

SEATTLE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PROCESS EVALUATION

Implementation of SPP Specialized Classrooms and Family Child Care Models

Seattle's Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) launched the Seattle Preschool Program (SPP) in 2015. SPP offers evidence-based, equity-focused, and culturally responsive learning environments in partnership with preschool providers throughout the city.

In 2024, DEEL partnered with Education Northwest and the American Institutes for Research[®] to evaluate implementation of three SPP classroom models: dual language initiative (DLI), special education inclusion (SPP Plus), and family child care (FCC). This brief presents selected findings from the evaluation (see full report for more detailed findings).

Community input

To ensure the evaluation reflects community priorities and perspectives, the evaluation team worked with an advisory committee of community members, program directors, preschool teachers, coaches, and higher education personnel. The advisory committee was a valuable partner in designing the evaluation, reviewing measures and questions, and framing the findings.

What we did to learn more

The evaluation team learned about DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC models by conducting interviews, focus groups, document reviews, and site visits. We also used data from surveys, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS),¹ and Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG)² to describe classroom quality and child outcomes.

¹ The CLASS assessment is a tool used to evaluate classroom quality in three areas: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support.

² TSG is an assessment that measures young children's growth and development in social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and math skills.

Interviews and focus groups. The evaluation team interviewed nine program administrators to learn the key features of DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC classroom models. The team also conducted 13 focus groups with 19 family members, 32 educators, and seven DEEL coaches to learn their views on the benefits, strengths, and recommendations for improving each classroom model.

Document reviews. We reviewed policies, procedures, and guidance documents to learn about implementation of each classroom model.

Site visits. The evaluation team observed the instructional practices and classroom environments in three DLI classrooms, six SPP Plus classrooms, and two FCC programs to see how each model was implemented in classrooms that differed in implementation quality, location, and children’s characteristics.

Classroom characteristics, implementation quality, and child

outcome data. For each classroom model, we analyzed the following data to describe classroom characteristics, implementation quality, and child outcomes.

- **Classroom characteristics.** Our team described children’s enrollment, race/ethnicity, home language, and family income. We also reported the number of teachers along with their qualifications, race/ethnicity, and language backgrounds.
- **Implementation quality.** We compared the 2023–24 CLASS scores for each classroom model with comparison classrooms that were not designated DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC. Our team analyzed survey data from families, teachers, and directors to help measure ideal implementation for each classroom type using an implementation fidelity checklist developed by the evaluation team and DEEL.
- **Child outcomes.** We used regression analyses to explore the relationships between DLI or SPP Plus and TSG and WaKIDS scores, controlling for other factors such as child demographic characteristics or eligibility for education supports. These analyses were not conducted for FCC classrooms due to the small number of children.



Key findings for DLI classrooms

In 2023–24, SPP supported 22 DLI classrooms that provided 359 children with dual language instruction in nine focus languages: American Sign Language, Amharic, Cantonese, French, Mandarin, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. DLI classrooms use Soy Bilingüe curriculum, a strengths-based dual language immersion model.

DLI classrooms enroll more Asian and multilingual children and have more multilingual teachers.

In 2023–24, DLI programs had a larger proportion of Asian children than non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms (31% compared to 15%), as well as a higher proportion of multilingual children (63% compared to 40%) and multilingual teachers (78% compared to 40%). About one in four children (27%) in DLI classrooms spoke the classroom focus language at home.

Some classrooms showed room for growth to meet goals for ideal classroom environments and teaching practices.

A majority of classrooms showed adequate or excellent implementation related to most implementation measures; however, in a majority of classrooms, less than 50% of enrolled children spoke the focus language at home.

In 2023–24, DLI classrooms had similar average CLASS scores as non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms in classroom organization (6.2 for both) and emotional support (6.5 for both) but lower scores in instructional support (3.0 compared to 3.3).

