

EXECUTIVE Summary

2008-2009

LA 4 Prekindergarten

Louisiana's Prekindergarten Success

In 2008-09, LA 4 served 15,205 of Louisiana's neediest children—those identified as being at risk for academic failure, based on financial need. For the eighth 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 at or even above the national average on the posttest. The success of LA 4 cohort 1 students on last year's LEAP test was repeated this year by LA 4 cohort 2, and cohort 3 demonstrated continued success on the iLEAP 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 teacher assistants, 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 the *Creative Curriculum* serve as a pedagogical foundation. The successes of LA 4 students throughout the past eight 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 already 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 eight years, the following quantitative and qualitative parameters have emerged as the anchors of the Louisiana preschool effort:

Qualitative Parameters

- Certified early childhood teachers
- Highly qualified teacher assistants
- Vision, hearing, and dental screening

- Developmentally appropriate materials and supplies
- Research-based and developmentally appropriate curricula
- Professional development opportunities that reflect needs identified through analyses of data
- Ongoing technical assistance and support
- Before- and after school enrichment program
- Collaboration with physical health, mental health, and social service agencies
- Collaboration among early childhood stakeholders
- Support and adult education services for children and their families
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to determine perceived strengths and needs

Quantitative Parameters

- Pretest and posttest measurement of student progress using the Developing Skills Checklist (DSC)
- Program evaluation and longitudinal research necessary to establish trends and predict outcomes
- Observation and evaluation using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale—Revised (ECERS—R)
- Small classroom sizes of 20 children
- 10:1 child-to-adult ratio
- Full-day (six-hour) program
- At least 18 hours of targeted professional development each year
- Daily transportation

Who is Served by LA 4/Starting Points?

The targeted population for LA 4 is children identified as at risk for academic failure, based on qualification for FRL services. Ninety-three percent of LA 4 students in 2008-09 qualified for FRL services.

Children with disabilities are also being served by the LA 4 program. Approximately 3.7% 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 slightly increased to 5.13%.

The following table illustrates that 13,157 children (86.5% of LA 4 students) received a vision screening, 12,025 children (79.0% of LA 4 students) received a hearing screening, and 3,441 children (22.6% of LA 4 students) received a dental screening.

* These numbers are estimates. Not all LA 4-participating sites supplied screening data to the LDOE.

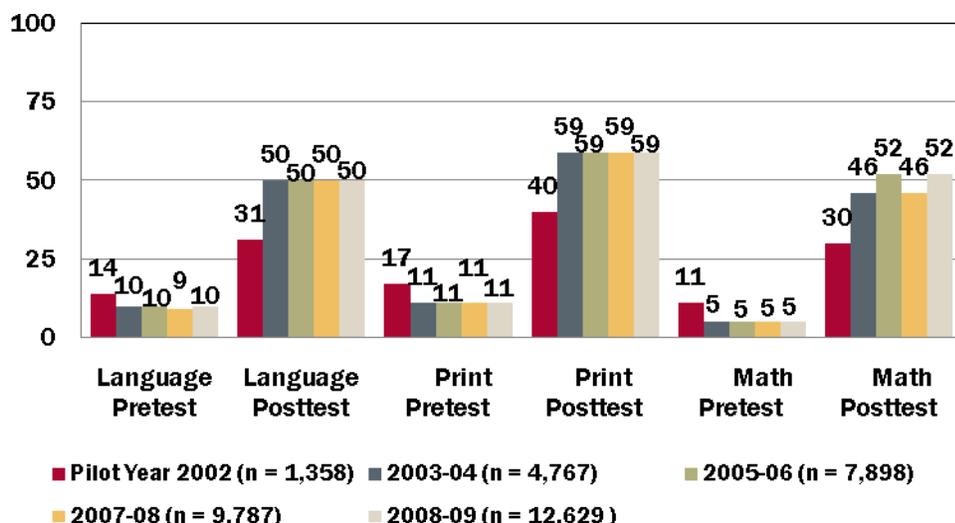
Medical Screenings Provided for LA 4/Starting Points Students

Total LA 4 Enrollment	Vision Screenings	Hearing Screenings	Dental Screenings
15,205	13,157	12,025	3,441

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 2008-09, progress was measured in this way for the 12,629 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. The percentage of students scoring in the lowest quartile on the DSC decreased from 80% on the pretest in Language to 13% on the posttest. This improvement in scores moved students to the 50th national percentile for Language. In Print, student scores improved to the 59th percentile, and in Math, student scores improved to the 52nd percentile. All posttest scores were statistically significant and above the national average.

Increased Student Achievement: DSC



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

Note: Due to several years of participation, some years are not displayed due to limited space.

