



Picard Center

FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING

2007- 2008

LA 4 Prekindergarten Executive Summary

Prepared for
The Louisiana Department of Education

Prepared by
**Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning at
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of Alabama Birmingham, Center for Educational Accountability &
Georgetown University Center on Health and Education**

EXECUTIVE summary

Louisiana's Prekindergarten Success Continues and Improves Fourth Grade LEAP Scores

In 2007-08, LA 4 served 13,389 of Louisiana's neediest children—those identified as being at risk for academic failure, based on economic or special needs. For the seventh straight year, LA 4 children demonstrated dramatic improvement in their academic performance, as measured by the advances made from pretest to posttest on the Developing Skills Checklist (DSC). In addition to individual progress, LA 4 students once again scored very close to or even above the national average on the posttest. The success of LA 4 cohort 1 students on last year's iLEAP test was repeated this year by LA 4 cohort 2, and cohort 1 demonstrated continued success on the LEAP test. Further, the LA 4 program's record of reducing kindergarten retention and special education placement rates has remained unbroken for the past six years. All of these achievements coincide with the implementation of high-quality *Louisiana Standards for Programs Serving Four-Year-Old Children*, *Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs)*, and the *Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum*. Hiring certified teachers and highly qualified aides, providing full-day programs, and maintaining a low child-to-teacher ratio serve as quality anchors of the LA 4 program. Research-based and developmentally appropriate curricula such as *Creative Curriculum*, *High Scope*, and *Montessori* serve as a pedagogical foundation. The successes of LA 4 students throughout the past seven years provide clear evidence that high-quality early childhood education is working for Louisiana's children.

History of LA 4/Starting Points

The LA 4 prekindergarten program began in 2001 with the passage of Senate Bill 776 and was designed to serve 4-year-old children not currently enrolled in publicly funded prekindergarten classes. The LA 4 program was modeled after the Starting Points prekindergarten program, which began in the 1992-93 school year. Both programs follow *Louisiana Standards for Programs Serving Four-Year-Old Children* and the *Comprehensive Curriculum* to insure the provision of high-quality services at no cost for those children eligible for free or reduced price lunch services (FRL). Children not qualifying based on income may pay tuition or may be locally funded. Over the past seven years, the following characteristics have emerged as the quality anchors of the Louisiana preschool effort:

- Certified early childhood teachers
- Small classroom sizes of 20 children
- 10:1 child-to-adult ratio
- Full-day (six-hour) program
- Vision, hearing, and dental screening
- Appropriate materials and supplies



- Research-based and developmentally appropriate curricula
- At least 18 hours of targeted professional development each year
- Before-and-after-school enrichment program
- Program evaluation using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale—Revised (ECERS—R)
- Pretest and posttest measurement of student progress using the Developing Skills Checklist (DSC)
- Evaluation and longitudinal research necessary to measure and predict outcomes
- Collaboration with physical health, mental health, and social service agencies
- Support and adult education services for children and their families
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to determine perceived strengths and needs

The LA 4 program also provides transportation for its participating children. Before-and-after school enrichment activities are available to all four-year-old children, whether or not they participate in the full LA 4 program.



Who is Served by LA 4/Starting Points?

The targeted population for LA 4 are children at risk for academic failure, those children who qualify for FRL services. Eighty-eight percent of LA 4 students in 2007-08 qualified for FRL services.

Children with disabilities are also being served by the LA 4 program. Slightly less than one-half percent (.41%) of LA 4 students were classified as being enrolled in special education at the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, that percentage had increased to 7.35%, just slightly more than half of the state average for the 2006-07 school year (13%), the latest figure available.

The following table illustrates that 10,386 children (77.57% of LA 4 students) received a vision screening, 9,253 children (69% of LA 4 students) received a hearing screening, and 2,537 children (19% of LA 4 students) received a dental screening.

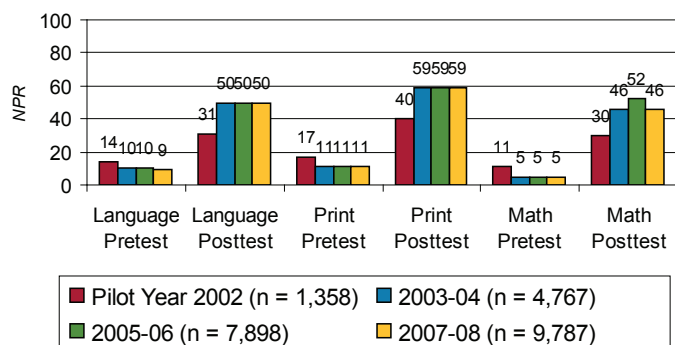
**Medical Screenings Provided for
LA 4/Starting Points Students**

Total LA 4 Enrollment	13,389
Vision Screenings	10,386
Hearing Screenings	9,253
Dental Screenings	2,537

EXECUTIVE summary

Improved Performance on the DSC

Each year, LA 4 students' progress over the school year is measured, in part, by comparing their pretest performance to their posttest performance on the DSC. In 2007-08, progress was measured in this way for 9,787 LA 4 students who completed both a pretest and posttest in Language, Print, and Math. LA 4 children showed significant improvement from pretest to posttest this year. Children exited the LA 4 program scoring very close to or even above the national average on the posttest.