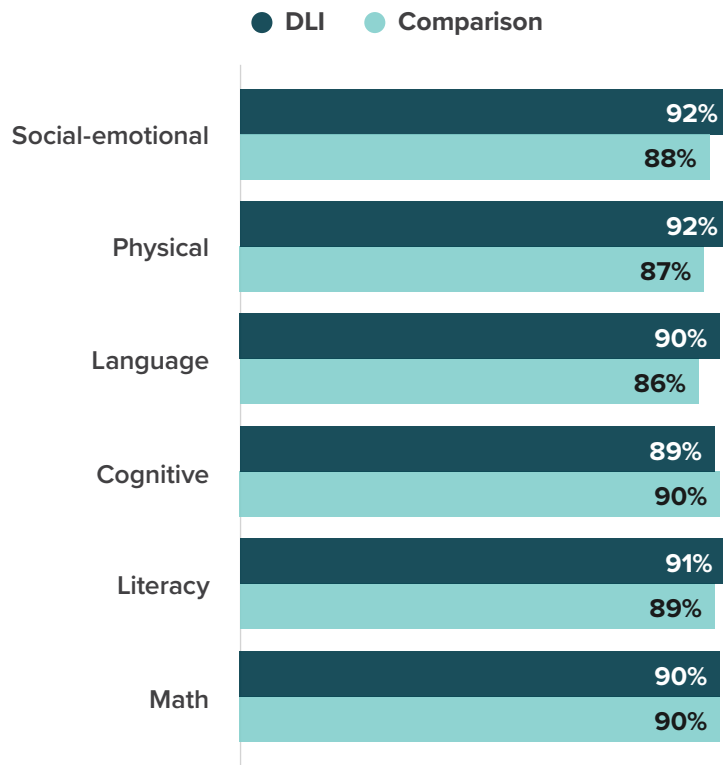
“My son every day came back home and then sings in Chinese. It surprised me. When we were [children], we learned the same song.”

– Family member

DLI classrooms show alignment with evidence-based practices in many instances. During site visits, teachers promoted language development, and some teachers connected content to children’s backgrounds. In focus groups, some teachers shared concerns about teacher retention and child assessment. Many families expressed in focus groups that the DLI classroom valued and celebrated their cultural backgrounds and improved their child’s language and social skills.

DLI classrooms show higher or similar child outcomes. Children in DLI classrooms met TSG growth targets at similar rates in most domains (figure 1). The children in DLI classrooms also had a higher rate of meeting all six widely held expectations than children in non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms. Among kindergartners eligible for English learner services in Seattle Public Schools, those who previously attended DLI classrooms had similar kindergarten readiness outcomes as those who attended SPP classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCCs.

Figure 1. Children in DLI classrooms met TSG growth targets at higher rates in four of six domains than children in comparison classrooms, 2023–24



Note: Comparison classrooms refer to non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms in the SPP program. The physical domain was the only domain with statistically significant differences in rates for meeting growth targets.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning TSG data.

Key findings for SPP Plus classrooms

SPP Plus classrooms provide inclusive learning environments in which children with an individualized education program (IEP) and typically developing children learn together in a preschool classroom. In 2023–24, SPP supported 28 SPP Plus classrooms that served 510 children, of whom 27 percent had IEPs.

SPP Plus classrooms enroll children with similar characteristics as other SPP classrooms.

The racial/ethnic composition of children and teachers in SPP Plus classrooms was similar to other types of SPP classrooms, though the percentage of multilingual children was lower. SPP Plus classrooms enroll two to five fewer children than many other SPP classrooms, and five to seven of the enrolled children must have an IEP. Most SPP Plus classrooms are located within Seattle Public Schools elementary schools. The remainder are part of the University of Washington Haring Center for Inclusive Education.

SPP Plus classrooms show high levels of quality and implementation fidelity on most measures. In 2023–24, SPP Plus classrooms had higher average scores on all three CLASS domains than other types of SPP classrooms. SPP Plus classrooms enroll a recommended number of children with an IEP, have positive feedback from families, and on average have more staff members than other types of classrooms.

SPP Plus classrooms show alignment with evidence-based practices and room for improvement in certain areas.

