

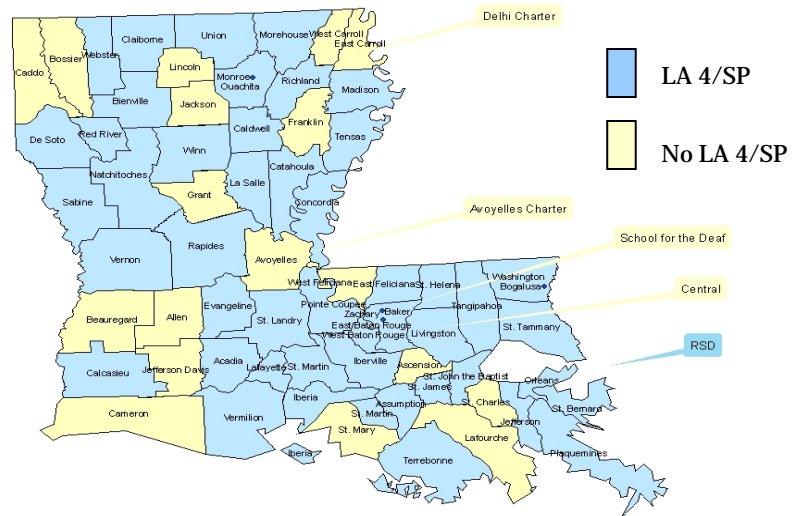
LA 4/Starting Points Evaluation Report

INSIDE THIS REPORT:

The History of LA 4	2
Who is Served by LA 4?	2
Improved Performance	3
High-Quality Classrooms	3
SWOT	4
Longitudinal Benefits:	
• Reading First: First, Second, Third Grades	4
• Kindergarten Retention Reduction	5
• Increased <i>i</i> LEAP Performance	5-6
• Special Education Placement Reduction	7
Closing the Gap	8
What the Future Holds	8
Superintendent's Letter	9
Acknowledgements	10

LA 4/Starting Points:

Early Childhood Education in Louisiana



Louisiana's Prekindergarten Success Transfers to Third Grade *i*LEAP Scores

In 2006-07, prekindergarten intervention was provided in the LA 4/Starting Points (SP) programs for over 10,000 LA 4/SP-eligible children. Analyses of LA 4/SP test scores over past school years reveal significant improvement in the participating children's pretest to posttest performance. For each of the last six years, LA 4/SP children's performance on the posttest remains close to or higher than the national average on the *Developing Skills Checklist* (DSC). Specific analyses of the test scores also indicate a narrowing of the gap in performances of children from differing family income backgrounds. Additionally, these results coincide with the implementation of high-quality *Louisiana Standards for Programs Serving Four-Year-Old Children* and the *Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum*, such as hiring certified teachers and highly qualified aides, providing full-day programs, and maintaining a low child-to-teacher ratio. Research-based and developmentally appropriate curricula such as *Creative Curriculum* and *High Scope* serve as a pedagogical foundation. *This year, long-anticipated *i*LEAP results confirmed that the gains made in prekindergarten for Cohort 1 children carried over to third grade *i*LEAP scores as well.*



Each year enrollment in LA 4 has increased. In 2006-07, 10,041 children received high-quality, early childhood education in Louisiana through the LA 4/Starting Points program. During the 2007-08 school year, LA 4 will serve 13,409 preschoolers.



**Children who do not qualify based on their FRL status may be locally funded or pay tuition.*

The History of LA 4/SP

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 assure 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 be locally funded. Over the past 6 years the following characteristics have emerged as the quality anchors of the Louisiana preschool effort:

- Certified early childhood teachers
- Vision, hearing, and dental screening
- Full-day (6-hour) program
- 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 child 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
- 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 4-year-old children, whether or not they participate in the full program. The Louisiana Department of Education contracts with the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Center for Child Development to conduct program evaluation and longitudinal research analysis.

Who Is Served by LA 4/SP?