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 using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale—Revised (ECERS—R). The ECERS—R is one of the most widely used standardized measures 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

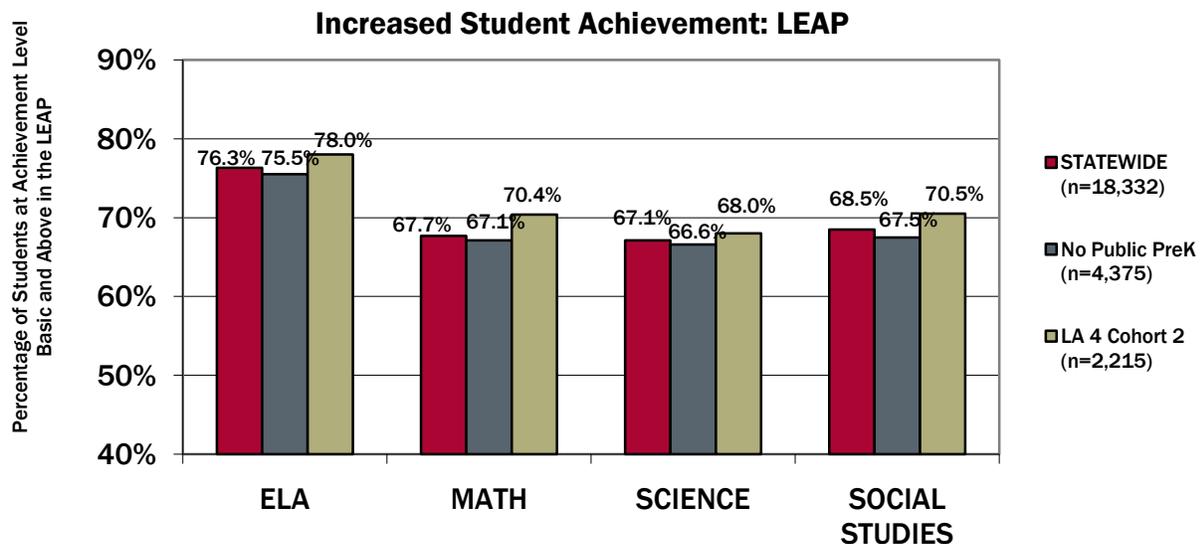
received above-average ratings on this assessment and has compared quite favorably to similar programs in other states. This year's performance was no exception. A compilation of assessment scores for 111 randomly selected classrooms resulted in an overall score of 5.83 on a scale of 1 to 7. This 2008-09 ECERS—R score places the LA 4 program solidly in the “good to excellent” range, and scores have remained consistent since 2002.

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 continue to demonstrate improved performance when compared to their no-public-prekindergarten (NPPK) peers. The following sections provide an overview of this progress.

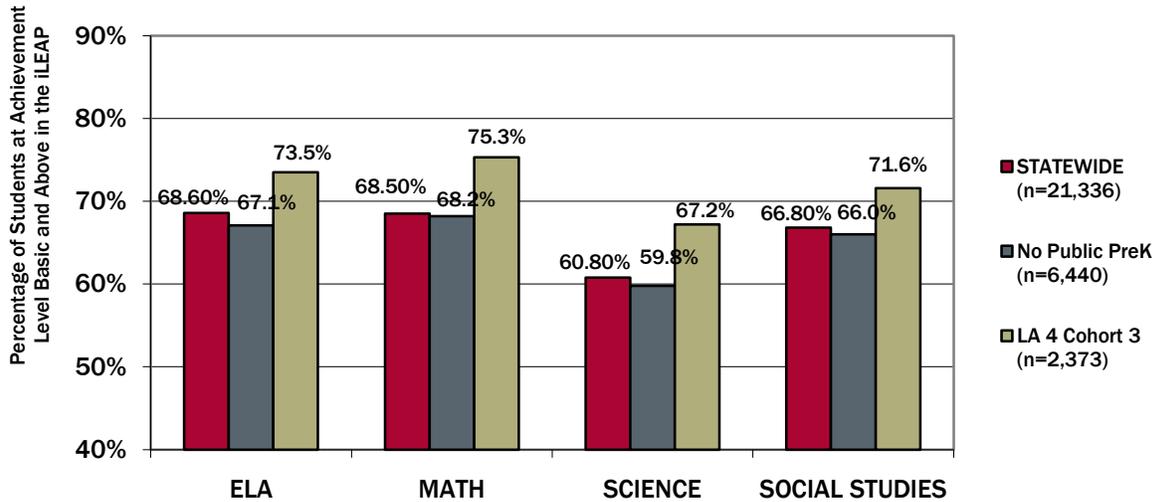
Improved iLEAP and LEAP

As fourth-graders in 2008-09, LA 4 cohort 2 students outperformed their NPPK peers on every subtest of the LEAP statewide. These results are consistent with last year's LEAP scores of LA 4 cohort 1 students. Further, LA 4 student success was also demonstrated on the third-grade iLEAP. LA 4 cohort 3 children performed better than their NPPK peers in all subject areas of the iLEAP. In fact, the percentage of students at achievement level basic and above on the iLEAP subtests (ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies) ranged between 67% and 75%, compared to 60% and 68% for their NPPK peers.



