-performed by the mature and high-achieving New Jersey Abbott Program.

FINDING 3: While available to all Seattle four-year-olds, the majority of SPS participants are from low- and middle-income families.

Approximately 67% of the children randomly selected for the study, and approximately 80% of children across the entire program, were from families earning less than 300% of federal poverty level (FPL), or less than \$73,000 annually for a family of four and qualified for free tuition.

The children selected to participate in the Seattle Preschool Program study had similar linguistic diversity but were more racially and ethnically diverse than children currently enrolled in Seattle Public Schools. The largest racial group in the Seattle Preschool Program study were multi-racial students (29%), followed by Black or African American (23%), White (21%), Asian or Pacific Islander (17%), Latino or Hispanic (8%), and students that identified as Other (3%). The largest demographic in Seattle Public Schools are White students (46%).

Further information in the attached report.

Families in the Seattle Preschool Program group reported higher overall positive changes on their child since preschool enrollment, better connection with their preschool, and slightly higher teacher communication levels when compared to the families in the non-Seattle Preschool Program classrooms.

These findings, along with information on the evaluation methodology and data instruments are described in depth in the body of the Year 2 report. DEEL will continue to use this data to refine and strengthen the Seattle Preschool Program to work towards our goal of closing the opportunity gap for Seattle's children and families.

For more information about the design of the program and the children it serves, see seattle.gov/education/overview.

ⁱ The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®).

ⁱⁱ As measured by measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale®, Third Edition (ECERS-3).