

# Seattle Preschool Program Evaluation

## Understanding trends in child and educator diversity, child outcomes, and classroom quality

The [Seattle Preschool Program](#) (SPP) serves 3- and 4-year-olds throughout the city, partnering with classrooms at community-based organizations (CBOs), family child cares (FCCs), and Seattle Public Schools (SPS). SPP aims to eliminate opportunity gaps in kindergarten readiness and provide equitable access to high-quality early learning. The Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning has partnered with [Education Northwest](#) to evaluate SPP. This brief presents selected findings from the first evaluation, which analyzed existing data on child, educator, and program characteristics and outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

### Community input

To ensure the evaluation reflects the values, priorities, and perspectives of families and community members, Education Northwest works with a 15-person advisory committee of parents, guardians, program directors, educators, and community members. The advisory committee is a valuable partner in creating the evaluation questions, design, and measures and in sharing the findings.

## SPP Learning Environments

Since SPP launched, the program has expanded across the city. In the first year (2015–16), 269 children enrolled in 15 classrooms. In 2021–22, 1,953 children enrolled in 132 classrooms. That same year, most of the 132 classrooms (57%) were in CBOs, with the remaining classrooms in SPS preschools (27%) or FCCs (16%). About 19% of children in SPP enrolled in 24 designated inclusion classrooms (SPP Plus) and 12% enrolled in 22 SPP Dual Language Initiative classrooms.

## Children and teachers in SPP are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse

To achieve its goals, SPP needs to serve a diverse group of children. This evaluation examined racial and linguistic diversity among children in SPP and in comparison to the larger group of children who attend SPS kindergarten. SPS kindergarten students include children who attended SPP and other preschools as well as students who did not attend preschool.

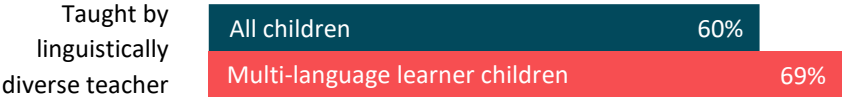
- Each year, over 75% of children in SPP were children of color,<sup>2</sup> with Black students as the largest racial group.
- 40% of children in SPP were multi-language learners<sup>3</sup> in 2021–22. This percentage has increased over time.
- Children in SPP were more diverse than SPS kindergarten students: 52% of SPS kindergarten students were children of color (compared to 77% of children in SPP) and 20% were multi-language learners (compared to 40% of children in SPP) in 2021–22.
- In 2021–22, 70% of SPP teachers were people of color and 48% were linguistically diverse. These percentages have increased over time. By comparison, in 2020–21, about 20% of SPS teachers were people of color.<sup>4</sup>

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## Most children in SPP have at least one teacher of color and at least one linguistically diverse teacher

The evaluation examined alignment between child and teacher race, ethnicity, and language because children of color who are taught by a teacher of the same race tend to be more successful academically, behaviorally, and socio-emotionally.<sup>5, 6</sup>

- In 2021–22, 78% of children in SPP had a teacher of color and 60% had a linguistically diverse teacher. Both percentages have increased over time.
- Among children of color in 2021–22, 80% were taught by at least one teacher of color and 40% were taught by a teacher of the same race/ethnicity.
- Among multi-language learners in 2021–22, 69% had a linguistically diverse teacher and 28% had a teacher who spoke the same primary language.



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## CLASS scores in SPP classrooms consistently met or exceeded the Head Start national mean

To help meet its goal of equitably providing high-quality preschool, SPP uses the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) to measure classroom quality and teacher-child interactions in three areas: classroom organization, emotional support, and instructional support. Using CLASS allows for a comparison to other programs and to examine changes in quality over time within SPP.

- In classroom organization, average SPP classroom scores in 2021–22 were comparable to the national Head Start average. SPP classrooms scored above the national average for emotional and instructional support.<sup>7</sup>

## Child Outcomes

The evaluation examined two child outcomes: performance on Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG), which is used in SPP preschools, and on the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), used in kindergarten classrooms across the state. These measures are imperfect: they may have cultural biases toward what is considered appropriate development, are available in limited languages, and are based on teacher observations (which are subject to inherent biases). Even with these issues, these data are important to examine because they help to understand child growth and development over time, which relates to SPP's goals of providing high-quality preschool and eliminating opportunity gaps.

### Over 80% of children met TSG growth targets in each of the last five years

TSG, an observational assessment used by SPP teachers, has six domains: social-emotional, math, physical, language, cognitive, and literacy. The assessment is available in both English and Spanish and is widely used in preschool settings across the United States. The evaluation examined individual growth from fall to spring, providing a view of how children grew during their time in SPP classrooms.

- More than 80% of children met TSG growth targets in each year from 2017–18 to 2021–22.
- In 2021–22, the highest percentage was in literacy and the lowest in the social-emotional domain.

Literacy	88%
Math	87%
Language	87%
Physical	86%
Cognitive	84%
Social-emotional	81%

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## Children in SPP perform similarly on WaKIDS when accounting for demographic characteristics

Based on TSG, the WaKIDS assessment is used across Washington state to gauge the kindergarten readiness of public school students in the fall of their kindergarten year. WaKIDS is also an observational assessment and is scored on the same six domains as TSG.