The LA 4 /SP program is targeted to serve at-risk children who qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRL) services. In addition, it provides services to children with disabilities and access to other support services focusing not only on academics, but on health issues as well. This focus leads to the following questions:

- **Is the LA 4/SP Program serving its intended audience of children at risk for school failure? YES.** Onsite program monitoring conducted at midyear indicates that 94% of LA 4 participants were enrolled in FRL services for the 2006-07 school year. These data demonstrate that the program serves the targeted population of at-risk children.
- **Are children with disabilities included in the LA 4/SP program? YES.** What was their level of participation? At the beginning of the school year, parents reported 1.7% of the participants qualified for special education. By the end of the school year, the participation rate reported by the school districts was 6.84%. This rate is less than half of the state average in other grades.
- **Do LA 4/SP children receive needed support services? YES.** What is the LA 4/SP referral participation activity for vision, hearing, and dental screening services across the state? The following table shows that 93% of the enrolled children were screened for vision, 88% were screened for hearing, and 22% received dental screenings.

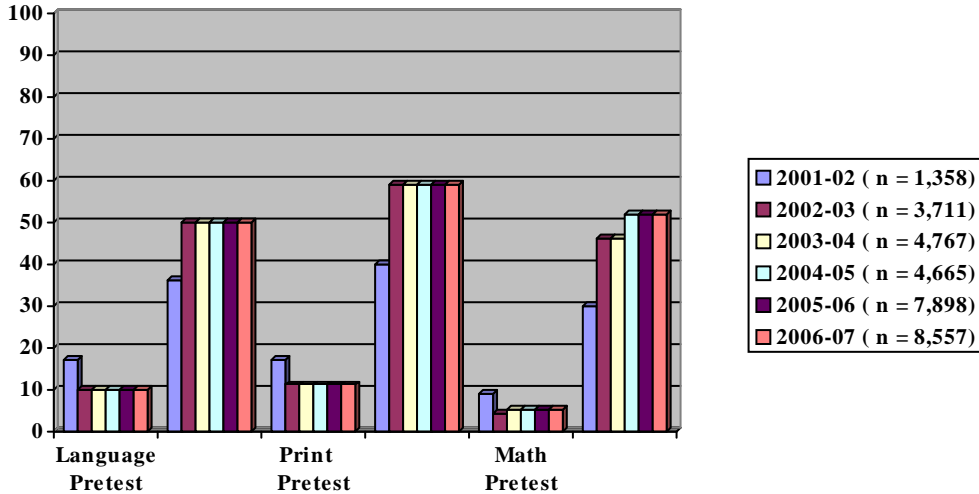
Total LA 4	Vision	Hearing	Dental
Enrollment	Screenings	Screenings	Screenings
10,041	9,355	8,861	2,232

Children Perform Better on the DSC

Every year the LA 4/SP program has demonstrated significant improvement in child performance on the Developing Skills Checklist (DSC) from pretest to posttest statewide. The school year 2006-07 was no exception. At-risk children left the LA 4 program this year performing at or above the national average in all areas tested.



National Percentile Rank for LA 4/Starting Points Children Statewide in Language, Print, and Math Across Program Years

