

Kindergarten Readiness with PA Pre-K Counts: A Statewide Summary of Local Evaluations

November 15, 2010
 Issue 1
 Research Brief

Does PA Pre-K Counts better prepare students for kindergarten?

“Our Pre-K Counts program provides our youngest learners with many opportunities that they otherwise would not have. In addition to exposure to early learning skills in reading and math, our program also addresses social growth and community awareness. These students come to kindergarten with solid readiness skills. The transition to kindergarten for these students is very smooth.”

- Principal, Penn Cambria School District

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts was created to provide research-based, high quality pre-kindergarten opportunities to at-risk children across the commonwealth by leveraging the existing early education services in schools, Keystone STARS child care programs, Head Start, and licensed nursery schools. The standards are high and the accountability comprehensive. PA Pre-K Counts grantees include child care centers and group child care homes with a Keystone STAR 3 or 4 rating, Head Start programs, school districts, and licensed nursery schools.¹

Before entering PA Pre-K Counts, most children have not had opportunities to interact with other

children and adults, have had limited exposure to high quality books and stories, and have not participated in experiences that support their emerging academic skills such as math or reading. By enrolling in PA Pre-K Counts, these children are able to get a jump on their academic, social, cognitive, and physical skills. Not only do these children show great strides at the end of the program, but they are typically better prepared for kindergarten than the non-PA Pre-K Counts child.

Evidence of child outcomes and parent and teacher testimonials suggest that Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is preparing children for kindergarten and success in school.

¹ As of September 2009, 63% of PA Pre-K Counts providers were Keystone STARS child care providers, 23% are school districts, 11% are Head Start providers, and 3% are PA Department of Education licensed nurseries.

A look at child outcomes

Statewide outcomes.

All PA Pre-K Counts grantees observe children’s progress three times a year and report children’s outcomes into the Pennsylvania Early Learning Network. Third year child outcomes (2009-2010) show that nearly every child (over 98 percent) demonstrated age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate language, math, and social skills after attending PA Pre-K Counts.² More than 70 percent of children who attended Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts finished the school year with age-appropriate proficiency in language, math, and social skills.

² Based on assessment of 10,060 children using the Work Sampling Online reporting tool (updated August 2010). For more information about preschool child outcomes in Pennsylvania, please refer to the 2009-2010 Program Reach and Risk Assessment: http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=EarlyLearning_Reach.

³ Pennsylvania’s Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN) is a single integrated information system for OCDEL programs serving children from birth to age five.

% PA Pre-K Counts Children Demonstrating Proficiency

	Fall '09	Spring '10
Mathematical Thinking	15%	70%
Language & Literacy	19%	71%
Scientific Thinking	17%	68%
Personal & Social Development	26%	77%

Local outcomes.

In addition to reporting child outcomes during the Pre-K enrollment, many PA Pre-K Counts grantees perform local evaluations of their program’s impact on kindergarten readiness by comparing PA Pre-K Counts children to their Kindergarten peers. These local evaluations are conducted

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A look at child outcomes continued...

independently and information is entered into PELICAN³ in the form of quarterly narratives. Evaluation narratives include data and anecdotal information on grantees' achievements, concerns, and impact on children, teachers, and the community. The information that follows represent highlights of multiple 2009-2010 grantee reports.

Delaware Valley School District reported that students who attended the PA Pre-K Counts program had improved outcomes in kindergarten compared to their peers on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)⁴ end of year (2009-10) assessment. Ninety-eight percent of PA Pre-K Counts students were at grade level, compared to 93% of all other students.

According to Penn State University researchers⁵, students who participated in the **Harrisburg Preschool Program (HPP)** scored significantly higher in the areas of early literacy and math than those who did not. On the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, kindergartners who had participated in HPP scored 110% higher than non-HPP kindergartners. In math, HPP participants scored 108% higher on the Woodcock Johnson Applied Problems than those who did not participate in HPP. HPP students also had higher reading and math scores in third grade on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). While 58% of HPP students were classified as advanced or proficient on the math PSSA, only 29% of non-HPP students were similarly classified. In reading, 45% of HPP students scored at the advanced or proficient level, while

⁴ The DIBELS are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills in four areas: initial sounds fluency, letter naming fluency, phoneme segmentation fluency, and nonsense word fluency.

⁵ For more information about the Harrisburg Preschool Program evaluation completed by Penn State University researchers, please visit <http://prevention.psu.edu/projects/REACH.html>.

⁶ AIMSweb is a benchmark and progress monitoring system based on direct, frequent, and continuous student assessment. Early literacy domains include: letter naming fluency, letter sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency. Early numeracy domains include: oral counting, missing number, number identification, and quantity discrimination.

⁷ The PSF measure assesses a student's ability to segment three- and four-phoneme words into their individual phonemes fluently.

What parents and teachers are saying about PA Pre-K Counts

When asked about the transition to kindergarten, 100% of parents whose children attended the **Bradford Tioga Head Start/Pre-K programs** agreed that Pre-K Counts helped with letter recognition, and also helped their children become more independent.

In **Erie School District**, kindergarten teachers were amazed to see how much better prepared the PA Pre-K Counts children were, and felt that they were socially ready to engage in school.

Teachers in the **Hazleton Area School District** also felt that the children were coming to kindergarten socially ready, in addition to being able to follow classroom routines. They also noticed that the parents had a better understanding

only 23% of non-HPP students scored at these two levels.

Montgomery Area School District compared 2009-10 DIBELS scores of kindergarten students who attended PA Pre-K Counts to baseline data from 2006-07 and 2007-08 in which students did not attend PA Pre-K Counts before entering kindergarten. There was a 41% reduction from 2006-07 to 2009-10 in students scoring below grade level for initial sound fluency, and a 59% reduction in students scoring below grade level for letter naming fluency.

Penn Cambria School District used the AIMSweb assessments⁶ to evaluate PA Pre-K Counts students in kindergarten and first grade. For the 2009-10 kindergarten class, PA Pre-K Counts students scored higher, on average, than the entire kindergarten class' average in six areas of assessment (all four domains in early numeracy and two out of four domains in early literacy). For the 2009-10 first grade class, PA Pre-K Counts students were outperforming their peers in four of the eight assessment domains (two in early numeracy and two in early literacy).

In **Pottstown School District**, 94% of the PA Pre-K Counts students scored at grade level on the DIBELS assessment in kindergarten, compared with 85% of the overall school district. In **Union School District**, kindergarten students who participated in PA Pre-K Counts outperformed students who were not enrolled, in all four areas assessed. The largest distinction between the two groups occurred in Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)⁷, where 100% of PA Pre-K Counts students scored at grade level, compared with 80% of non-PA Pre-K Counts.

of the importance of school. Kindergarten teachers in the **Union School District** noted that those children who had attended PA Pre-K Counts had more advanced skills in the areas of following directions, problem-solving, and appropriately joining activities. They also stated that children were better able to pay attention and get along with others.

Parents and teachers agree – PA Pre-K Counts repeatedly demonstrates the ability to prepare at risk children for kindergarten. And, as they progress through the primary grades, these PA Pre-K Counts enrollees continue to perform on par with, or better than, their elementary school peers.