National percentile rank for LA 4/Starting Points children statewide in Language, Print, and Math across program years



High-Quality Classrooms: Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale—Revised (ECERS—R)

LA 4 classrooms routinely demonstrate the characteristics of high-quality early childhood education programs. Each year since its inception, the LA 4 program has been assessed by the Louisiana Department of Education, using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale—Revised (ECERS—R). The ECERS—R is one of the most widely used standardized measure of the quality of child care environments. The assessment examines seven areas reflective of a program's quality: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff. High ratings in these areas are associated with high quality programs. Each year, the LA 4 program has received above average ratings on this assessment and has compared quite favorably to similar programs in other states. This year's performance was no exception. A compilation of assessment scores for 96 randomly selected classrooms resulted in an overall score of 5.62 on a scale of 1 to 7. This 2007-08 ECERS—R score places the LA 4 program solidly in the "good to excellent" range.

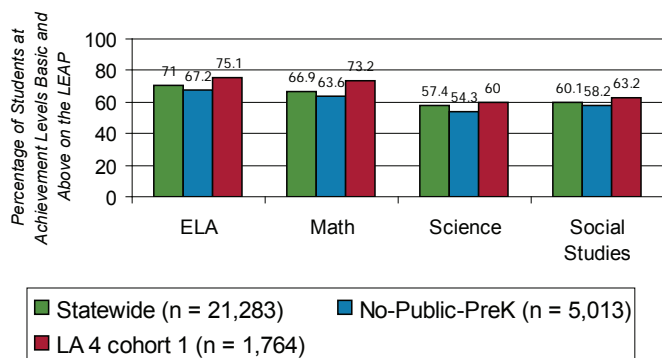
Longitudinal Benefits

The high-quality early childhood education provided by LA 4 programs has had a positive impact on children's academic success. From the kindergarten year through fourth grade and according to every empirical measure that has been applied, LA 4 participants demonstrate improved performance when compared to their no-public-prekindergarten (NPPK) peers. The following sections provide an overview of this progress.

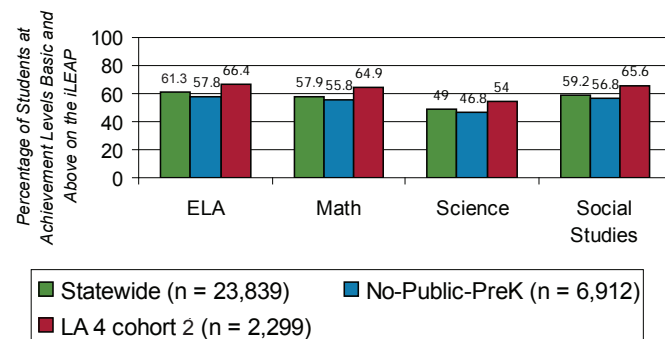


Improved iLEAP and LEAP Performance

Last year, long-anticipated LEAP results confirmed that the gains made in prekindergarten for LA 4 cohort 1 students carried over to fourth-grade LEAP scores as well. Statewide, LA 4 cohort 1 students outperformed their NPPK peers in every subject area of the LEAP test. Further, this group's success is not an anomaly. LA 4 cohort 2 children performed better than their NPPK peers in all subject areas of the iLEAP by a range of 7-11%. In fact, LA 4 cohort 2's iLEAP results demonstrate an even larger performance gap between those LA 4 students who received a high-quality program (LA 4 program) and their NPPK.



Percentage of students performing at achievement levels Basic and Above on the fourth-grade LEAP by program group

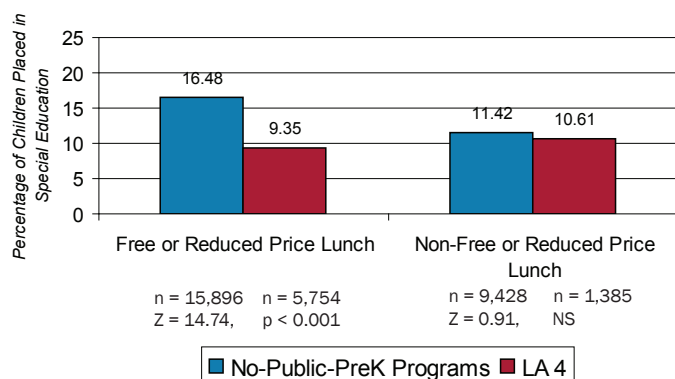


Percentage of students performing at achievement levels Basic and Above on the third-grade iLEAP by program group