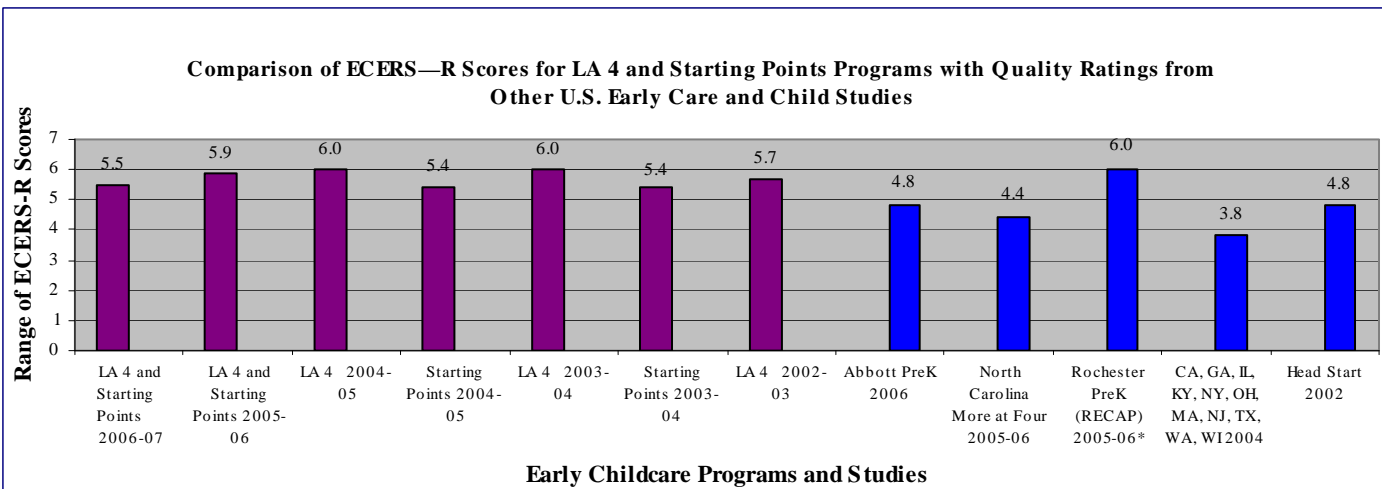


*National Percentile Rank is determined by the conversion of the mean number of correct responses.

†2001-02 was the pilot year for LA 4. Students enrolled in this year only attended a half year of the program, starting in January 2002.

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

Does the LA 4/SP program demonstrate higher ECERS-R program quality ratings when compared to similar programs outside of Louisiana? **YES.** Programs in LA 4/SP continue to perform well above expected levels when compared to similar programs in other states. The ECERS—R program quality assessment is conducted utilizing a random sampling of classrooms participating in the LA 4/SP programs. This assessment encompasses seven areas associated with programs of high quality: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff. A compilation of the assessment scores for this sample of 75 classrooms rated the LA 4/SP classrooms as “good to excellent,” with an overall score of 5.5 on a scale of 1 to 7.



The SWOT findings reported here are based on feedback from a representative sample of schools. Responses from all schools were analyzed and will be included in a future report.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

Does the SWOT analysis of stakeholder perceptions reveal areas of strengths and opportunities as well as weaknesses and threats so as to inform and develop strategies for continued improvement? YES.

SWOT is completed by administrators and teachers each year in order to ascertain stakeholders' perceptions of program implementation and performance. Generally, strengths and opportunities were noted in the areas of funding, curriculum, faculty and staff, training, and children's improved language and literacy skills. Issues noted as weaknesses and/or threats in need of attention centered around classroom improvements, use of the ECERS-R program, behavior management, and staff. Some areas were identified as both strengths and weakness, or as opportunities and threats. This could be due in part to stakeholders' desire to enhance an already strong area as well as possibly demonstrating the need for further training in the use of the SWOT as an analytical tool.

Longitudinal Benefits

Does LA 4 affect performance in later grades? YES.

LA 4/SP has consistently demonstrated high quality results each year that the program has been in existence. High quality standards for the program have resulted in children being ready for kindergarten. The expectation that these children would experience continued academic success based on the available research was realized this year as Cohort 1 demonstrated increased iLEAP performance when compared to their peers who received no public prekindergarten. The following sections present the longitudinal impact of LA 4/SP on reading, grade retention, special education participation, and performance on standardized tests. The first year (2001-02) services were provided for a half year and will be referred to as the "Pilot Group." Subsequent years are then referred to by "cohort" beginning with the 2002-03 students being identified as Cohort 1. Subsequently, 2003-04 is Cohort 2, 2004-05 is Cohort 3, 2005-06 is Cohort 4, and 2006-07 is Cohort 5.



Longitudinal Benefits: Reading First

Is there a positive relationship between LA 4/SP and participation in the Reading First program? YES.

Children previously in LA 4/SP perform overall at higher levels in the Reading First program. Children who are exposed to both programs perform at higher levels than children who have only LA 4 or Reading First. Students who participate in either program perform at higher levels than students who have participated in neither.