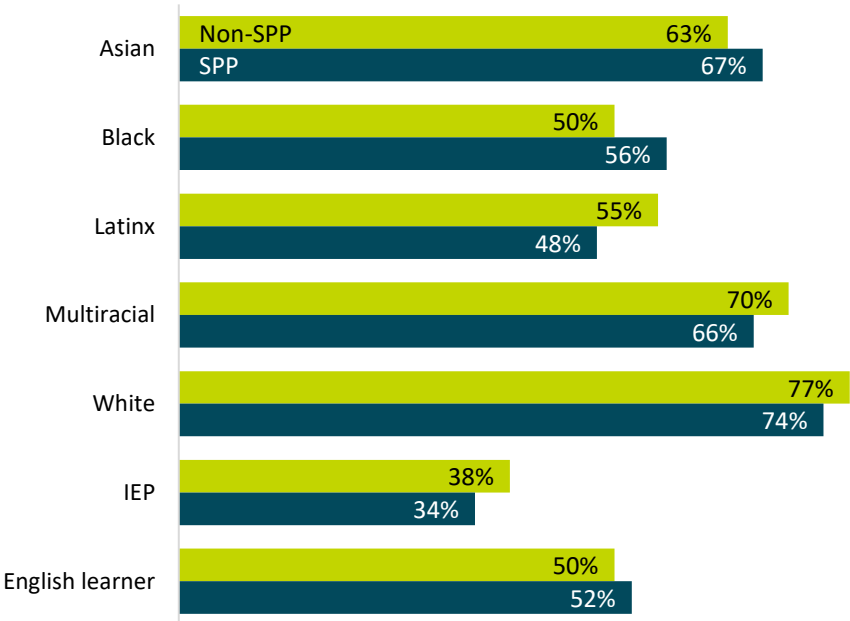
- Among children with similar characteristics, SPS kindergarten students who participated in SPP performed similarly on WaKIDS compared to SPS kindergarten students who did not participate in SPP.<sup>8</sup>

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## Certain groups of children in SPP have higher percentages of meeting kindergarten readiness standards

To understand progress toward SPP’s goal of eliminating opportunity gaps, the evaluation examined which groups of students were meeting WaKIDS kindergarten readiness standards.

- In 2021–22, children in SPP who were Asian or Black, or who received English learner services, met kindergarten readiness benchmarks at higher rates in all six domains compared to non-SPP students in the same groups.<sup>9</sup>



## Recommendations

- **Ensure continued racial/ethnic diversity in enrollment.** Use culturally responsive outreach strategies and ensure that services are accessible to every family. Expand dual language classrooms to promote use of home languages in SPP and support language development.
- **Track and use TSG and CLASS results.** Tailor coaching supports at each site to address lower-scoring TSG and CLASS domains.
- **Increase social-emotional supports.** Consider providing a dedicated curriculum and additional resources for social-emotional and mental health supports for children and families.
- **Recruit and retain diverse SPP educators.** Strategically recruit diverse teachers. Provide recruitment support to sites that do not have teachers whose characteristics match the children they serve. Examine existing systemic barriers to entering the SPP teaching workforce. Expand supports that help SPP teachers overcome systemic racial and linguistic barriers to higher education and close qualification gaps between educators in different demographic groups. Create a pathway for assistant teachers to become lead teachers.
- **Support teachers in serving diverse families.** Increase funding for high-quality training on diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Streamline access to funding and release time.

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<sup>1</sup> Data source for all results is the Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning. All children enrolled for 10 days or more from 2015–16 through 2021–22 (ranging from 269 to 1,953 children each year) are included. Key limitations are that SPP did not necessarily cause these outcomes and that child assessment measures, such as Teaching Strategies GOLD and Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, may be biased (see report for details). The second evaluation in December 2023 will combine family and educator perspectives with existing data analysis to determine the impact of SPP.

<sup>2</sup> The terms “children of color,” “people of color,” and “teachers of color” refer to individuals who reported their racial/ethnic identity as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black, Latinx, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, North African/Middle Eastern, or two or more races.

<sup>3</sup> Multi-language learners refers to children who live in a household where a non-English language is spoken.

<sup>4</sup> Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2021). Report card: Seattle School District No. 1. <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/100229>. Data on linguistic diversity were not available.

<sup>5</sup> Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M. D., Lindsay, C. A., & Papageorge, N. W. (2017). The long-run impacts of same-race teachers. National Bureau of Economic Research. IZA Institute of Labor Economics. <https://docs.iza.org/dp10630.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Joshi, E., Doan, S., & Springer, M. G. (2018). Student-teacher race congruence: New evidence and insight from Tennessee. *AERA Open*, 4(4), 1–25. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2332858418817528>

<sup>7</sup> Head Start. (2020, September 29). A national overview of grantee CLASS® scores in 2020. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/data-ongoing-monitoring/article/national-overview-grantee-class-scores-2020>

<sup>8</sup> This analysis matched former SPP students with similar non-SPP students in SPS and controlled for demographic characteristics.

<sup>9</sup> American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander categories included fewer than 10 students and are not shown. SPS data do not include North African/Middle Eastern as a category. This analysis only includes children with scores in all six domains.