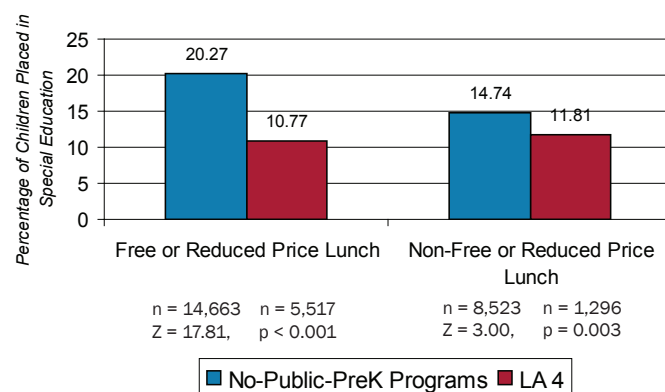
EXECUTIVE summary

Special Education Placement Reduction

For children who participated in the LA 4 (FRL) program in 2005-06, there was a statistically significant reduction in the overall percentage of children placed in special education in kindergarten and first grade.



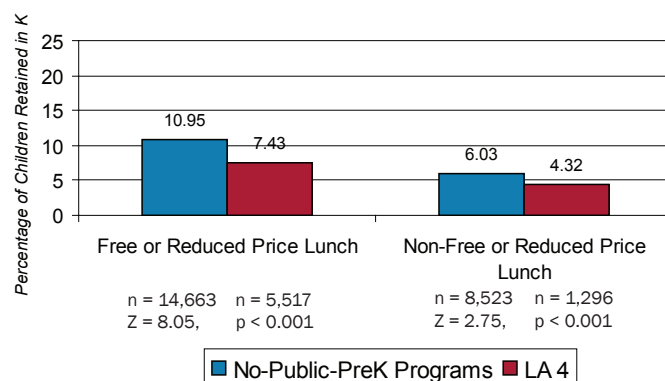
Percentage of children placed in special education in kindergarten as a function of participation in the LA 4 program and FRL eligibility for cohort 4 (2005-06)



Percentage of children placed in special education in first grade as a function of participation in the LA 4 program and FRL eligibility for cohort 4 (2005-06)

Kindergarten Retention Reduction

For children who participated in the LA 4 (FRL) program in 2005-06, there was a statistically significant reduction in the overall percentage of children retained in kindergarten.



Kindergarten grade retention rates as a function of participation in the LA 4 program and FRL enrollment

What the Future Holds

For the past seven years, results from the evaluation of the LA 4 program has consistently demonstrated that the high-quality early childhood education is positively impacting the academic success of at-risk children. In order to continue monitoring the short and long-term progress of these children, the early childhood staff of the LDE and the Picard Center staff at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette will continue to investigate the following research findings:

- Four-year-old “at risk” children, who participate in the LA 4 prekindergarten program, continue to show significant gains in the academic areas of Language, Print, and Math, year after year.
- Participation in the LA 4 program increases student performance on Louisiana’s *i*LEAP and LEAP achievement tests, sustaining continued benefits through the fourth grade.
- The LA 4 program significantly reduces the number of students placed in special education.
- Participation in the LA 4 program significantly reduces grade retention in the elementary grades.
- Some targeted children will require additional high-quality early childhood educational opportunities to become “school ready.”



Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
P.O. Box 42730 Lafayette, Louisiana 70504
Phone: 337-482-1567 Fax: 337-482-1553
<http://ccd-web.louisiana.edu>

Acknowledgments

Louisiana Department of Education

Paul Pastorek

State Superintendent of Education

Ollie Tyler

Deputy Superintendent of Education

Scott Norton, PhD

*Assistant Superintendent,
Office of Student and School Performance*

Mary Louise Jones, EdD

Section Supervisor

Marybeth Ridgel

*Program Officer,
Office of Student and School Performance*

**Anita Ashford, Loren Barrios, Linda Champion,
Jeanette Hidalgo, Nicholy Johnson, Crystalyn Lee,
Terri McClellan, Kay Nelson, Cindy Ramagos, and
Ivy Starns**

Program Consultants

Fen Chou, PhD and Marieanne Hollay, PhD

Education Research Analyst

**Carla Amy, Tara Baudean, Penny Black, Stephanie
Blanchard, Ellen Howell, April Lauterbach, Rebecca
Marcantel, Stacy Marino, Joyce Sjolander, and
Libbie Sonnier**

LA 4 and Special Education Coordinators

Louisiana State Board of

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Member-at-Large

Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning Research Team at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Billy R. Stokes, EdD, MBA

*Cecil J. Picard Endowed Fellow in Child Development,
Executive Director*

Ouida Forsyth, EdS

Project Director, Early Childhood

Gary Asmus, PhD

Director of Management Information Systems

Kara L. Farmer, MS

Research Associate

Georgetown University Center on Health & Education

Craig T. Ramey, PhD

*The Georgetown Distinguished Professor of
Health Studies Director*

University of Alabama at Birmingham Center for Educational Accountability

Carl M. Brezaussek, MS

Information Systems Specialist III