Percentage of Students on Benchmark as Measured by Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Oral Reading Fluency

	Neither LA 4 nor Reading First	Reading First Only	LA 4	Reading First + LA 4
First Grade	49%	52%	57%	65%
Second Grade	38%	45%	48%	57%
Third Grade	31%	37%	38%	46%

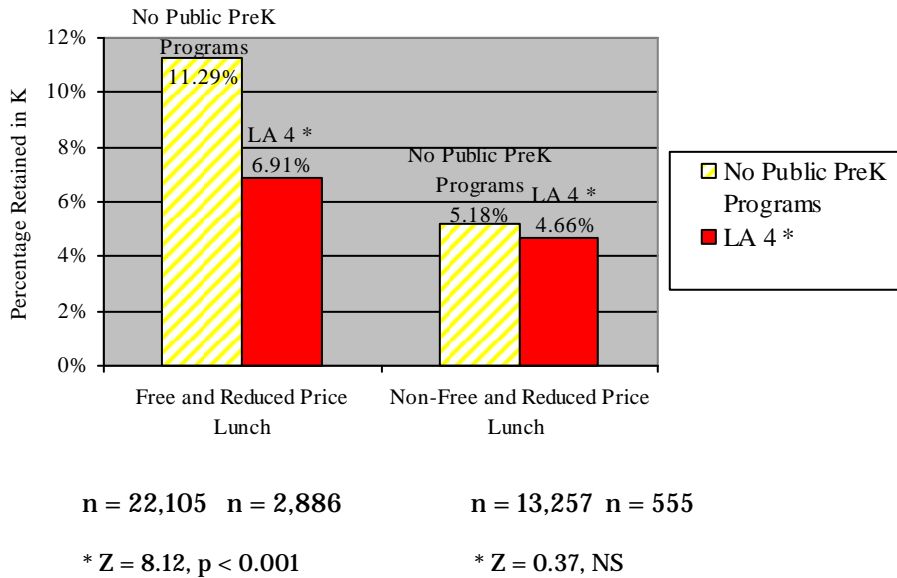
Data limited to the following LEAs that participate in both programs:

Bogalusa, DeSoto, East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Tangipahoa, Vermilion, and Washington

Longitudinal Benefits: Retention

Does LA 4 affect retention rates? **YES.**

Children who participated in LA 4 in the 2004-05 (Cohort 3) school year and who received FRL services showed a statistically significant difference in retention rate (6.91%) in kindergarten as compared to the retention rate of their peers who did not receive public prekindergarten services (11.29%).

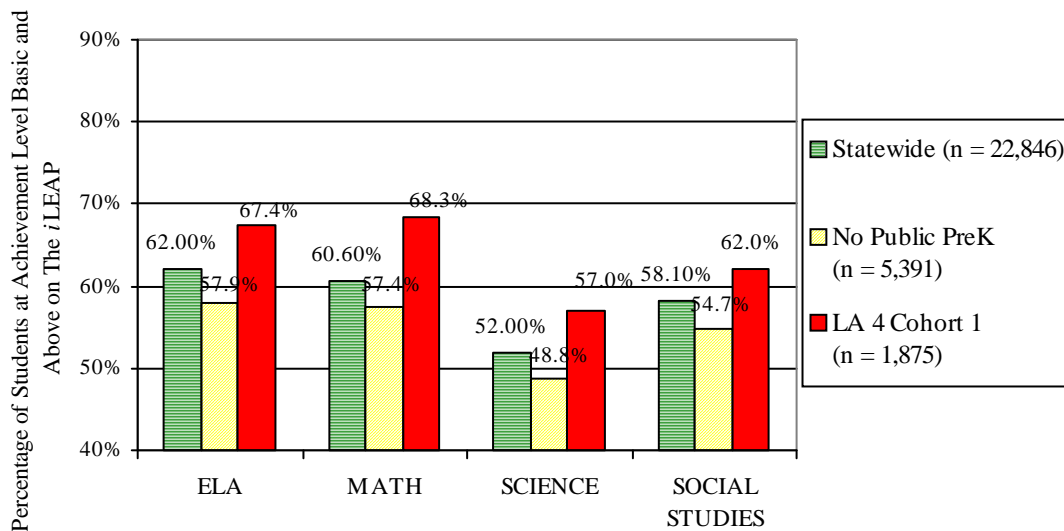


Children who participated in LA 4/SP demonstrated increased levels of student achievement and decreased levels of retention and special education participation.