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

Increased Student Achievement: iLEAP

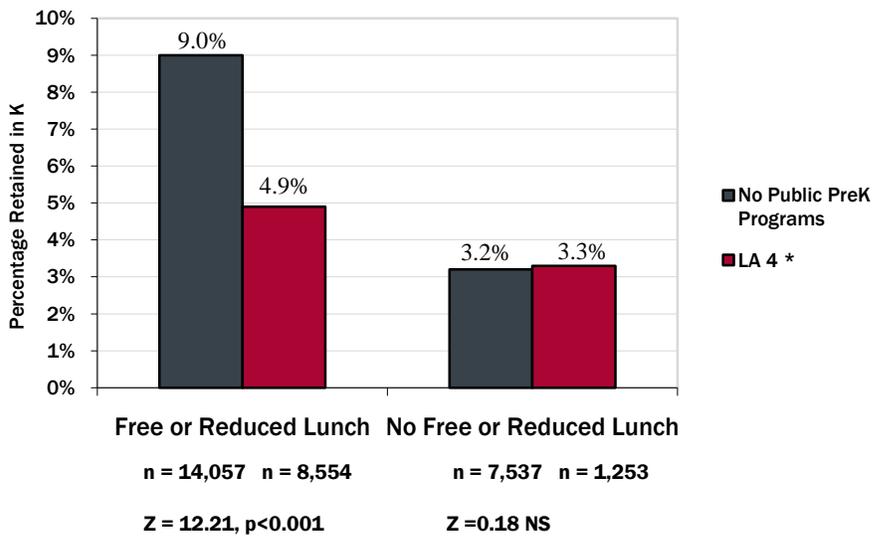


Percentage of students performing at achievement levels Basic and Above on the third-grade iLEAP by program group

Kindergarten Retention Reduction

Among children who participated in the LA 4 (FRL) program in 2006-07, there was a significant reduction in the overall percentage retained in kindergarten.

Reductions in Grade Retention



Kindergarten grade retention rates as a function of participation in the LA 4 program and FRL eligibility for cohort 5 (2006-07)

What the Future Holds

For the past eight years, results from the evaluation of the LA 4 program have consistently demonstrated that high-quality early childhood education is positively impacting the academic success of Louisiana's at-risk children. In order to continue monitoring the short- and long-term progress of these children, the early childhood staff of the Louisiana Department of Education and the Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette will continue to investigate the following areas:

- Compare pretest and posttest scores of 4-year-old at-risk children who participate in the LA 4 program to ensure that these students continue to show significant gains in the academic areas of Language, Print, and Math, year after year.
- Encourage schools to provide additional high-quality early educational opportunities to become "school ready."
- Identify LA 4 outlying districts (those districts that perform highest and lowest on the DSC on the posttest assessment).
- Determine factors that contribute to the success of the higher performing districts and ascertain the needs of the lower performing districts.
- Expand high-quality prekindergarten programs for targeted, unserved, at-risk 4- year-olds using the Picard Saturation Report.
- Continue efforts to improve and coordinate high-quality, diverse-delivery early childhood services for all children across the state.
- Increase student achievement on high-stakes assessments such as iLEAP, LEAP, and the Graduation Exit Exam (GEE) by increasing participation in LA 4.
- Reduce grade-retention rates by increasing participation in LA 4.
- Investigate the benefit of serving targeted, at-risk, 3-year-olds by identifying the essential predictors which would warrant a child's participation in two years of high-quality early childhood education.
- Identify LA 4's highest and lowest performing districts to ascertain the success indicators of the highest and the need indicators for the lowest.
- Track performance of LA 4 students as they enter 8th grade.
- Analyze LA 4 student high-stakes testing results for 7th, 8th, and 9th-grade students for their impact on student dropout rates.

Acknowledgements

Louisiana Department of Education

Paul Pastorek, JD
State Superintendent of Education

Ollie Tyler, MEd
Deputy Superintendent of Education

Scott M. Norton, PhD
Assistant Superintendent of Education, Office of Student and School Performance

Kerry Laster, PhD
Executive Director, Office of Literacy and Numeracy

Mary Louise Jones, EdD
Section Supervisor

Marybeth Ridgel, MEd
Program Officer, Office of Student and School Performance

Anita Ashford, Loren Barrios, Linda Champion, Kaye Eichler, Jeanette Hidalgo, Nicholy Johnson, Crystalyn Lee, Terri McClellan, Kay Nelson, Cindy Ramagos, Ivy Starns
Program Consultants

Fen Chou, PhD and Marieanne Hollay, PhD
Education Research Analysts

Carla Amy, Tara Baudean, Penny Black, Stephanie Blanchard, Sherri Caskey, Ellen Howell, April Lauterbach, Stacy Marino, Joyce Sjolander, Libbie Sonnier
LA 4 and Special Education Regional Coordinators

Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

Keith Guice
President
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John L. Bennett
Member-at-Large

Penny Dastugue
Member-at-Large

Tammie A. McDaniel
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

Tamika Carmouche, MEd
Research Associate

Gary Asmus, PhD
Director, Management Information Systems

Mike Mayne, BS
Data Manager

Kara Farmer, MS
Data Coordinator

Georgetown University Center on Health and Education

Craig T. Ramey, PhD
The Georgetown Distinguished Professor of Health Studies Director

Center for Educational Accountability at the University of Alabama at Birmingham

Carl M. Brezausek, MS
Information Systems Specialist III