During site visits, teachers used child-centered approaches such as play-based instruction that encouraged each child's engagement, social interactions, and inclusion in learning activities. In focus groups SPP Plus families said that their children with and without disabilities experienced belonging, strengthened relationship-building skills, and had opportunities to learn about acceptance of differences. Areas of improvement include enrollment processes, using data to inform decisions, and welcoming families to engage in their classroom and with one another. Teachers also highlighted a need for alignment between coaching and training offerings.

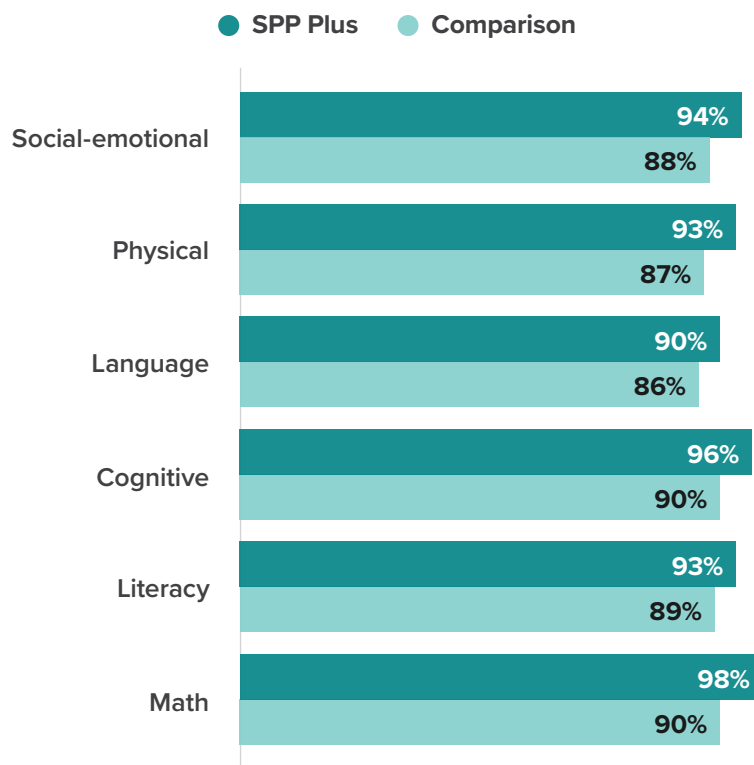
“We have seen a massive behavioral change in my son ... I think it’s because of their ability to redirect to a purposeful, intentional activity while keeping in mind his preferred activities.”

– Family member



SPP Plus classrooms have higher child outcomes in most areas. In 2023–24, children in SPP Plus classrooms had higher TSG spring scores and a higher percentage of meeting TSG growth targets than children in comparison classrooms (figure 2). However, SPP Plus classrooms had a slightly lower rate of children meeting TSG widely held expectations in all six domains than comparison classrooms. Among Seattle Public Schools kindergartners both with and without an IEP, children who had previously attended SPP Plus classrooms had higher levels of kindergarten readiness in 2023–24 than those who attended other types of SPP classrooms.

Figure 2. A higher percentage of children in SPP Plus classrooms met their TSG growth targets than children in comparison classrooms, 2023–24



Note: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning TSG data.

Key findings for FCC classrooms

FCC providers offer families access to mixed-age classrooms with low child-teacher ratios and a focus on cultural and linguistic alignment. Two hubs (operated by BrightSpark and a partnership between Voices of Tomorrow and Tiny Tots Development Center) coordinate SPP implementation at 22 FCC sites. In 2023–24, FCC sites served 99 children.

A higher proportion of FCC children and teachers are multilingual and Black.

Approximately 75 percent of children enrolled in FCCs in 2023–24 were Black, compared with 24 percent in non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms. Fifty-five percent of FCC children were linguistically diverse compared to 40 percent across SPP. Among teachers, 78% of FCC teachers were Black compared with 39% in other classrooms. Nearly 40% of teachers reported speaking Oromo, Somali, or Tigrinya.

FCCs have lower CLASS scores with more variability. In 2023–24, average CLASS scores were slightly lower among FCCs than other SPP classroom types. There were also larger differences between FCC classrooms.