Longitudinal Benefits: Student Achievement

Does LA 4 affect child performance on the Integrated Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (iLEAP)? **YES.**

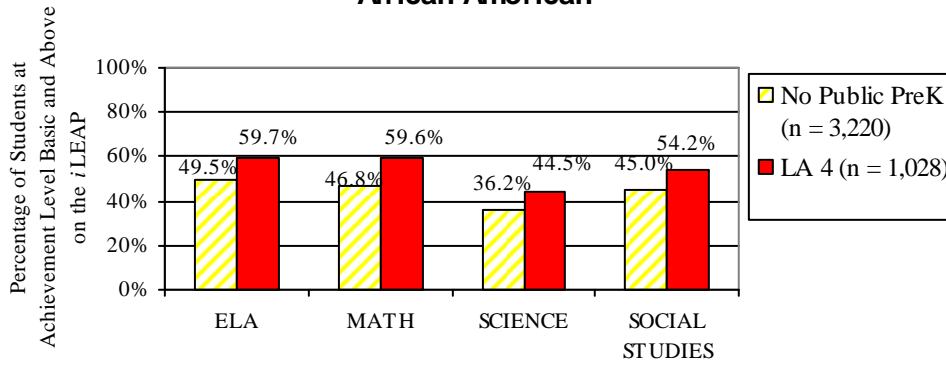
Children who received the first full year of LA 4 (Cohort 1, 2002-03) performed better on statewide tests of achievement in the third grade than did their peers who received no public prekindergarten and better than students statewide as a whole.



Note: Statewide represents students who entered public school kindergarten the same year as Cohort 1 students and completed iLEAP testing in the third grade.

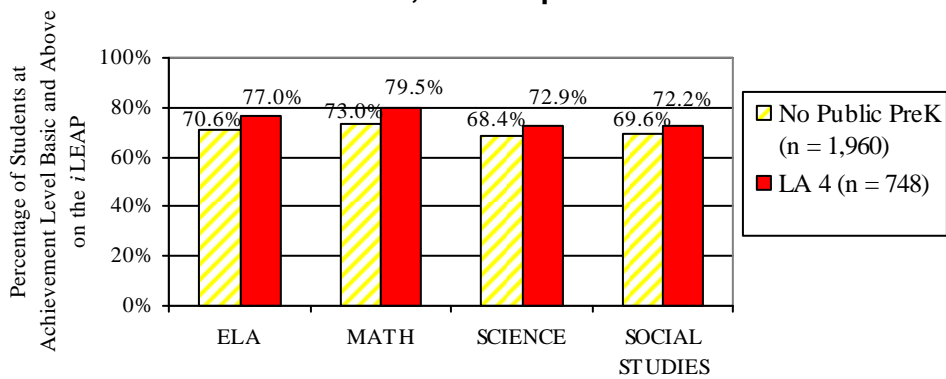


African American

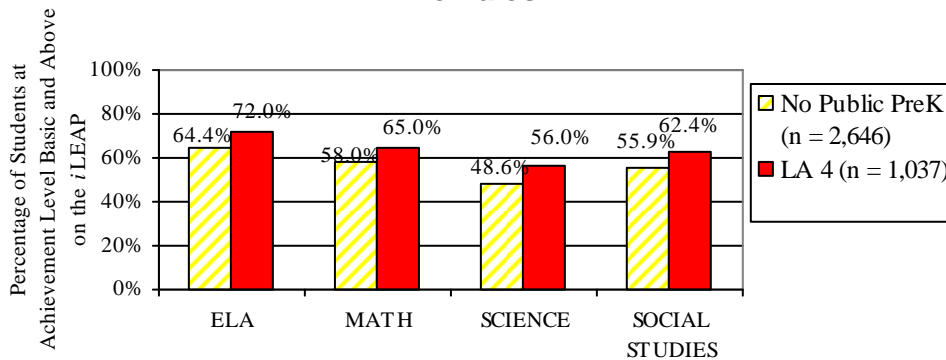


Both African American and White/non-Hispanic students who received the LA 4 program in 2002-03 (Cohort 1) and were eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch Services (FRL) had higher achievement levels on the iLEAP than students who were eligible for FRL services but did not receive any public prekindergarten.

White, Non-Hispanic

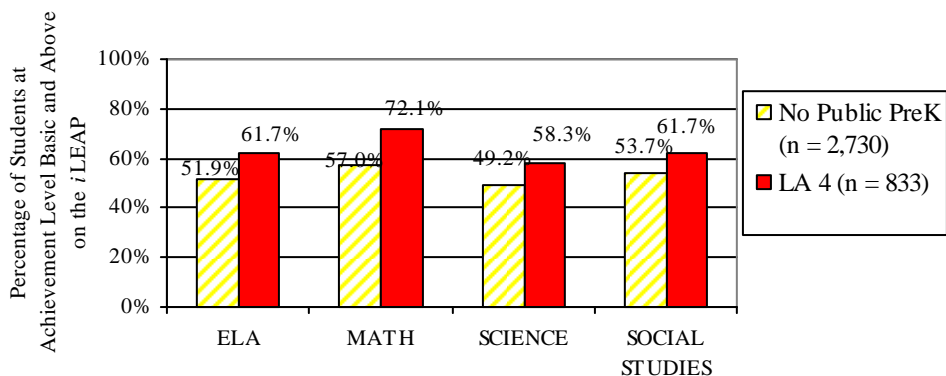


Females



Both males and females who received the LA 4 program in 2002-03 (Cohort 1) and were eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRL) services had higher achievement levels on the iLEAP than students who were eligible for FRL services but did not receive any public prekindergarten.

Males

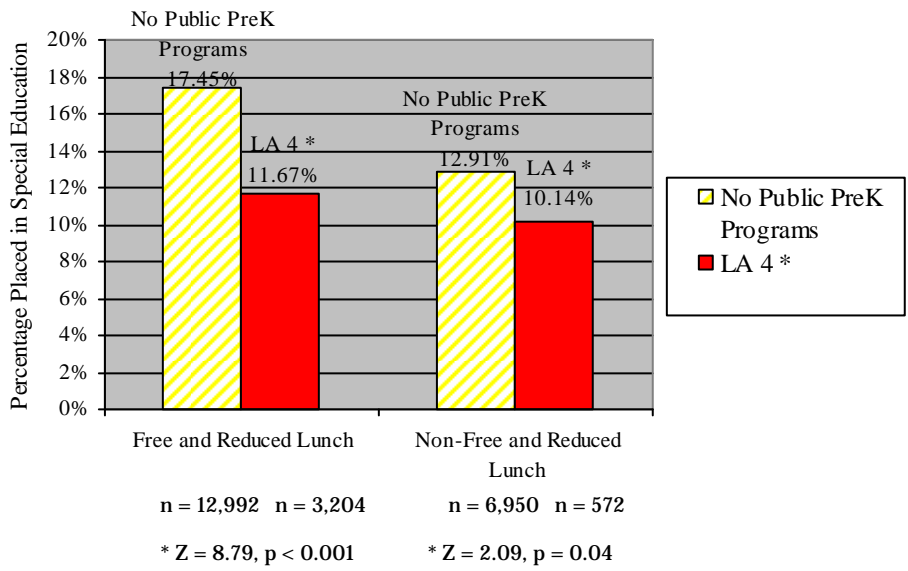


Longitudinal Benefits: Special Education

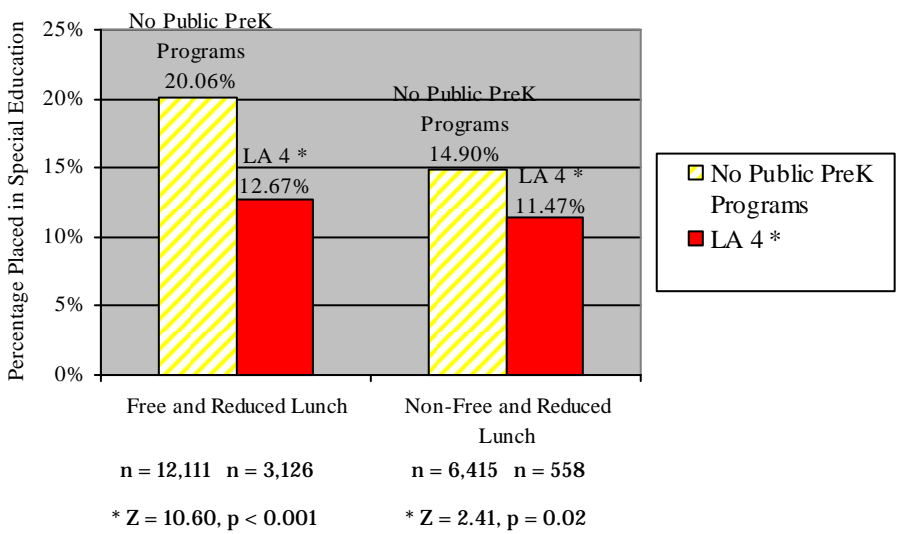
Does LA 4 affect Special Education participation rates? YES.

Children who participated in LA 4 (FRL) during 2004-05 (Cohort 3) were significantly less likely to be placed in Special Education during their kindergarten and first grade years than children who were also eligible for FRL services but did not participate in a public prekindergarten program.

Percentage of Children Placed in Special Education in Kindergarten as a Function of Participation in the LA 4 Program and FRL Eligibility for Cohort 3 (2004-05)

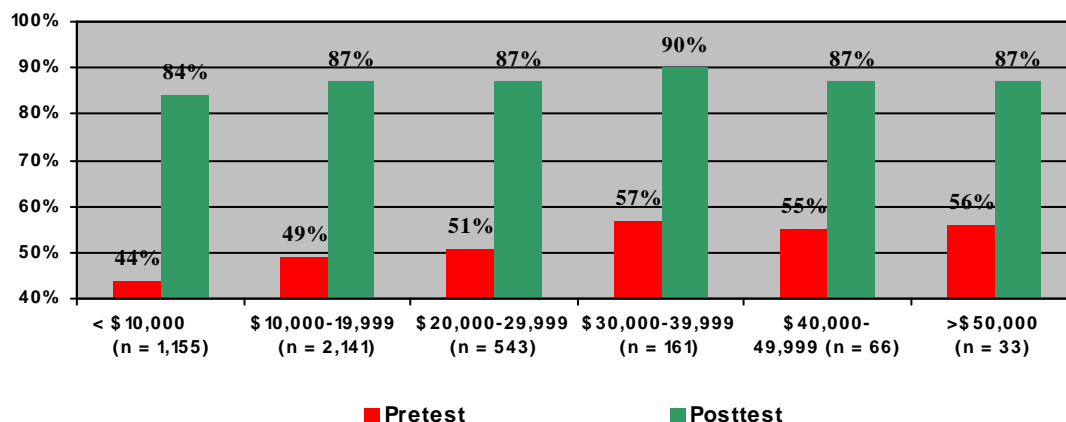


Percentage of Children Placed in Special Education in First Grade as a Function of Participation in the LA 4 Program and FRL Eligibility for Cohort 3 (2004-05)

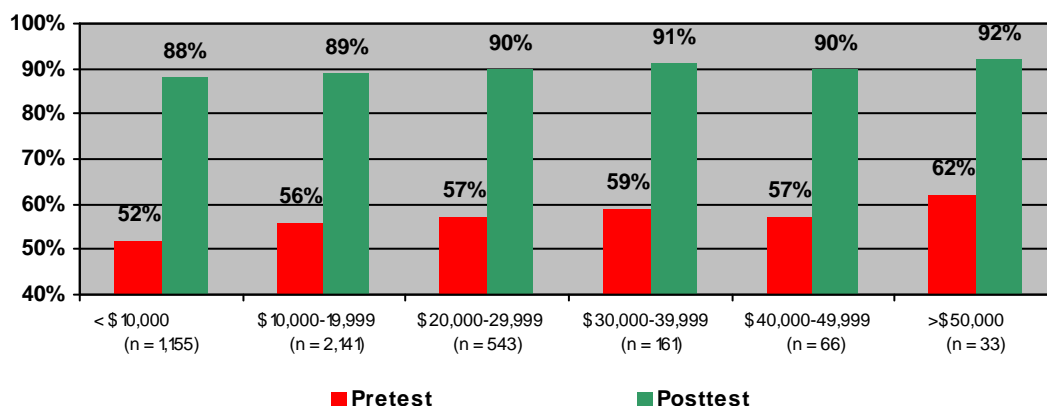


Closing the Gap: Student Performance

Proportion of Correct Responses for African American LA 4 Students Statewide in Language, by Family Income Level for 2006-07 (n = 3,881)



Proportion of Correct Responses for White LA 4 Students Statewide in Language, by Family Income Level for 2006-07 (n = 3,452)



Children enrolled in the LA 4/SP program demonstrate a similar proportion of correct responses on the DSC regardless of ethnicity when their responses are controlled for income. These results also suggest a larger positive response from lower income families.



What the Future Holds

In summary, for the past six years, results from the evaluation of LA 4/SP have consistently come to the same conclusion: **high-quality preschool works!** The Louisiana Department of Education early childhood staff and CCD staff at UL Lafayette have recently constructed research designs to answer the following longitudinal research questions. Implementation of these research questions will measure whether or not students benefiting from this program continue to sustain their gains consistent with previous longitudinal research findings.

- Do children maintain these gains as demonstrated by *iLEAP* scores in grades 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9?
- Is there less grade level retention among LA 4/SP children?
- Is there a reduction in special education placement?
- How do LA 4/SP children perform in schools with different school performance scores?
- Do LA 4/SP children have higher graduation rates?





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Thank you for your continued support of the LA 4/Starting Points program. The State Department of Education has been able to help even more children in Louisiana because of the legislature's approval to increase funding by \$23 million. As a result, LA 4 has been expanded to include approximately 5,000 additional students this school year, bringing the total number of students in the program to approximately 15,000.

This program started as a vision of my dear friend Cecil J. Picard, who was a great champion of high-quality, early childhood education. He worked diligently to develop a quality Pre-Kindergarten program for children under the age of 5, especially at-risk children. Our goal is to continue Cecil's dream of making certain this program ultimately serves every at-risk child in this state.

LA 4 has a proven track record of success and it remains a top priority for this department. The research continues to show that students who participate in LA 4 outperform those students who do not. LA 4 students who started the 2006-2007 school year scoring in the lowest quartile for math, language, and print, scored above the national average for PreK students after one year in the program. Language test scores for both black and white students of various income levels indicate a narrowing of the achievement gap. Its impact is far reaching and the benefits can be seen in students for many years afterward. Extensive data shows that this program has helped improve students' test scores as well as their literacy and math skills.

It is clear that LA 4 is a smart investment, and I am confident that the return on our investment will be significant for years to come. Based on analysis conducted by the *Center for Child Development at ULL*, it is expected that students who participate in LA 4 will perform better in school, have higher test scores, and will have fewer retentions and referrals to special education.

Unfortunately, many of our school-age children live in poverty. One of the greatest gifts this state can give them is a solid education, one that will enable them to be successful in the classroom and in life. Education is the strongest path to breaking that cycle of poverty. My executive team and I are currently crafting an academic plan that will create a world-class education system for **ALL** students. That is the Department's vision for the children of Louisiana. Our mission is to improve the academic performance for **ALL** students, eliminate achievement gaps, and prepare students to be effective citizens in a global market. We are reaching out to education experts statewide, nationally, and internationally. LA 4 is an integral part of this plan. I will share more details with you once it has been finalized.

I am grateful for Governor Kathleen Blanco's support of LA 4 and its expansion. I look forward to working with each of you as we embark on the road to improving education for **ALL** of our children.

Paul G. Pastorek

State Superintendent of Education

Acknowledgements

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