FCCs create an emotionally supportive learning environment and meet family expectations.

During the site visit observations, the warm and welcoming environment was evident, and teachers were highly responsive to children’s needs. Behavioral expectations were consistent for all children, and adaptations and social and emotional support were individualized in response to children’s learning needs. Families who participated in focus groups appreciated the safety, comfort, and consistent environment that the FCC provided for their children. They also said the FCC provider helped prepare their child for kindergarten.



“What sets [FCCs] apart is a ... smaller classroom ... and also making available an alternative for families, especially immigrant families, where they really want their children to hold on to their culture.”

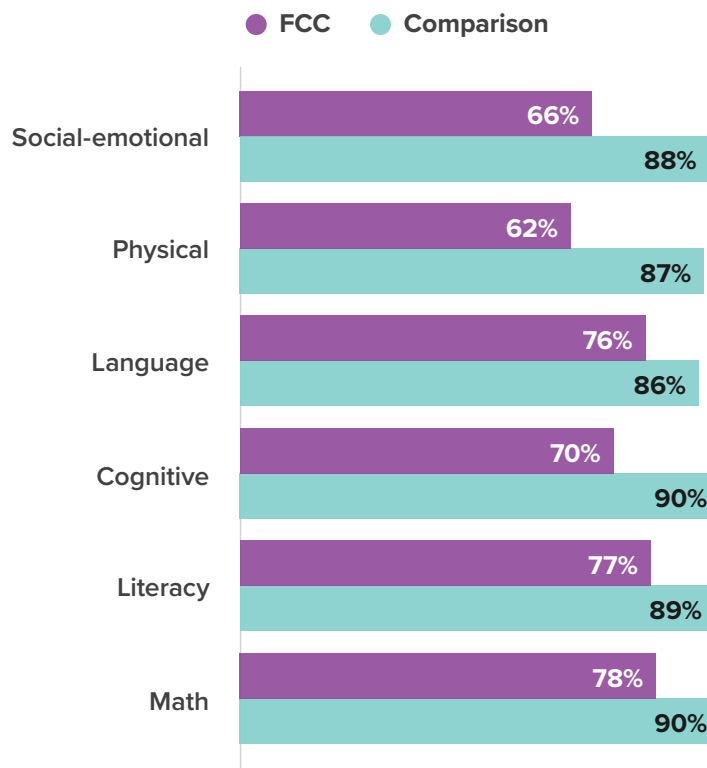
– Key informant

Educators appreciated coaching supports and requested additional tailoring and support.

Staff members and interviewed teachers noted that coaching and training supports could be more tailored to the FCC context. Some providers asked for more coaching in areas such as supporting neurodivergent children.

FCCs have lower TSG growth outcomes compared to other classroom models. In 2023–24, children in FCCs had higher average TSG scale scores upon entry than children in non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms. However, in all domains, a lower percentage of children in FCC programs met growth targets (figure 3).³

Figure 3. A lower percentage of children in FCC programs met TSG growth targets in all domains compared to children in comparison classrooms, 2023–2024



Note: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning TSG data.

³ In 2023–24, this was 77 children of 99. These are lower participation rates (63 and 78%) than among DLI and SPP Plus classrooms (88 and 86%).

Selected recommendations for DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC classrooms

- Expand the knowledge and use of DLI dual language immersion strategies and SPP Plus inclusion practices across the SPP system, regardless of classroom type.
- Align training and coaching support across the SPP system and tailor support to specific classroom types and teacher skill levels.
- Strengthen curriculum implementation and use of evidence-based instructional practices (such as high-quality teacher-child interactions) and equity-focused practices, especially for new teachers and FCC providers.
- Improve educator support for assessment administration and data-based decision making to help monitor progress and enhance services.
- Provide additional specialized training on trauma-informed care; restorative practices; social-emotional learning; meeting the needs of students receiving special education; approaches for classrooms with multiple home languages; and incorporating music, movement, and play in learning activities.
- Implement retention strategies to address teacher turnover, such as career development opportunities, recognition programs, or compensation adjustments.

All photos throughout this brief are credited to the Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning.