

EVALUATION OF
THE *STARTING POINTS PRESCHOOL PROGRAM*:
A FOLLOW-UP STUDY
(CHILDREN OF PROGRAM YEARS 1997-98 THROUGH 1999-2000)



Louisiana Department of Education
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October 2001

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This public document was printed at a cost of \$181.50. One hundred ten (110) copies of this public document were published in this first printing at a cost of \$181.50. This document was published by the Louisiana Department of Education; Office of Management and Finance; Division of Planning, Analysis and Information Resources; P.O. Box 94064; Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9064, to report information about the *Starting Points Preschool Program*, under authority of R.S. 17:22. The material was printed in accordance with the standards for printing by state agencies established pursuant to R.S. 43:31.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Starting Points Preschool Program* provides Pre-Kindergarten classes for at-risk four-year-old children. More than 1,600 children were served each year from 1997-98 through 1999-2000. Approximately 80.1% of the 1997-98 and 1998-99 former participants received free or reduced-priced lunches, as compared to the 1999-2000 statewide statistic (i.e., 58.8% of all public school students received free or reduced lunches in 1999-2000).

Annual evaluation studies of this Program have been conducted since its inception in 1992-93. To provide policy makers and administrators with further information, a follow-up study was conducted in Spring of 2001. A detailed evaluation report presents Program quality data; developmental progress results for approximately 46% of the 1999-2000 former participants; grade progression, promotion information, and attendance data for Starting Points former participants (Program years 1997-1998 through 1999-2000); and retention rates for children served in 1997-98 or in 1998-99. The following is a brief summary of the follow-up findings.

- Based on ratings of 56 local programs, the 1999-2000 Program received good quality ratings in the majority of Program features that were assessed. Practices that were similar to those used in excellent quality programs were found in features such as Indoor Space; Safety Practices; Greeting/Departing; Staff Interaction; Staff-Child Interaction; and Furniture for Routine Care, Play, and Learning. Features of lesser quality included practices pertaining to Nature/Science, Music/Movement, Space for Gross Motor activities, and Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills.
- The *Creative Curriculum Child Development and Learning Checklist* assessments indicated that among the observed children (N=777), the majority did make developmental progress during the 1999-2000 Starting Points Program year. The following summary results show that, in each of three developmental areas and in the total or overall results, the majority of the Starting Points children were rated as “Sometimes” demonstrating a skill or behavior as the Program was just beginning. Near the end of the 1999-2000 Program year, the majority of the children were now rated as “Often” demonstrating a skill or behavior in the three developmental areas.

| | Pre-Program | | | Post-Program | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-------|--------------|-----------|-------|
| | Not Yet | Sometimes | Often | Not Yet | Sometimes | Often |
| Socio-Emotional Development | 25.5% | 44.9% | 29.6% | 0.6% | 17.9% | 81.5% |
| Cognitive Development | 33.9% | 44.7% | 21.3% | 1.9% | 20.8% | 77.3% |
| Physical Development | 16.7% | 46.4% | 36.9% | 0.4% | 10.9% | 88.7% |
| Overall Results (Total) | 27.7% | 45.2% | 27.1% | 1.2% | 17.8% | 81.0% |

- In addition, 1,663 Starting Points former participants of 1999-2000 enrolled in a Louisiana public school in 2000-01; 1,639 children (or 98.6%) of these enrolled children were placed in Kindergarten in 2000-01.
- In 1999-2000, over 93% of the 1998-1999 and of the 1997-1998 Starting Points former participants were enrolled in Louisiana public schools. The majority of these enrolled children had progressed to their maximum expected grade level by the 1999-2000 school year (i.e., 94.7% of the enrolled 1998-1999 Starting Points children were placed in Kindergarten and 92.3% of the enrolled 1997-1998 Starting Points children were in grade 1 classes).
- Starting Points children had frequent school attendance in 1999-2000, as indicated by the rates of 95.9% for the 1997-98 former participants, 95.3% for the 1998-99 former participants, and 95.3% for the 1999-2000 participants. These attendance rates exceed the 10-year attendance rate goal of 95% that has been set for K-8 students and also compare favorably with the 1999-2000 statewide attendance rate of 95.5% that was calculated for elementary public schools.
- Among Starting Points former participants, who reached their maximum expected grade-level in 1999-2000, retention rates (Kindergarten=7.6%, grade 1=12.2%) were lower than the overall statewide retention rates (Kindergarten=9.6%, grade 1=13.2%) and lower than the statewide retention rates of free-lunch students (Kindergarten=11.3%, grade 1=16.4%).

INTRODUCTION

The Nature of the *Starting Points Preschool Program*

Since 1992-93, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) has administered the *Starting Points Preschool Program*. Currently, the Division of Student Standards and Assessments, Elementary Education Section employs staff members who serve as the State-level Program coordinators. According to these Program coordinators, the *Starting Points Preschool Program* has two main goals. The first goal is to provide quality programs for preschool children of parents/guardians who are employed and/or enrolled in job training/educational programs. The second goal is that the children who are served will be prepared for Kindergarten. To meet these goals, eligible children who are enrolled receive services and participate in Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) activities that are believed to help at-risk children get ready to enter school.

While Starting Points is one of Louisiana's publicly-funded Pre-K programs, only four-year-old children who meet the eligibility criteria can be enrolled. As explained in *The Starting Points Preschool Program, Program Regulations (Bulletin 1934)*, there are three State-specified criteria and two Federal criteria. The Federal criteria were established to provide services to children of low-income families, but each child's parents/guardians must be (1) employed and/or (2) enrolled in a job training/educational program. Evidence has been collected to document these services.

From 1992-1993 to 1999-2000, the *Starting Points Preschool Program* expanded to include an increasing number of school systems. The children were placed in Pre-K classes that were housed in Louisiana schools. Most of the schools were public schools, but a few nonpublic schools have also participated in Starting Points. Program staff, who are employed by a school system or by a school, design their own local programs, but the State-level Program coordinators developed regulations for the *Starting Points Preschool Program*. These regulations specify that the local programs must

adhere to the developmental philosophy as outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Inherent in this philosophy is the provision of a child-centered program directed toward the development of cognitive, social, emotional, communication, and motor skills in a manner and at a pace consistent with the needs and capabilities of the individual child. (See *Bulletin 1934*, 1999-2000)

Some local programs utilize the *Creative Curriculum*, with its goals of promoting a child's socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical development by building on the individual's strengths and interests. In all programs, teachers are to consider the characteristics of young children when planning activities. For example, preschool children generally have a short-attention span, their muscles may still be developing, they enjoy opportunities to be creative, and they learn through their play. The children are energetic, curious, and interested in exploring. Morse and Wingo (1962) suggested that teachers might think of the children's energy, curiosity, and their play as resources for working with young children.

Examples of Program activities include dramatic play; simple cooking projects; field trips; nature walks; tasks involving hands-on materials, colors, patterns, counting skills, or environmental print; games, music, movement, and exercise; stories are read to the children; and children make up their own books. It is of value to have the children use language, thus daily tasks include prompting the children to communicate, such as by asking them to predict what will happen in a story, to tell others about something a child has created, and to dictate their ideas for a journal. When attending Early Childhood Conferences or other training opportunities, Program staff receive suggestions for developmentally-appropriate activities. The LDE has supported the implementation of local programs by providing training opportunities and other resources, such as, site visits with on-site technical assistance and monitoring, and

annual evaluation studies. The next section of this report focuses on evaluations of this Program and related activities.

Previous Evaluations of the Program, Related Activities, and Re-Design of the Evaluation

Currently, two evaluators (i. e., Barbara Abshire and Janice Ducote), who are LDE staff members within the Division of Planning, Analysis and Information Resources, are providing program evaluation services by collaborating with the State-level Program coordinators. Annual evaluation services have been provided from 1992 through 2001. Originally, the first phase of each annual study involved collecting information about each Program year by asking the system-level Program coordinators to respond to a *Program Description Survey (PDS)* instrument. The *PDS* responses were used to produce a written report that described a specific Program year, by including participation and implementation statistics. For the first five Program years, student level information was also collected on children who were reported as being eligible. This information was used to build a database, containing records on children who had received Starting Points services for varying lengths of time, within a particular Program year.

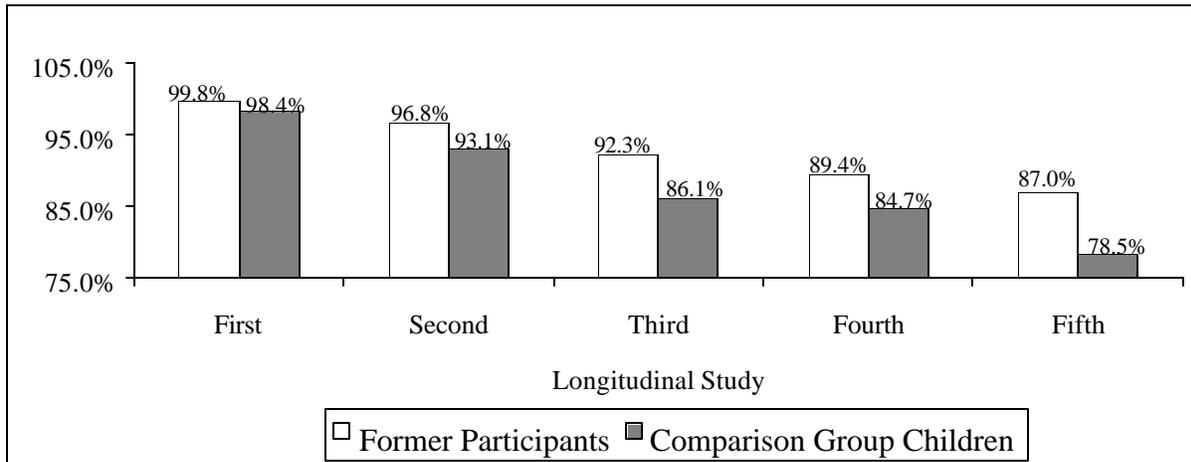
The second phase of the original evaluation designs used the student-level data in longitudinal studies. Altogether, five longitudinal studies were completed in an effort to determine the sustained effects of the Program, as measured by the children's grade-progression and their performance on standardized tests. In addition to including former *Starting Points Preschool Program* participants (who had received at least five months of services), these five longitudinal studies also included smaller groups of comparison children. The comparison group children were eligible for one Program year, but these children had received less than five months of Starting Points services. The most recent longitudinal report (released in September 1999) provided performance data on Starting Points children of Program years 1992-93 through 1996-97, if these children were enrolled in Louisiana public schools during school year 1997-98.

Although these two-phase studies produced informative results, the overall evaluation design had some methodological limitations, which were described in the previous reports. For example, one problem in conducting longitudinal studies was the length of time between the year of Program eligibility and the collection of performance data. As this time interval increased, it was more difficult to locate the records of the children (especially the comparison group children) for use within in a longitudinal study. Over just a few school years, the number of children, who could be included in longitudinal studies, began to decrease. The loss of children from a longitudinal study made it difficult to interpret some of the longitudinal findings.

Previous longitudinal studies also suggested few differences between the mean performance of an entire grade population and the mean performance of Starting Points former participants/comparison group children. Nevertheless, other differences [i.e., in quartile performance patterns for norm-referenced tests (NRT) or in criterion-referenced test (CRT) attainment rates] were detected between the entire grade-level population and the Starting Points former participant groups. However, due to the delay between the Program year and the time of assessing former participants with NRTs or CRTs, it was not appropriate to conclude that participation in Starting Points was the only factor responsible for the slightly higher quartile performance patterns or the slightly higher attainment rates. Any Starting Points child could have received other services subsequent to Starting Points that helped the child perform adequately on the tests.

Stronger evidence of this Pre-K Program's positive effects was revealed by a consistent finding that the grade progression of children classified as former participants was superior to that of the comparison group children. Exhibit 1 summarizes the percentage of children who had reached their maximum expected grade level (in a specific school) year during the five longitudinal studies.

Exhibit 1. Percentages of Children Reaching Their Maximum Expected Grade Levels During Five Longitudinal Studies



While these findings suggested that the *Starting Points Preschool Program* had sustained effects on the former participants, as measured by the children’s subsequent grade-progression, it was prudent to improve the evaluation studies. Members of the Louisiana Legislature had become very interested in the long-term effects of preschool/Pre-K programs and were asking for research findings. Unfortunately, constraints such as pressing Departmental priorities, lack of staff, and limited financial resources caused some reduction of evaluation services, but LDE staff began planning for the revision of the *Starting Points Preschool Program* evaluation design.

Beginning in 1998, the evaluators and other staff of the Planning and Analysis Section met with the State-level Starting Points Program coordinators and with LDE staff who supervise other preschool/Pre-K programs. Some of these LDE staff members felt it was important to examine the quality of a Pre-K program, while others believed outcome measures on the children were of more value in securing additional resources for the preschool/Pre-K programs. It also appeared to be wise to study the children closer to their year of Program participation. With the limited resources available for evaluation of the all preschool/Pre-K programs, it was necessary to have help in exploring what was feasible and what data sources might be utilized in future evaluations. Thus, several LDE staff members participated in research-related activities, such as:

- (1) studying what other states were doing to evaluate their Pre-K programs,
- (2) reviewing and summarizing literature,
- (3) using *SIS* and other existing data sources in exploratory studies, and
- (4) searching for instruments or assessment approaches that could be used to study young children.

Appendix A summarizes what was learned through these LDE activities. Following these activities, the first new evaluation service was an attempt to have the systems improve the student-level data, which are reported via the *Student Information System (SIS)*. Improvements in the *SIS* data, coupled with new ways of using the *SIS* data, would facilitate the inclusion of additional outcome measures (e.g., attendance rates and retention rates) in studies of the former Pre-K program participants. However, asking the system-level coordinators to be more involved with the reporting of *SIS* data also increased their work and the work of the evaluators. Thus, to reduce the usual paperwork of both the system coordinators and the evaluators, as well as to make better use of other data reported to LDE, the *PDS* instrument was modified for the 1999-2000 Program year. A similar *PDS* instrument was used to collect implementation and participation data for the 2000-01 Program, and these results were provided in *The 2000-01 Starting*

Points Preschool Program, Program Description Evaluation Report (finalized in June of 2001). It is suggested that readers review several earlier evaluation reports in tandem with the current report.

Another change in the evaluation design was to include data about the quality of the local programs. An instrument for assessing the quality of the local Pre-K programs was in use by the State-level Starting Points coordinators. This instrument's data for the 1999-2000 Program year were available as this follow-up study commenced, thus this report includes quality ratings of some local programs.

However, the desire to study children closer to their Program year eliminated the use of standardized tests in this study. The professional literature indicated very young children (e.g., four-year-olds) should not be assessed with "paper and pencil standardized achievement tests," as is often done when studying what older children have learned. In fact, the evaluators were not able to find any low-cost instruments or assessment approaches that could be implemented to measure the academic skills or achievement of very young children. Nevertheless, a well-received evaluation of another Pre-K program utilizes the *Creative Curriculum Child Development and Learning Checklist*. For this follow-up study, this checklist was selected as an instrument for measuring the developmental progress some children made during the 1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program year. A later section of this report describes the instrument in greater detail. The report also includes other follow-up data for children served by Program years 1997-98, 1998-99, and 1999-2000.

Once the evaluators had explored the new data sources, the follow-up study was implemented. In the next section, the purpose of this report, evaluation questions addressed within the study, and data sources are outlined. An overview of the follow-up study is also presented.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report summarizes evaluation activities and describes the data sources that were used in the follow-up study. However, the main purpose of this report is to communicate the follow-up findings to the evaluation stakeholders. The follow-up findings may assist policy-makers, the State-level Program coordinators, and the administrators of the local programs as these individuals make decisions or changes in the funding or implementation of the *Starting Points Preschool Program*. The following three evaluation questions were written to guide the study and to organize this report.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- (1) To what extent did the *1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program* provide quality Pre-K programs for children of parents who were employed and/or enrolled in job training/educational programs?
- (2) What evidence exists to indicate whether or not the former participants of 1999-2000 made developmental progress that enabled them to be prepared for their Kindergarten year?
- (3) What does follow-up data on Starting Points former participants suggest about their school success?

DATA SOURCES AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Responses to these three evaluation questions were prepared to present follow-up findings. Each response was based on data from one or more of the sources that are listed below.

Relevant Professional Literature

The 1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program, Program Description Evaluation Report and its data sources

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition

The Creative Curriculum Child Development and Learning Checklist

Enrollment records of the *Student Information System (SIS)*, School Years 1997-98 through 2000-01

Later sections of this report will describe the data sources and will explain how each source was used within the follow-up study. Based on the findings, this follow-up report provides information about the features of Pre-K or early childhood programs that characterize programs of good quality. Aspects of the 1999-2000 Program that the State-level Program coordinators rated as being of good quality, as well as areas in which the local programs need to improve are also identified.

Next, the ways in which the children changed, in terms of making developmental progress during the 1999-2000 Program year, were assessed with the *Creative Curriculum* checklist. The checklist data were analyzed for presentation in graphic and tabular formats.

In addition, follow-up results pertaining to the grade-progression and 1999-2000 school attendance are provided for the children served in 1997-98, 1998-99, and 1999-2000. Since it is not appropriate to retain a child in a Pre-K Program, only Kindergarten and grade 1 retention rates are presented for the children who had reached their maximum expected grade by the 1999-2000 school year. Finally, the retention rates for Starting Points former participants were compared to the rates reported in the statewide retention studies. In the next sections of this document, all findings are presented.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Evaluation Question 1: To what extent did the 1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program provide quality Pre-K programs for children of parents who were employed and/or enrolled in job training/educational programs?

Evaluation question 1 was answered by using statistics previously reported in the *1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program, Program Description Evaluation Report* (July 2000); information from *Bulletin (1934)* for 1999-2000; October 1 (*SIS*) enrollment data, and *The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition* data. In addition, Schulman, Blank, and Ewen's (1999) report on State Pre-K Initiatives, which was published by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), and the web site of the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Institute (ECI) were also reviewed.

The last two data sources identified features of quality early childhood programs, which are summarized in Exhibit 2. Because these features of quality programs are consistent with the philosophy and implementation of the *Starting Points Preschool Program*, Exhibit 2 also indicates how similar features are incorporated into Starting Points.

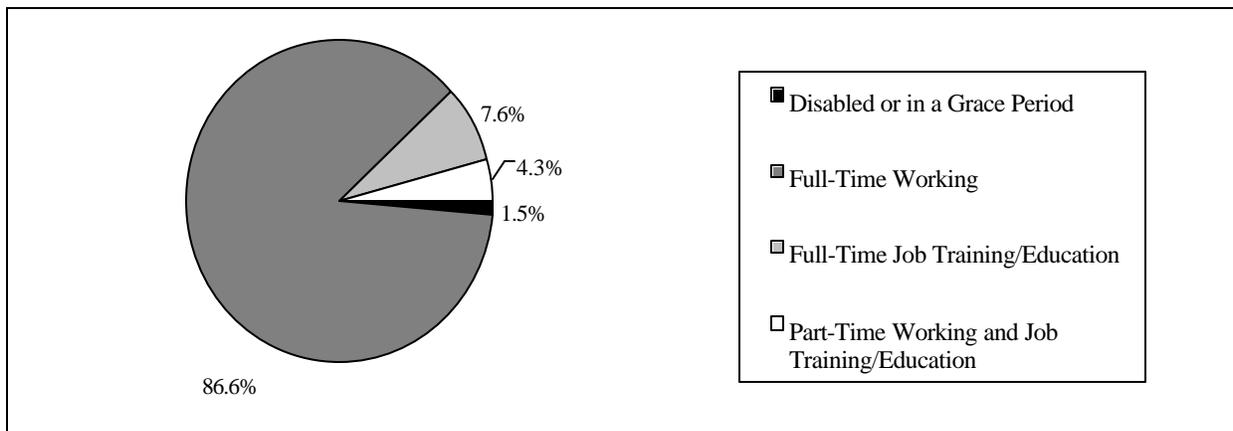
Exhibit 2: Features of Quality Early Childhood Programs

| Views of Children's Defense Fund | Views of Early Childhood Institute | Starting Points Preschool Program: Philosophy, Regulations, and Findings |
|--|--|---|
| In a quality program, the children's needs for security, affection, stimulation, and development are met. A holistic approach is used to address educational goals and other needs (health care, good nutrition, and adequate housing.) | Relationships, readiness, and resilience are the three Rs of quality programs. Quality programs are responsive to children and they provide ample adult-child verbal interaction. | Staff use developmentally-appropriate techniques to help young children learn from their play and early experiences. The program can include other services, but activities are directed toward the development of cognitive, social, emotional, communication, and motor skills. |
| Highly-qualified, well-compensated, and stable staff interact with the children to develop a close relationship with them. | Excellent teachers provide the rich educational activities that ready a child for school. Teachers also build relationships with a child. | In 1999-2000, 93.6% of the teachers were fully certified in Nursery School, Kindergarten, or Early Childhood Education, as required by the Program. Teachers work directly with the children five days a week, for the full school day. |
| Parents are encouraged to be equal partners in their child's education and development (e.g., the staff involves parents in the child's learning). | As the children's first teachers, parents create important learning attitudes. Loving parent-child relationships build security and confidence, so that the child sees him/herself as a capable learner. | Since parents are the first teachers of their children, the parent involvement component of the Program provides meetings, workshops, individual parent/teacher conferences, and other activities. Many techniques are frequently used to inform parents of activities and to encourage parental participation in Program activities. |
| Good health, nutrition, and safety practices that are appropriate for Pre-K children are used in the program. The physical environment is safe and appropriate for Pre-K children. | A quality program attends to the physical health and safety of children and offers an environment that is rich in learning opportunities. | In 1999-2000, all participating school systems had policies about first aid or medications; children with contagious health conditions could not attend until they were well. The curriculum included child-centered instruction on health, good hygiene, and safety. Well-balanced meals were provided each day. The daily schedule included planned, physical exercise, and/or outdoor play activities. Fire departments inspected the schools annually. Classroom materials, mats, and furniture were sanitized on a regular basis. |
| Quality programs promote inclusiveness by having policies that allow for the participation of children, families, and teachers from diverse backgrounds. Efforts are made to provide a linguistically and culturally appropriate curriculum, suited to the child's developmental stage and to each child's interest and needs. | A quality program strengthens a child's resilience or ability to overcome obstacles, especially for children facing violence, poverty, bias, or disability. | A child-centered program that develops a child's skills at a pace consistent with the needs and capabilities of the individual child is provided in school settings. Although Starting Points targets at-risk four-year-old children of parents who are working, in job training, and/or in educational programs, the Program is open to children and low-income families of all ethnic groups. When needed, the Program admits disabled or special needs children. However, of the 1999-2000 participants, 72.5% were from single-parent homes and 78.1% were from families having an income of less than \$1,997 per month. |
| Children have the attention they need in a classroom with small group sizes and a low child/staff ratio. | | A class is limited to 20 children. A local program has a full-time aide when there are 16 to 20 children or a half-time aide with 13 to 15 children. |

The 1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program, Program Description Evaluation Report (July 2000) and its Executive Summary described the 1999-2000 Program year. (See Appendix B for a copy of the Executive Summary.) Among other participation and implementation information, these reports included statistics about the children who were served in 1999-2000 and their parents/guardians.

As illustrated in Exhibit 3, 86.6% of the 2,105 parents/guardians were reported as employed on a full-time basis, 7.6% were enrolled in a job training or educational program on a full-time basis, and 4.3% combined work and a job training/educational program. The remaining parents/guardians were either disabled or in a 30-day grace period at the time data were reported.

Exhibit 3. Program Year 1999-2000, Employment/Enrollment Status of the 2,105 Parents/Guardians

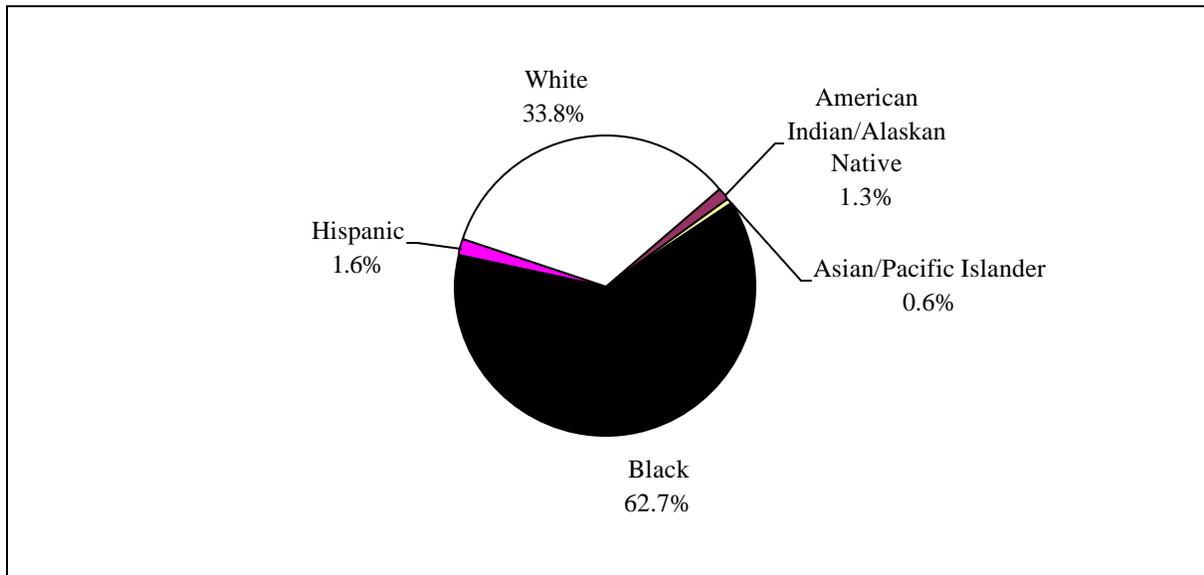


Although most parents/guardians were employed and the families met the income criterion, the Program year income statistics lead to the conclusion that the majority (78.1%) of the 1999-2000 Starting Points children were from families with a monthly household income under \$1,997. In addition, 72.5% of the 1999-2000 children were from single-parent homes.

By November of 1999, a total of 97 public schools and two diocesan nonpublic schools housed the 109 Pre-K classes of the 1999-2000 Program year. Eligibility and enrollment reports indicated that 1,686 children were enrolled in the 109 Starting Points classes, with an additional 297 children placed on waiting lists.

Ethnicity information drawn from the *1999-2000 SIS* leads to the conclusion that the Starting Points classes that were housed by the public schools included children from the five major ethnic groups. However, as illustrated in Exhibit 4, the majority of the enrolled public school 1999-2000 Starting Points children were identified as Black or as White. (See Exhibit 4.)

Exhibit 4. Ethnicity of 1999-2000 Starting Points Children Who Were Enrolled in Public Schools



Other available statistics were also included in the report describing the 1999-2000 Program year. However, some information about the Program was not available until the follow-up study was conducted in the Spring of 2001. For example, an assessment of the quality of the Program was made during school year 1999-2000 when the State-level Program coordinators visited all new Program classes, continuing classes with new teachers, and any continuing classes that did not score an average rating of at least 5.0, when previously visited. To assess the Program quality, the State-level coordinators used *The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R)*, which is an instrument authored by Harms, Clifford, and Cryer (1998). The *ECERS-R* consists of 43 items, which are rated by a qualified observer. The 43 items are grouped into seven subscales that are named “Space and Furnishings,” “Personal Care,” “Language-Reasoning,” “Activities,” “Interaction,” “Program Structure,” and “Parents and Staff.”

Each item is given a 1 to 7 point rating, with each odd-numbered rating being anchored to a set of indicators. The observer is told to begin with the indicators under the rating of 1 (which is labeled as inadequate) and continue with one item until he/she can assign a rating score. (A rating of 3 is labeled as “minimal,” a rating of 5 is labeled as “good,” and the rating of 7 is labeled as “excellent.”) If indicators under an odd-numbered rating are scored “yes”, then the odd-numbered rating is assigned. Even-numbered ratings are assigned when all indicators under the preceding odd-numbered rating are scored “no” and at least half of the indicators under the next odd-numbered rating are scored “yes” (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998).

The authors of this instrument indicated that the observations and ratings were developed to measure the quality of early childhood programs, for research or program improvement purposes (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). In Louisiana, the State-level Program coordinators have been using the *ECERS*, not only to assess specific local programs and the teachers, but also as a researched-based method of identifying topics to stress in training sessions. If all Program staff apply suggestions learned in these training sessions, then this form of technical assistance should yield quality Pre-K classes that serve the Starting Points children.

In 1999-2000, the State-level Program coordinators visited and assessed with the *ECERS-R*, a total of 56 program sites. One State coordinator tabulated the *ECERS-R* ratings, and she provided the tabulated results to the evaluators. Analysis of the tabulated results indicated that 15 of the assessed sites were staffed by new teachers; that is, by teachers who had not worked with the *Starting Points Preschool Program* before 1999-2000. On the *ECERS-R*, the teacher-average ratings ranged from a low of 3.5 to a high of 6.89. Ten of the 56 teacher-average ratings were below 5.0, but only three of these 10 teachers were identified as new teachers.

An average rating was also computed for 38 of the 43 items. All of these item-average ratings ranged from a low of 3.9 to a high of 6.8. Of these 38 items, only six items had an item-average rating of 5.0 or less; six other items had an item-average rating above 6.0, but less than 7. Exhibit 5 presents the six items with the lowest item-averages and the six items with the highest item-averages.

**Exhibit 5: 1999-2000 Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Results
for Lowest and Highest Item-Averages**

| Lowest Item-Average Ratings | | Highest Item-Average Ratings | |
|--|---------------------|--|---------------------|
| Item Name | Item-Average Rating | Item Name | Item-Average Rating |
| Nature/Science | 3.9 | Indoor Space | 6.1 |
| Music/Movement | 4.3 | Safety Practices | 6.1 |
| Space for Gross Motor | 4.8 | Greeting/Departing | 6.1 |
| Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills | 4.9 | Staff Interaction | 6.2 |
| Space for Privacy | 5.0 | Staff-Child Interaction | 6.4 |
| Promoting Acceptance of Diversity | 5.0 | Furniture for Routine Care, Play, and Learning | 6.8 |

Among the six items with average ratings of 5.0 or less, the Nature/Science item received the lowest item-average rating of 3.9. To assign a rating on this item, observers look for: collections of natural objects that are available to the children; living things to care for and work with; nature/science books, games, or toys; cooking activities; or simple “experiments” (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). Lower ratings are likely to be assigned if nature/science materials are in short supply or when the nature/science materials are not accessible to the Pre-K children on a daily basis. Of the programs rated less than 5.0 on Nature/Science, nine were staffed by new teachers.

The second lowest item-average rating was a 4.3 for the Music/Movement item. This item assesses how music, dance, or other movements are incorporated into the regular activities. Indicators under the rating of 5.0 are concerned with the accessibility of many music materials for children’s use and the extent to which various types of music are used (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). A new teacher staffed seven program sites that were rated less than 5.0 on Music/Movement.

Two of the six items with the lowest ratings were concerned with the space available. The Space for Gross Motor Play (item-average rating = 4.8) includes assessment of both indoor and outdoor space, as well as the safety, adequacy, and accessibility of this space. A note in the rating instrument indicates the intent of this item is that “major causes of serious injury are minimized.” Other indicators considered under the rating of 7 address the surfaces, suitable for different types of play; protection from the elements; and whether or not the space has other convenient features (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). Six local programs, staffed by new teachers, were among the sites that were rated less than 5.0 on this item.

In addition to the Space for Gross Motor Play item of the *ECERS-R*, the 1999-2000 *PDS* also included several questions about classroom/outdoor play areas, the use of planned exercise or outdoor play activities, and other features of a program that are recommended to increase safety. According to the system-level 1999-2000 Program coordinators, the daily schedule included outdoor play activities (or exercise) in all 53 participating systems. In over 92% of the participating systems, outdoor play areas were said to be large enough to provide at least 75 square feet of space per child, at any one time. In more than 75% of the systems, outdoor play areas were also enclosed. In more than 62% of the systems, soft surfaces were placed under equipment that the children might climb on as they played.

However, the classrooms were reported as large enough to accommodate furniture and shelving, and to provide at least 35 square feet of space per child in just 52.8% of the participating systems. In systems where the indoor space is limited, the small size of classrooms may reduce indoor Gross Motor Play. Thus, some of the lower ratings assigned on the Space for Gross Motor Play item may be due to having a classroom that is too small for the class size, but the small classroom may be the only room available for this Pre-K Program.

The Space for Privacy item of the *ECERS-R*, is concerned with whether or not the program setting gives children “relief from the pressures of group life.” That is, in a good or excellent program, one or two children can play in a private space, without being interrupted by other children. To receive a higher rating, the staff must be able to supervise the child/children while they are in the private space. However, placement of a child away from the larger group as a punishment does not earn credit in Space for Privacy item (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). Although the Space for Privacy item had one of the six lowest average ratings, its average equaled 5.0, which is labeled as “good.” Fifteen of the program sites that were observed were rated less than 5.0 on the Space for Privacy item. Only four of these sites were staffed by a new teacher.

Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills had an item-average of 4.9. This item concentrates on staff discussing logical relationships, introducing concepts appropriately, using actual events and experiences as a basis for concept development, and encouraging children to explain their reasoning as they solve problems (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). Twenty-two of the observed program sites (including six sites that were staffed by a new teacher) received ratings less than 5.0 on this item.

Promoting Acceptance of Diversity was the sixth item with a lower item-average rating, but its average also equaled 5.0. Basically, this item assesses the diversity in program materials or activities (i.e., racial, cultural, age-diversity, gender, and abilities); whether or not the staff demonstrates prejudice; and efforts of the staff to counteract prejudice that is shown by the children or by other adults. Programs that receive the Excellent-rating of 7 would encourage parents to share family customs with all the children, would represent many cultures in holiday celebrations, and would include ethnic foods and/or music from different cultures (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). About one-third of the sites staffed by a new teacher were among those programs that received lower ratings on this item, but no school system had more than two program sites which received the lower ratings on the Promoting Acceptance of Diversity item.

Of all 38 items scored for the 56 program sites, 26 items had average ratings between 5.1 and 6.0. Thus, for the majority of these items, the averages imply that the program features were rated as being of good quality. Furthermore, a profile of all 38 item-averages indicated those items, with averages approaching 6.0 (or slightly above 6.0), tended to be clustered under the “Space and Furnishings” subscale or under the “Personal Care Routines” subscale.

As shown in Exhibit 5, the Indoor Space, Safety Practices, and Greeting/Departing items received average ratings of 6.1. The Staff Interaction item-average rating was 6.2 and the Staff-Child Interaction item received an average rating of 6.4. Finally, the item receiving the highest average rating of 6.8 was

the Furniture for Routine Care, Play, and Learning item. In general, these higher ratings imply that the six specific program features assessed by these items were of good quality, but the observers were also able to see some practices like those observed in programs of excellent quality.

Therefore, evidence gathered through the *ECERS-R* and through other sources supports a conclusion that good quality Pre-K programs were provided to children who participated in the 1999-2000 Program. Demographic data revealed that many of these 1999-2000 participants had several characteristics often associated with being at-risk for school failure and the children served in 1999-2000 also had parents/guardians who were employed and/or who were enrolled in job training/educational programs.

Evaluation Question 2: What evidence exists to indicate whether or not the former participants of 1999-2000 made developmental progress that enabled them to be prepared for their Kindergarten year?

The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (SBESE) and other LDE administrators value the 8(g) *Preschool Program* evaluation results. That study includes the *Creative Curriculum Child Development and Learning Checklist*, which was designed to assess a child's developmental progress, in keeping with the goals of the *Creative Curriculum*. In an effort to maintain consistency in assessing preschool programs (e.g., 8(g), Title I, and Starting Points), a portion of this follow-up study was structured to include *Creative Curriculum* checklist ratings on some children who were served by the *1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program*.

As the author (Trister-Dodge, 2000) of the *Creative Curriculum Child Development and Learning Checklist* directs, the checklist ratings were not used to compare one child with another, nor were the checklist items used as a list of skills all children should have prior to entering Kindergarten. The author intended that teachers use the checklist as a tool to plan a program that promoted each child's growth and development in three very important areas. That is, teachers who used the checklist assessed children in Socio-Emotional Development, in Cognitive Development, and in Physical Development. Each developmental area has several related behaviors or skills, under which the items are listed, but the items are examples of only some behaviors that reflect a child's development in a given area. In addition, these behaviors/skills (or others like these) within the items can be observed as children participate in a wide range of program activities.

The teacher who completed the checklist for each child assigned a rating for each item. A "Not Yet" rating means the teacher rarely or never saw evidence of the skill demonstrated by the child. The "Sometimes" rating was selected if the teacher saw some evidence of the skill. When a child frequently behaved in a way that demonstrated mastery of a particular skill, then the "Often" rating was assigned. In addition to the assigned ratings, the teacher may also record notes about the behaviors of each child (Trister-Dodge, 2000).

The evaluators understand that the *Creative Curriculum Checklist* is made available to the *Starting Points Preschool Program* staff, but the most valid use of the checklist is within a program that also uses the *Creative Curriculum*. Some school systems that implemented the *Starting Points Preschool Program* in 1999-2000, did not use the *Creative Curriculum*, thus there was no way to obtain valid checklist results on every child served in 1999-2000. In fact, this follow-up study was designed after the 1999-2000 year had ended. While the checklist ratings within this follow-up study were submitted on a voluntary basis, as requested by the State-level Program coordinators, Starting Points local Program staff were asked to submit the checklist ratings only if the local program used the *Creative Curriculum*.

To make the submission of these checklist ratings efficient and less expensive, the State-level Program coordinators received permission to use a scan-form version of the *Creative Curriculum* checklist. The scan-form version of the checklist was made by the staff of the 8(g) Office, who provided extra checklist copies for use in the Starting Points follow-up study, as well as access to some checklist ratings that had been submitted for a recent 8(g) evaluation study. Instructions accompanying the scan-form version of the checklist asked the teachers, who instructed Pre-K participants, to observe the children and rate the children two times during the year of Program participation. The first observations and ratings were made after each child had been in a preschool/Pre-K program for about one month. The teachers were also asked to make observations and ratings near the end of the Program year. These two ratings are the only ratings requested and received through the checklist scan-forms, but teachers may have rated the children many times during the 1999-2000 Program year. In this report, the first set of ratings on the scan-forms was conceptualized as a Pre-Program Assessment, and the second set of ratings was called the Post-Program Assessment.

When submitted, the checklist forms were sent to LSU for scanning, and a file of the ratings was made for further analysis. Because some of the Starting Points children had been included in a recent 8(g) *Preschool Program* evaluation, their scanned ratings were selected from a previous file and then merged with the scanned ratings obtained for additional 1999-2000 Starting Points former participants. All together, checklist ratings were provided for a total of 777 Starting Points children, which is approximately 46% of the children enrolled at the beginning of the *1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program*. A total of 36 public school systems sent in scan-forms on Starting Points children.

The planned analysis of these checklist ratings included determining the numbers and percentages of the Starting Points former program participants who progressed from “Not Yet” to “Sometimes” or to “Often” ratings. Progression from “Sometimes” to “Often” was also examined, as well as any negative developmental changes appearing in the ratings. (For example, a child could have “Sometimes” demonstrated a skill as the Program began, but then stopped demonstrating the skill by the end of the Program. While this is not a desired outcome, children sometimes do regress in their development.)

Exhibits 6 and 7 present a summary of the checklist ratings, assigned to the 1999-2000 Starting Points former participants, whose scan-forms contained both Pre- and Post-Program Assessments. Inspection of the graphs presented as Exhibit 6 reveal that in each developmental area and in the overall result, the majority of the Starting Points children were rated as “Sometimes” demonstrating a skill or behavior as the Program was just beginning. That is, during the Pre-Program Assessment, the “Sometimes” ratings ranged from 44.7% to 46.4% of the children; the overall result was 45.2%.

However, assessments made near the end of the 1999-2000 Program year indicated that the majority of the children were now rated as “Often” demonstrating a skill or behavior. By the Post-Program Assessment, “Often” ratings were assigned to 77.3% of the children for Cognitive Development, to 81.0% of the children for Overall Results, to 81.5% of the children for Socio-Emotional Development, and to 88.7% of the children for Physical Development.

1999-2000 Creative Curriculum Ratings for Starting Points Participants

Exhibit 6. Creative Curriculum Checklist Ratings for 1999-2000 Starting Points Participants
Pre-Program and Post-Program Assessments

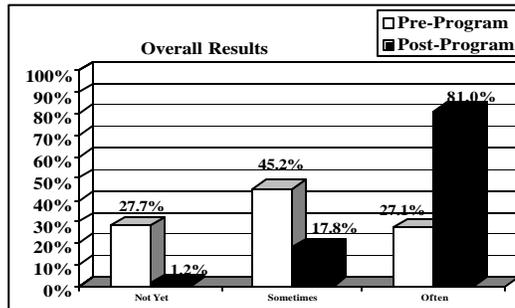
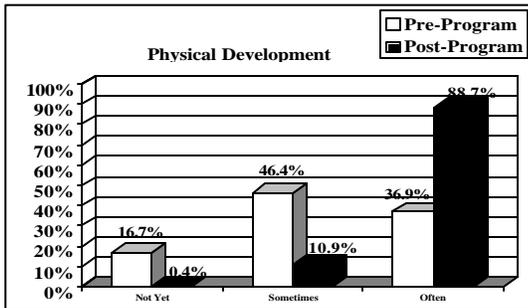
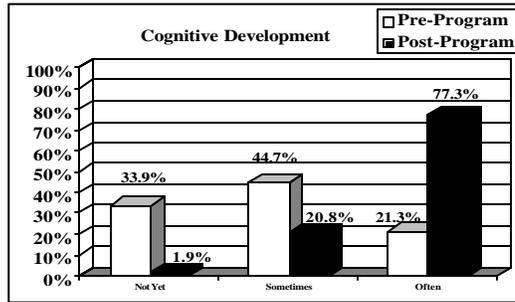
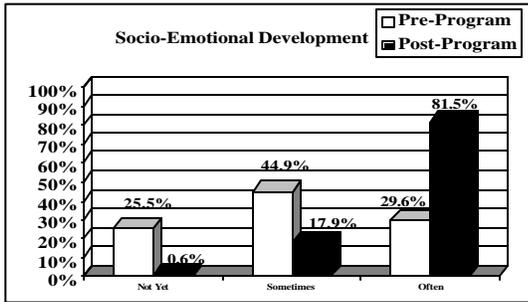


Exhibit 7: 1999-2000 Starting Points Former Participants (N = 777)
A Summary of *Creative Curriculum Checklist* Ratings

| DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS | PRE-PROGRAM | | | POST-PROGRAM | | | CHANGE | | |
|---|-------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Not Yet (1) | Sometimes (2) | Often (3) | Not Yet (1) | Sometimes (2) | Often (3) | (1-2) | (1-3) | (2-3) |
| SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT | 25.5% | 44.9% | 29.6% | 0.6% | 17.9% | 81.5% | 1.5% | 4.8% | 34.8% |
| A. Self-Esteem | 24.4% | 41.4% | 34.2% | 0.8% | 15.5% | 83.7% | 1.5% | 4.0% | 24.8% |
| B. Positive Attitude | 16.4% | 44.5% | 39.1% | 0.2% | 11.3% | 88.5% | 1.7% | 4.1% | 37.0% |
| C. Cooperative, Pro-Social Behavior | 31.5% | 47.7% | 20.8% | 0.7% | 23.5% | 75.8% | 1.5% | 6.5% | 42.6% |
| COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT | 33.9% | 44.7% | 21.3% | 1.9% | 20.8% | 77.3% | 5.0% | 8.0% | 48.1% |
| A. Learning and Problem Solving Skills | 38.3% | 43.8% | 17.9% | 2.6% | 25.9% | 71.5% | 6.1% | 7.9% | 42.3% |
| B. Logical Thinking Skills | 42.9% | 44.0% | 13.1% | 1.8% | 23.7% | 74.5% | 7.8% | 14.4% | 72.5% |
| C. Concepts and Information | 32.6% | 47.7% | 19.7% | 1.4% | 17.9% | 80.8% | 5.4% | 6.5% | 47.9% |
| D. Make-Believe Play | 18.2% | 43.5% | 38.4% | 0.2% | 11.2% | 88.6% | 5.2% | 8.2% | 41.7% |
| E. Language and Emerging Literacy Skills | 31.4% | 44.2% | 24.4% | 2.2% | 20.7% | 77.1% | 0.8% | 3.3% | 37.0% |
| PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT | 16.7% | 46.4% | 36.9% | 0.4% | 10.9% | 88.7% | 2.7% | 4.7% | 41.3% |
| A. Gross Motor Skills | 9.9% | 41.8% | 48.3% | 0.1% | 7.2% | 92.7% | 0.1% | 0.0% | 28.6% |
| B. Fine Motor Skills | 19.5% | 50.6% | 29.9% | 0.8% | 12.3% | 86.9% | 3.2% | 3.3% | 45.7% |
| C. Use of Senses | 27.6% | 51.2% | 21.2% | 0.7% | 16.1% | 83.2% | 4.9% | 10.7% | 49.5% |

Exhibit 7 presents a detailed summary of Pre- and Post-Assessments in the developmental areas, as well as information indicating the percentage of children who demonstrated sufficient developmental progress that the teacher assigned a higher rating to the children during the Post-Program Assessment. That is, children who progressed from “Not Yet” to “Sometimes,” or to “Often,” as well as those who changed from “Sometimes” to “Often” are included in Exhibit 7.

A child was not included in Exhibit 7 when (1) the child did not progress enough for a different post-rating to be assigned; (2) the child was not assessed both Pre and Post; (3) the child was rated as “Often” in both the Pre- and Post-Assessments, thus no higher rating was available to document any progress this child made; or (4) the child had a negative change in ratings, such that the behavior or skill was demonstrated as the program began, but was observed less frequently near the end of the 1999-2000 Program. Fortunately, such negative changes were not seen in many cases.

Since most children began with a “Sometimes” rating, an effective Program would be expected to help several of its participants progress to the “Often” rating. As previously mentioned, across all three developmental areas, the largest percent of the 777 children were rated as “Sometimes” during the Pre-Program Assessment, but as “Often” during the Post-Program Assessment. As shown in Exhibit 7 developmental progress of this type was found for 34.8% of the children in the Socio-Emotional Development Area, for 41.3% of the children in the Physical Development Area, and for 48.1% of the children in the Cognitive Development Area.

Across all three developmental areas, smaller percentages of the children who were rated as “Not Yet” during the Pre-Program Assessment progressed either to “Sometimes” or to “Often” during the Post-Program Assessment. That is, developmental progress from “Not Yet” to “Sometimes” was found for 1.5% of the children in the Socio-Emotional Area, for 2.7% of the children in the Physical Development Area, and for 5.0% of the children in the Cognitive Development Area. Developmental progress from “Not Yet” to “Often” was found for 4.7% of the children in the Physical Development Area, for 4.8% of the children in the Socio-Emotional Area, and for 8.0% of the children in the Cognitive Development Area.

Based on the *Creative Curriculum* checklist results, there is evidence that some former participants of the *1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program* did make progress in three developmental areas. When examining only the ratings made at the end of the Program year, the children were most developed in the Physical Development Area, followed by the Socio-Emotional Area, and then by the Cognitive Development Area. However, approximately 61.1% of the 777 children made progress in the Cognitive Developmental Area, 48.7% of the children progressed in Physical Development, and 41.1% of the children progressed in the Socio-Emotional Area.

Finally, it should be noted that the *Creative Curriculum* checklist is NOT a measure of readiness to enter Kindergarten. However, Bowman, Donovan, and Burns (2000) report that cognitive, social, emotional, and motor development all require active attention in the preschool years and all these areas are related to early learning and to later academic achievement. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that since many Starting Points former participants made developmental progress during 1999-2000, then as a group, Starting Points children should have been more developed than other at-risk children. The public school systems screen children for readiness, prior to placing students in Kindergarten. Assuming the Kindergarten-screening results were used to place the Starting Points former participants, an estimate of the children’s Kindergarten-readiness can be based on the percent of 1999-2000 children who were enrolled in a Louisiana public school Kindergarten class in school year 2000-01.

The best data source for determining progression to Kindergarten is the *Student Information System (SIS)*. As in earlier Program years, the 1999-2000 *SIS* records document children who participated in a

public school Pre-K class that was funded by Starting Points. By October of 2000, the *SIS* records contained information on children who continued to enroll in Louisiana public schools and their grade-placements. If a 1999-2000 Starting Points participant was served by a nonpublic school or if a Starting Points former participant did not enroll in a Louisiana public school in 2000-01, then such a child did not have the *SIS* records required for inclusion in this analysis of Kindergarten progression. Exhibit 8 summarizes the 2000-01 grade-placement/Kindergarten progression statistics (Program year 1999-2000 former participants) and provides a brief explanation of the findings.

Exhibit 8: 2000-01 Grade Placement and Progression

| 1999-2000 Program Year Served 1,815 Children | | Explanation |
|---|---------------|--|
| Grade Placements/ Progression by 2000-01 | | In school year 1999-2000, there were 1,815 Starting Points participants; 91.6% (or 1,663 children) were still enrolled in 2000-01. Of these enrolled children, 98.6% (or 1,639) had progressed to Kindergarten (their maximum expected grade), with an additional 0.3% (or 5 children) enrolled in grade 1, and 1.1% (or 19) received preschool/Pre-K services in 2000-01. |
| Total children enrolled | 1,663 (91.6%) | |
| In Preschool/Pre-K Program | 19 (1.1%) | |
| In Kindergarten* | 1,639 (98.6%) | |
| In Grade 1 | 5 (0.3%) | |

* These former participants were in their maximum grade expected for the 2000-01 school year.

Since the time between the end of the Starting Points Program year and the collection of the Kindergarten data was relatively short, the grade-progression findings imply that almost all of the 1999-2000 Starting Points former participants who returned to a Louisiana public school, were placed in Kindergarten by the beginning of the 2000-01 school year. Because placement in Kindergarten does not necessarily mean a child is ready for this level of schooling, the Kindergarten-progression finding is only an estimate of Kindergarten readiness. Nevertheless, the high Kindergarten-progression percent (98.6%) suggests that Starting Points services have a positive impact on the public school former participants.

Evaluation Question 3: What does follow-up data on Starting Points former participants suggest about their school success?

As plans were made for this study, the State-level Program coordinators remained interested in the grade-progression of Starting Points former participants, but they also wanted to have other follow-up findings, such as attendance information and retention rates. Due to a concern that earlier years of *SIS* records on Starting Points children may not have been completely accurate, a decision was made to report follow-up data for children served by Program years 1997-98, 1998-99, or 1999-2000. Any former participant of these three Program years, who was not enrolled in Louisiana public schools during 1999-2000 or in 2000-01, could not be included in this part of the follow-up study due to the lack of a recent *SIS* record.

Grade-Progression by 1999-2000

As the 1999-2000 children began to participate in the *Starting Points Preschool Program*, former participants of the two previous Program years were continuing to enroll in Louisiana public schools. By matching two years of *SIS* records, the 1999-2000 grade placement data were found for most former participants of the 1997-98 or 1998-99 Program years. With these data, grade progression statistics were

calculated. Exhibit 9 summarizes the 1999-2000 grade-placement/progression statistics and provides a brief explanation of the findings.

Exhibit 9: 1999-2000 Grade Placement and Progression

| 1997-98 Program Year Served 1,730 Children | | Explanation |
|---|---------------|---|
| Grade Placements/ Progression by 1999-2000 | | In school year 1997-98, there were 1,730 Starting Points participants; 93.2% (or 1,612 children) were still enrolled in 1999-2000. Of these enrolled children, 92.3% (or 1,488) had progressed to grade 1 (their maximum expected grade), with an additional 0.9% (or 14 children) enrolled in grade 2, and 6.8% (or 110) enrolled in Kindergarten. |
| Total children enrolled | 1,612 (93.2%) | |
| In Kindergarten | 110 (6.8%) | |
| In Grade 1* | 1,488 (92.3%) | |
| In Grade 2 | 14 (0.9%) | |
| 1998-99 Program Year Served 1,765 Children | | In school year 1998-99, there were 1,765 Starting Points participants; 93.7% (or 1,653 children) were still enrolled in 1999-2000. Of these enrolled children, 94.7% (or 1,565) had progressed to Kindergarten (their maximum expected grade), with an additional 3.2% (or 53 children) enrolled in grade 1, and 2.1% (or 35) received preschool/Pre-K services in 1999-2000. |
| Grade Placements/ Progression by 1999-2000 | | |
| Total children enrolled | 1,653 (93.7%) | |
| In Preschool/Pre-K Program | 35 (2.1%) | |
| In Kindergarten* | 1,565 (94.7%) | |
| In Grade 1 | 53 (3.2%) | |

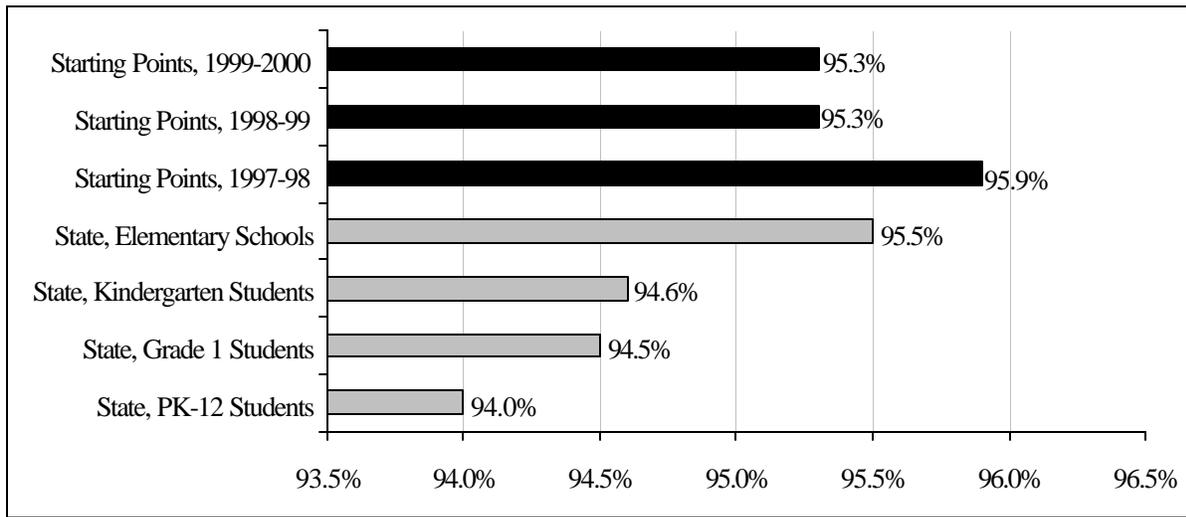
* These former participants were in their maximum grade expected for the 1999-2000 school year.

When taken together, the grade-progression findings indicate that the majority of the 1997-98 former participants (92.3%) and the majority of the 1998-99 former participants (94.7%) had progressed to their maximum grade levels expected for the 1999-2000 school year. An additional 14 children of the 1997-98 Program year and 53 children of the 1998-99 Program year were one grade ahead of their maximum expected grade level, suggesting that these children must have been allowed to skip a grade. A Pre-K Program is not intended as a replacement for Kindergarten or grade 1; thus, it is hoped that decisions to advance 67 former participants were based on each child's demonstrated abilities. The remaining Starting Points former participants, who were enrolled, either received additional preschool/Pre-K services or they were enrolled in Kindergarten.

Attendance in 1999-2000

By the time the 1999-2000 SIS records on public school students were finalized, each record included the number of days a student was absent during the 1999-2000 school year. Combining the days absent with the number of days each child was enrolled and with the number of instructional days of each school system, aggregated days of enrollment and aggregated days of absences were obtained. Using aggregated information of this type, other LDE reports have provided attendance rates for an individual school, for certain types of schools, for a school system, or for the State. In this study, attendance rates for the 1997-98, 1998-99, and 1999-2000 former participants of the *Starting Points Preschool Program* were calculated and are presented in Exhibit 10, along with other State attendance rates.

Exhibit 10: 1999-2000 Attendance Rates*



*In Exhibit 10, the gray bars present several statewide attendance rates, whereas the black bars show the attendance rates of Starting Points former participants, Program years 1997-98 through 1999-2000.

As shown in Exhibit 10, the 1997-98 Starting Points former participants had the highest attendance rate of 95.9%. The 1998-99 and 1999-2000 Starting Points former participants both had attendance rates of 95.3%; the 95.3% rate was higher than all State attendance rates, with the exception of a 95.5% State rate for all elementary public schools.

For K-8 students, the *Louisiana School Accountability Program* has set a 10-year attendance rate goal of 95% or better. As shown in Exhibit 10, the attendance rates for three cohorts of Starting Points former participants exceeded this attendance goal in school year 1999-2000. These attendance findings suggest that during and/or subsequent to their participation in the *Starting Points Preschool Program*, the former program participants attended school frequently.

Promotion/Retention by 2000-01

Because of continuing efforts to improve student achievement, the LDE has an interest in studying the retention and promotion of K-12 students. To facilitate such studies, an Education Progress code was added to the K-12 students' *SIS* records. Based on *SIS* enrollment data, the Education Progress code was designed to indicate whether a student was promoted, demoted, or retained in a particular grade as one school year ends and another begins. However, this code does not apply to students who have left the Louisiana public schools, to ungraded students, or to children who have not enrolled in any K to 12 grade-levels. In addition, the Education Progress code can be used only when a student has a valid *SIS* enrollment record for at least two consecutive school years.

Before looking at follow-up findings on Starting Points former participants, a general discussion of promotion and retention is in order. Many students are promoted to the next higher grade because they have performed adequately in school and/or satisfied academic requirements. High-performing students may even be allowed to skip a year (or more) of school when decisions are made to enroll such students in a higher grade than their same-aged peers. Hopefully, these advanced-grade placements are made for the purpose of asking high-performing students to study more challenging material. However, students who are not performing in a satisfactory manner may be failed or retained¹. The purpose of retention is to provide low-performing students with additional opportunities to master fundamental or basic skills as preparation for the next highest grade level. Obviously, the achievement of Louisiana public school students will not improve just by increasing the number of retained students.

In recent school years, LDE staff have supported the implementation of programs that are designed to increase student achievement. For example, the *K-3 Reading and Mathematics Initiatives* and related technical assistance have been of value in strengthening the skills of elementary students. Also, the *Louisiana Content Standards* were developed. Teachers received training relative to providing instruction that will help students meet the more challenging content standards. Finally, the Student Assessment Programs and standardized tests were revised to align with the *Louisiana Content Standards*. The revised tests require a higher level of performance, in order for a student to receive a satisfactory score.

In Spring 2000, the grade 4 and grade 8 English Language Arts and Mathematics tests became high stakes tests. As a result of implementing a high-stakes testing policy, grade 4 and grade 8 students, whose scores were unsatisfactory in these content areas, had an opportunity to attend summer school and then take a re-test in the Summer of 2000. After remediation, grade 4 students whose scores were still unsatisfactory were retained in grade 4 for the 2000-01 school year. Grade 8 students whose re-test scores remained unsatisfactory could be retained in grade 8, or these students could be transferred to a high school campus, where they could take remedial courses and be re-tested.

While other grade-levels do not have promotion/retention decisions that are tied directly to grade-level tests, students can be promoted or retained, based upon how successfully they perform when attempting any academic task. By the end of a school year, performance-based decisions can be made to determine whether a student will be promoted or retained in a particular grade.

For this last part of the follow-up study, the *SIS* Education Progress code (when it could be determined) was used to provide promotion data and retention rates for the 1997-98 and 1998-99 Starting Points former participants who remained in Louisiana public schools. (This code is not used for Pre-K participants.) Exhibit 11 was prepared to provide information on the number of Starting Points former participants enrolled in grades K-2 during 1999-2000 and then promoted to the next highest grade by the beginning of the 2000-01 school year.

¹ Appendix A includes a discussion of reasons why students may fail in school.

Exhibit 11: Enrollment and Promotion, Grades K Through 2¹

| Starting Points Groups | Kindergarten | | Grade 1 | | Grade 2 | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | No. Enrolled 1999-00 | No. Promoted 2000-01 | No. Enrolled 1999-00 | No. Promoted 2000-01 | No. Enrolled 1999-00 | No. Promoted 2000-01 |
| 1997-98 former participants | 110 | 98 | 1,488 | 1,247 | 14 ² | 11 |
| 1998-99 former participants | 1,565 | 1,370 | 53 ² | 34 | | |

¹ The Education Progress code could not be determined for 81 enrolled children of Program year 1997-98 and for 127 enrolled children of Program year 1998-99. These children were excluded from the promotion and retention findings determined for school year 2000-01.

² The children in these cells were one grade ahead of their maximum expected grade placement for 1999-2000; within the text, these children are referred to as advanced-grade children.

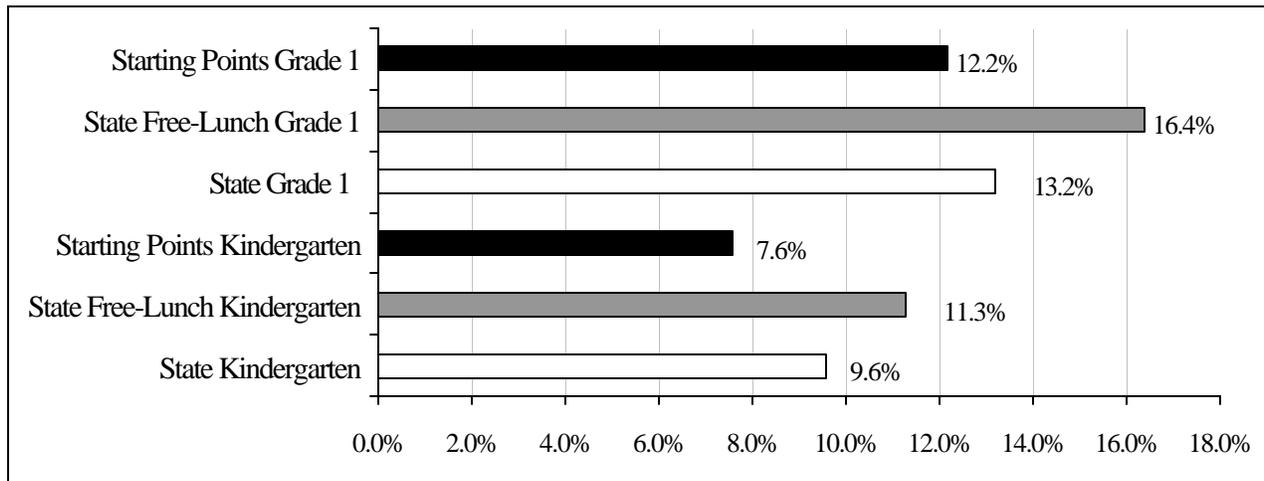
As illustrated in Exhibit 11, the Education Progress code indicated that most enrolled Starting Points former participant children were promoted to the next highest grade for the 2000-01 school year. Even the majority of the advanced-grade Starting Points children (i.e., those who were a grade ahead of their expected grade in 1999-2000) were promoted for the 2000-01 school year. However, one advanced-grade child (Program year 1997-98) and 10 advanced-grade children (Program year 1998-99) were retained for the 2000-01 school year.

In determining the retention rates of Starting Points children, calculations were limited to those 1997-98 or 1998-99 former participants who had reached their maximum expected grade level for the 1999-2000 school year. Thus, Starting Points retention rates were calculated for former participants retained in grade 1 or in Kindergarten. Among the 1997-98 children who were in grade 1 during 1999-2000, approximately 12.2% were retained in grade 1 for the 2000-01 school year. The Kindergarten-retention rate determined among the 1998-99 Starting Points former participants was 7.6%.

Retention rates for the 1998-99 and 1997-98 Starting Points former participants were compared to other statewide retention rates and are summarized in Exhibit 12. (All statewide rates were provided by Yuan in 2001.) It was of particular interest to compare the Starting Points children to Kindergarten and grade 1 students who received free lunches because most Starting Points children came from families that had an income of less than \$1,997 per month. Since family income levels were low, it was suspected that many Starting Points former participants would receive free or reduced-priced lunches as they entered the early elementary grades. Indeed, the 1999-2000 *SIS* data revealed that of former participants who were still enrolled in Louisiana public schools, 68.2% of the enrolled children (of 1997-98 Program year) and approximately 67% of the enrolled children (of 1998-99 Program year) were free-lunch recipients. An additional 12% of the enrolled 1997-98 former participants and an additional 12.9% of the enrolled 1998-99 former participants were students receiving reduced-price lunches in 1999-2000. Thus, the majority of Starting Points former participants, who were still enrolled, were “free or reduced lunch students.”

As can be seen in Exhibit 12, it was found that the Kindergarten retention rate of the Starting Points former participants (7.6%) was lower than the statewide Kindergarten-retention rate of 9.6%. In addition, the grade 1 retention rate of the Starting Points former participants (12.2%) was lower than the statewide grade 1-retention rate of 13.2%. (Yuan, 2001).

Exhibit 12: Kindergarten and Grade 1 Retention Rates*



*The white bars of Exhibit 12 present statewide retention rates of grades K and 1, while the gray bars show the statewide retention rates of free lunch students in these same grades. For Starting Points former participants, Program years 1997-98 or 1998-99, who had reached their maximum expected grade in school year 1999-2000, the black bars of Exhibit 12 provide Starting Points retention rates. Each retained student was to repeat his or her grade during school year 2000-01.

As illustrated in Exhibit 12, Starting Points retention rates were also less than the statewide Kindergarten and grade 1 retention rates of free-lunch students. That is, the Kindergarten-retention rate of the 1998-99 former participants (7.6%) and the grade 1-retention rate of the 1997-98 former participants (12.2%) were lower than the corresponding statewide retention rates for students who received free lunches (i.e., 11.3% for free-lunch Kindergarten and 16.4% for free-lunch grade 1 students).

Thus, the outcome measures examined in this study support the conclusion that the *Starting Points Preschool Program* is a quality program that is likely to have a positive impact on the majority of the at-risk children who are served. All previous longitudinal studies and this follow-up study yielded findings to strongly suggest that subsequent to the year of Program participation, the Program appears to have sustained effects. For example, a large proportion of former participants return to Louisiana public schools, the majority of the children progress to Kindergarten and then on to the regular elementary grades, and school attendance in 1999-2000 was frequent. Most former participants were successful in Kindergarten or in grade 1, such that they were not retained for 2000-01. In fact, the retention rates of former participants were found to be lower than those for the State and lower than retention rates for the public school students who received free lunches.

Using information collected relative to the 1999-2000 Program year, its participants, or through the follow-up study of former participants, several conclusions were drawn about the *Starting Points Preschool Program*. The final section of this report presents these conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS

1. By November of 1999, 1,686 eligible children were enrolled in 109 Pre-K classes that were supported by Starting Points funds. By the end of the 1999-2000 school year, *SIS* indicated that 1,815 children had been enrolled in local programs offered by Louisiana public schools. Also, the 1999-2000 Program expanded to include 53 school systems, with no increase in its annual allocation.
2. When rated on *The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R)*, 56 of the 1999-2000 local programs that were observed received average ratings ranging from a low of 3.5 to a high of 6.89. Only 10 of these program sites had average ratings below the good quality rating of 5.0, suggesting that the majority of the observed sites were implementing 1999-2000 programs of good quality.
3. Average ratings were also computed for 38 of the 43 *ECERS-R* items. Item-averages ranged from 3.9 to 6.8, with the majority of these averages being between 5.1 and 6.0. In general, the *ECERS-R* ratings imply that most program features assessed by the 38 items were of good quality; however, State-level coordinators were also able to observe practices suggesting that six features of the local programs (i.e., Indoor Space; Safety Practices; Greeting/Departing; Staff Interaction; Staff-Child Interaction; and Furniture for Routine Care, Play, and Learning, average ratings of 6.1 to 6.8) were similar to those found in programs of excellent quality. There were four *ECERS-R* items having an average item rating of less than 5.0 [Nature/Science (3.9), Music/Movement (4.3), Space for Gross Motor Play (4.8), and Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills (4.9)]. Opportunities for the Starting Points teachers to learn more about excellent practices in these areas may improve this Pre-K Program.
4. *Creative Curriculum* checklist data on 777 of the 1999-2000 Starting Points participants, indicated that in each of three developmental areas and in the overall results, the majority of the Starting Points children were rated as “Sometimes” demonstrating a skill or behavior as the Program was just beginning. That is, in the Pre-Program Assessment, the “Sometimes” ratings were as follow: 44.7% in Cognitive Development, 44.9% in Socio-Emotional Development, and 46.4% in Physical Development, with the overall result of 45.2%. However, near the end of the 1999-2000 Program year, the majority of the children were now rated as “Often” demonstrating a skill or behavior, with “Often” ratings now assigned to 77.3% of the children for Cognitive Development, to 81.0% for Overall Results, to 81.5% for Socio-Emotional Development, and to 88.7% of the children for Physical Development. Pre- and Post- assessments indicated that among the observed children, the majority did make developmental progress during the 1999-2000 Starting Points Program year. In addition, 1,663 Starting Points former participants of 1999-2000 enrolled in a Louisiana public school in 2000-01; 1,639 children (or 98.6%) were placed in Kindergarten.
5. The 1999-2000 *SIS* enrollment records also showed that 1,653 of the 1998-1999 and 1,612 of the 1997-1998 Starting Points former participants were enrolled in Louisiana public schools subsequent to their year of Program participation. It was found that more than 92% of the enrolled children of each of these two years had progressed to their maximum expected grade level for the 1999-2000 school year. An additional 67 former participants progressed to one grade higher than their maximum expected grade-level placement.
6. In school year 1999-2000, Starting Points children were found to have frequent school attendance, with the rate of attendance being 95.9% for the 1997-98 former participants, 95.3% for the 1998-99 former participants, and 95.3% for the children participating in 1999-2000.

7. For the 2000-01 school year, small proportions of Starting Points former participants were found to be retained in either Kindergarten (7.6% for 1998-99 children) or in grade 1 (12.2% for 1997-98 children). Retention rates for Starting Points former program participants were lower than the statewide rates for students receiving free lunches (Kindergarten, 11.3% and grade 1, 16.4%) and lower than the statewide retention rates of 9.6% for Kindergarten and 13.2% for grade 1. The favorable comparison to the overall statewide retention rates is additional evidence of this Pre-K program's sustained effects.
8. Finally, all evaluation studies of the *Starting Points Preschool Program* indicate that each Program year has been implemented in accord with the Federal and State guidelines. A large percentage of the teachers are fully certified to work with the four-year-old children and the local programs have served well over 1,000 children in each school year. Since these evaluations provided evidence of the Program's effects on former participants (i.e., developmental progress when served; good grade progression/promotion, frequent school attendance, and lower retention rates as sustained effects), it is recommended that Starting Points should be continued and expanded, as an annual allocation would allow for future years of a quality Pre-K program.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE AND LDE ACTIVITIES

Several staff members of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) were involved in reviewing early childhood literature, in learning about preschool/Pre-K programs of other states, and in activities pertaining to Louisiana's Pre-K programs. Unfortunately, the LDE does not have the same resources to implement programs as universally as other states, nor to conduct extremely rigorous studies of the children served. In Louisiana, there may be a need to study a large number of children in order to demonstrate that the publicly-funded Pre-K programs are effective and have long-term effects on the children. However, it appears that other researchers have studied small numbers of children, during or shortly after, their Pre-K or preschool experiences.

Early childhood, Pre-K, or preschool programs are often said to be an intervention strategy for getting children ready for school. Recent literature on getting children ready for school, now contains the notion that "No child should be left behind" and frequently discusses what young children are like today. For example, within the United States, West, Denton, and Germino-Hausken (2000) reported that students entering Kindergarten in the 1990s differed from those children who began Kindergarten in other decades. These authors felt there is an increasing diversity of the children's backgrounds, with many young children being from single-parent or from stepparent homes. West, et al (2000) said teachers must address the increasingly diverse needs of their young students and noted that today's schools are providing services that were provided by other institutions in the past.

The goal of leaving no child behind comes from a concern that many children are failing in school. There are many possible reasons why a child may fail in school. For example, Morse and Wingo (1962) discussed brain-injured children and children who have limited intellectual capacity. These authors felt that a brain-injured child would tend to have two patterns of performance; either the child would have difficulty controlling his/her impulses and thus could become a behavior problem, or he/she would be very poor at patterning experiences, symbolic and theoretical understandings. On the other hand, children with limited intelligence were described as having small vocabularies, a slow rate of learning, poor judgement, and limited conceptual ability (Morse & Wingo, 1962).

Furthermore, it is believed that all children learn and develop at different rates. If this is true, then the child who is slow to develop probably needs more time to master the content of the regular elementary education programs. Therefore, at the end of a school year, a slow-developing child may be retained. Within the schools, retained children can receive additional services designed to help them catch-up with other children, but a better approach is to prevent students from failing in the first place.

Another possible reason children may fail is that the home environment may not provide appropriate stimuli to support the development of young children, as may be the case when a child lives in poverty. A Pre-K program cannot really change a home environment, or eliminate a family's poverty, but if the program is well-organized, it can be conducive to early learning and/or social adjustment. For example, a program may improve the child's social behavior or coping mechanisms, by addressing the socio-emotional aspects of the child's functioning. The daily activities should stimulate the development of other skills which will help the child function as he/she enters the regular elementary program (e.g., communication skills, control of impulses/motor activities, learning to pay attention, following school rules, being cooperative, emergent reading skills, reasoning and/or problem-solving.)

A look at past research studies reminds readers that educators and psychologists have studied factors affecting children's ability to learn for many decades. For example, when American society included many children living in orphanages, these institutional environments were perceived as having little potential for stimulating the child's development. But as institutionalized children grew up, at least some

of them were able to attend regular schools. Apparently, the institutionalized children were not seen as performing very well in school. Perhaps, their performance even resembled that of today's poverty children, who still live with family members.

Gage and Berliner (1975) cited findings about children who lived in institutions versus those who were in a home setting. Children raised in a home setting were spoken to about five times as much as those reared in institutions. Also, infants in a home setting were found to vocalize more than infants in an institution. However, when infant vocalizations were reinforced, the institutionalized infants increased their vocalizations.

Several early studies were also conducted to determine if modifying the environment of institutionalized children had an impact on the children's IQ scores. At the time, it was possible to study children before and after they had experienced an environmental modification. For example, as cited by McConnell (1983), during the 1930s, Skeels transferred young, apparently-retarded children from an orphanage into a group home that was staffed by 30 women who were described as being "retarded." Despite the assumption that both the women and the children were retarded, the women frequently interacted with the children. It must have been very surprising when improvement was found in the children's IQ scores, following their transfer to the group home.

In a similar manner, Scarr and Weinberg (cited by McConnell, 1983) studied several hundred children who were placed in foster care homes. The IQs of the children's biological parents were low, but most of the foster parents were college educated and many held professional jobs. Children placed with these foster parents later scored well above the average IQ score.

Another way to modify a child's environment was to allow the child to attend nursery school. Gage and Berliner (1975) discussed the 1945 work of Wellman who reviewed 50 studies that compared the IQ scores of children who attended nursery schools vs. children who did not attend nursery school. In most studies, the initial IQ of the children averaged 110 points. Subsequent IQ measures revealed that nursery school participant groups gained more in average IQ scores than did the nonparticipant groups. When children had attended nursery school for two or three years, their IQ gains were even greater than those of children who only attended nursery school for one year.

Another study conducted by Heber (cited by McConnell, 1983) included 40 Black infants who lived in families with a low-income and a low educational level. Unemployment rates and population density were high in the city where these families were living. For the study, the infants were randomly assigned to experimental or control groups. Families of the experimental group infants received intensive vocational help as well as training in homemaking and childcare skills. When the experimental group children were 30 months old, they attended a special education center for 35 hours a week. Training for these children focused on the development of language and cognitive skills. Control group infants and their families did not receive any services. Repeated IQ testing demonstrated that experimental group children always scored 20 or more points above the control group children.

These studies provided evidence that it was possible to increase the IQ scores of children, thus it was thought that the provision of early intellectual stimulation would enhance the abilities of children and increase the probability of their success in school. Because there was growing concern about the intelligence and achievement of minority children and students from low-income families, in 1964, *Project Head Start* was authorized to provide Federally-funded preschool programs. Louisiana began *Head Start Programs* in 1965.

Across the nation, another set of studies researched what type of program produced the best results for the children. In Louisiana, it is thought that programs in which developmentally-appropriate

techniques were used are best practice. Gage and Berliner (1975) cited the opinions of Bereiter and Engleman who believed preschool programs that focused on language development and on skills needed for school success would give better long-term results than programs which only provided field trips, social games, or free play with educational toys.

Unfortunately detection of long-term results or sustained effects of a program requires studies that often have methodological difficulties. For example, when conducting studies on preschool children, there is difficulty in measuring the gains young children make during a program year or immediately after a program. Researchers are advised to avoid paper and pencil testing of young children as well as the inappropriate use of screening instruments as pre/post program measures. Because it is so difficult to measure the gains of young children, research on Pre-K programs was often designed as a longitudinal study that tracked children after they were no longer participating in a program. Such studies also have limitations, especially as the time between the program and the study has increased.

If possible, longitudinal studies should include a control group to see if nonparticipants also demonstrate the desired outcomes as all the children mature. For Pre-K longitudinal studies, the best control group would be individuals, who were assessed as being at risk of school failure, but they did not participate in Pre-K or preschool programs.

Furthermore, children should be randomly assigned to the control group or to the group that participates in a Pre-K program. In the *Perry Preschool Studies*, which are considered to be landmark studies, 123 disadvantaged Black youths from one school district were studied over several years. Weikart (1989) reported that at ages three and four, these children were randomly assigned to two groups. The experimental group participated in a high-quality preschool educational program for two years. The program was center-based, but the children were only at the center for 2.5 hours per day. In addition, each family was visited for 1.5 hours each week. The classroom portion of the study existed between 1962 and 1967. Children assigned to the control group received no preschool training. Weikart (1989) reports both groups were studied annually from ages three to eleven. The groups were studied again when the individuals were 14, 15, and 19 years old.

Weikart (1989) indicates that outcomes for the *Perry Preschool Program* former participants were better than those for the control group subjects. After all subjects matured, fewer former participants were classified as mentally retarded, more completed high school, and more attended college or job-training programs. More former participants were employed, more supported themselves by their own or their spouse's earnings, and there was more satisfaction with work than among the control group individuals. A smaller number of the former participants had been arrested for criminal acts and a smaller number needed public assistance, when compared with the members of the control group (Weikart, 1989). Weikart is very confident about the findings because a true experimental design was used at the beginning of these studies; attrition was not much of a problem; and the findings were consistent, regardless of the data collection procedures used.

Weikart (1989) also noted that few children participated in preschool programs at that time in history, thus teachers should not have been biased towards or against either group. However, in 1970 --just a few years after the classroom portion of the study ended-- the U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2000) reported that 37.5% of three- to five-year-olds were enrolled in Pre-K and Kindergarten programs. By 1998, the percentage of three- to five-year-olds enrolled in Pre-K or Kindergarten programs had increased to 64.5%. Although such an increase in Pre-K and Kindergarten program participation is probably helpful to children and their families, these high participation rates suggest that it will be difficult to include nonparticipant control groups when researching a particular Pre-K program. Thus, the only thing a researcher could do to achieve true random assignment of children to a participant vs. nonparticipant group would involve denying some children their opportunity to receive

Pre-K or preschool programs. That would be very unethical practice in light of all older studies, which provided sufficient evidence of program effectiveness to encourage the public funding of Pre-K/preschool programs. But when public funds are in short supply as they are today, certainly it is wise to conduct studies, which help to ensure that public funds are being invested in beneficial programs.

Researchers from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center (1999) indicated that many of today's state and local programs lack the degree of scientific control necessary for firm conclusions, whereas university-based programs generally have low numbers of participants or high attrition rates which reduce confidence in the findings. Yet, in reviewing studies, these researchers concluded that participation in preschool programs has been associated with reductions in special education program placements and lower retention rates, as well as gains or increases in academic performance. Unfortunately, in most studies, the academic gains seem to fade away three to six years after participants have entered school.

LDE studies of a state-funded Pre-K program that began in 1984-1985, provided some evidence to suggest that in Louisiana, the positive program effects were lasting longer than in other studies. The particular program investigated has changed names several times, but it is now commonly called the *Model Early Childhood Program* or the *8(g) Preschool Program*. When schools began to offer this program in the 1980s, priority was given to at-risk four-year-old children who were from low-income families. For many years, the Bureau of Evaluation conducted comprehensive studies of this program, including assessments of the classroom environment, program participation and implementation statistics, and measures of subsequent performance of former program participants. No control group children were included in these studies and it became more difficult to locate information about former participants, as they became older.

Nevertheless, the last longitudinal study of the *Model Early Childhood Program* (completed in April 1993), which included former program participants served in school years 1984-1985 through 1990-1991, provided evidence to show that 77.1% of the former program participants had progressed to their maximum expected grade level by the 1991-1992 school year. Furthermore, the students' teachers most often rated the former participants as being on-line with the class average in seven developmental areas. When comparing the performance of students on criterion-referenced tests (CRTs), the former program participants were more successful than the entire grade populations, in terms of the percentages of students who attained the performance standards in grade 3 or grade 5 mathematics and language arts during the 1991-92 school year. Regarding performance on norm-referenced tests, the percentage of former participants scoring in the lowest quarter was lower than the percentage reported for the entire grade 4 or grade 6 populations of Louisiana students who were assessed in 1991-1992. In addition, the percentages of former participants scoring in the highest quarter for grade 4 mathematics and for grade 6 mathematics, reading, language arts, and total test battery were greater than the percentages reported for the entire grade populations.

When reporting longitudinal findings on these former participants, the evaluators always acknowledged the limitations of the design, including the interval of time between the year of program participation and the follow-up study. It was certainly possible that other services, received after the Pre-K program, had helped the former participants to perform adequately on the standardized tests. In addition, the relatively small size of the former participant group in comparison to the total tested-population of an entire grade level was of some concern, but a group of at least 30 members is usually sufficient to provide a reasonably accurate measure of the group's performance.

Discussion of such research concerns, combined with the desire to inform other evaluators about the matching of student records, and the multiple dimensions examined in each annual study, often resulted in longitudinal reports that were too technical for most educators to read quickly. Sometimes, it was

necessary to break up one year's findings into as many as three separate full reports and then to write corresponding stand-alone Executive Summary Reports, which increased the time and cost of providing the annual results. The studies were also criticized for lacking comparable statistics on children who were not served by this state-funded Pre-K program.

However, when Starting Points (originally, a Federally-funded program) was initiated, the evaluators were asked to do a similar study of this new Pre-K program, along with continuing to study the state-funded program. In the first year, the evaluation design was simplified by removing dimensions from the state-funded program evaluation that were no longer revealing new information, but efforts were made to begin including at-risk children who did not receive the full-range of the program services. Finally, attempts were made to make the Phase I reports much less technical, and staff planned to continue producing separate Executive Summary Reports to achieve better distribution of the study's main findings. Regrettably, during the very first year of Starting Points, the *Model Early Childhood Program* was removed from the supervision of the State-level Program Coordinators. Evaluations of that program now became the responsibility of the 8(g) Office; longitudinal studies of the *Model Early Childhood Program* participants have ceased.

However, Barbara Abshire and Janice Ducote have conducted Starting Points evaluations that have examined longitudinal enrollment, grade-progression, and CRT/NRT performance for students who were enrolled during a given school year. In addition to Starting Points former participants (of the first five Program years), these longitudinal studies included corresponding groups of comparison children. The children of the comparison groups were identified as eligible for Starting Points, but they participated in this Program for less than five months. The fifth longitudinal study (completed in September 1999) showed that a larger percentage of the former participants (92.2%) were enrolled in Louisiana public schools during 1997-1998 than the percentage of the comparison group children (77.8%). Among the enrolled former participants, 87% had progressed to their maximum expected grade level during 1997-1998, whereas only 78.3% of the enrolled comparison group children were also on grade level.

In addition, larger percentages of the 1992-1993 and the 1993-1994 former participant groups participated in the 1998 CRTs or NRTs than the percentages of the two corresponding comparison groups. In the major subject areas, the former participants (and the tested comparison group children) generally did as well as the entire grade 3 or grade 4 populations, in terms of mean test scores. When the 1998 grade 4 NRT quartile percentages (for language, reading, mathematics, and total battery composite scores) were compared, the majority of the former participants (and the comparison children) tended to score in Quartiles 2 or 3, but the majority of the Louisiana grade 4 population tended to score in Quartiles 1 or 2. Comparisons of the grade 3 CRT attainment rates (language arts and mathematics) showed that the former participants (and comparison group children) were more successful than the entire grade 3 population tested, in terms of the percentages attaining the performance standards.

When taken together, these findings provided evidence that many at-risk children previously served by the *Starting Points Preschool Program* were succeeding in Louisiana public schools during 1997-1998. Although other factors or services may have contributed to the children's successes, the *Starting Points Preschool Program* appears to be one service that prepares at-risk children for a regular education program.

As LDE asked for additional money to implement all its publicly-funded Pre-K programs to serve a greater number of at-risk four-year-olds, demand increased for studies that demonstrated former Pre-K program participants were doing better than other children. A study that used *SIS* data to explore the relationship, between the type of Pre-K program that served the children and later scores on standardized tests, showed very few differences in scores that were received by the former participants of the different Pre-K programs.

A more elaborate study that attempted to collect data on a sample of children who had not received any Pre-K services, as well as children who had participated in private vs. publicly-funded Pre-K programs, did not lead to conclusive results. This study used reading level results as the single indicator of program effectiveness. Two problems in this study must have been that all children were now receiving more intensive reading instruction in grades K-3 than in previous school years, and it was assumed that one outcome measure (i. e., the reading test scores) would detect long-term program effects, even though the four-year-old participants of a developmentally-appropriate Pre-K program are not taught to read until later in life.

Another LDE study used the same sample of children, but multiple dependent measures, drawn from scores on the Iowa Tests. Statistical analysis did not show that former participants of any one type of Pre-K program performed better than any others. In other words, regardless of Pre-K program participation or nonparticipation, there were no significant score differences in any of the Iowa Test scores. The staff psychometrician (Mindy Crain-Dorough) suggested that score differences may be more evident if the assessments were made in Kindergarten. However, LDE does not assess Kindergarten children with the Iowa Tests.

LDE staff members also explored what other states were doing when evaluating their preschool programs. Two of the more interesting studies were of programs in Michigan and in Kentucky. The *Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP)* is for four-year-old children who are at-risk of school failure. An evaluation of the *MSRP* included several measures, as well as comparison group children. The comparison group children were not served by the *MSRP*, but they are described as being comparable to students who participated in the *MSRP*. Parker-Mathews (1999) summarized the evaluation results as follows:

The evaluation found that those students who participated in the *Michigan School Readiness Program* were significantly more advanced in their cognitive, social, and emotional development than were the comparison group. This difference was also noted when the students progressed to Kindergarten. It was also found that those students who participated in the *MSRP* were more advanced socially and academically than they would have been otherwise. Finally, results showed that the *MSRP* students exhibited behaviors more conducive to their learning in Kindergarten than similar students without a preschool experience.

Students who participated in the *Kentucky Preschool Program* have also been studied, along with a group of comparison children. In the beginning, Kentucky's program participants were rated by teachers and by parents as being more socially-skilled than the comparison group children and a few other scores were slightly higher among the preschool participants than among the comparison group children. However, as the children progressed in school, no group differences were found at Kindergarten, first, or second grade (This study was also summarized by Parker-Mathews, 1999).

Some more recently-reported studies were also reviewed. For example, the *Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study* (reported by Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustici, and Zelazo, 1999) was a two-phase study that began in 1993. In phase one, 401 day care centers in four different states were studied to document the quality of services provided and costs associated with the services. The researchers found that the majority of children receiving childcare did not have access to high quality programs.

However, phase two of the study followed a sample of children from their next-to-last year in the childcare centers through the second grade. During the four-year period of phase two, the researchers collected data about the classrooms where the children were; each child's teacher rated the teacher-child

relationship; and children were assessed individually in the areas of receptive language, letter-word recognition, mathematics skills, cognitive/attention skills, sociability, problem behaviors, and peer relations. Parent surveys provided demographic data and other child/family information. All data were analyzed in light of the quality of the childcare experience and/or the quality of the teacher-child relationship. Major findings were:

- In the preschool years and when making a transition to school, children who attended higher quality childcare centers performed better in mathematics, language, and in social skills (e.g., interactions with peers, problem behaviors) than those who attended lower quality childcare centers. Childcare program quality had stronger effects for children who were at greater risk of school failure.
- Lasting impacts of childcare were found as the children progressed through the early elementary grades. Children who had attended childcare centers with higher quality classroom practices had better cognitive development (language and mathematics skills), while those who had closer relationships with their teachers had better classroom behaviors and social skills (greater thinking/attention skills and sociability, fewer problem behaviors, and better peer relations.)
- When the children had progressed to grade 2, effects of childcare were seen in the social domain (classroom behavior and peer relationships) more than in the cognitive skills.

The *Abecedarian Study* (reported by researchers from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, 1999) is an additional longitudinal study of 57 individuals who had participated in a preschool program, as well as a control group of 54 individuals. The study began when all subjects were infants and continued until the subjects were 21 years old. Members of the preschool group had five years of a high quality program in which each child had individualized, prescribed educational activities. The activities addressed social, emotional, and cognitive development, giving particular emphasis to language.

While the preschool group and the control group were initially comparable, differences were found as the subjects matured. For example, from 18 months through age 21, the preschool group scored higher than the control group on mental tests and on achievement tests in reading and mathematics. Control group members tended to be younger (about 17.7 years) when their first child was born than subjects in the preschool group (about 19.1 years). At age 21, 40% of the preschool group versus 20% of the control group were still in school. Regarding attendance and/or graduation from a four-year college, 35% of the preschool group, but only 14% of the control group had this level of educational attainment. In addition, employment rates for the preschool group (65%) were somewhat higher than for the control group (50%). The researchers are very confident about the findings because they indicate the study was carefully controlled, with the subjects having been randomly assigned to the preschool or control group condition.

A recent article, written by Linda Jacobson (2001), discussed the research of Gilliam and Zigler, who are affiliated with the Yale University Child Study Center. Gilliam and Zigler compared studies of state-funded preschool programs in 12 states, including Louisiana. Jacobson reports that these researchers were unable to draw conclusions from the Louisiana study because it did not include a “comparison group of similar children who did not attend the program.” Gilliam received information about the Starting Points longitudinal studies and about the *8(g) Preschool Program* evaluations. Since Starting Points studies did include comparison groups, Gilliam and Zigler must have been referring to the study of *8(g) Preschool Program* participants. Jacobson (2001) indicated that Gilliam and Zigler feel that the lack of a comparison group is a “serious methodological limitation”; nevertheless, the conclusion was reached that evaluations provide the best assessment of the benefits of publicly-funded preschool programs.

Jacobson (2001) quoted Marilou Hyson, the Associate Executive Director for professional development at the NAEYC, who said she hopes “state leaders don’t lose their enthusiasm for providing

funding for programs based on preliminary studies that are not well-designed.” While a methodological limitation can reduce the certainty researchers have about their findings, it does not follow that a study with limitations is not well-designed. Even a well-designed study can become limited by such factors as (1) balancing the needs of the children against the need to research a particular aspect of a program, (2) budget and/or staff constraints, (3) the reporting of inaccurate data, (4) a program implementation or record-keeping practice, and (5) loss of research subjects through attrition.

Furthermore, a well-designed study may be too comprehensive for researchers to investigate every member of the former program participant group and control group members. The methodology of such a study may include a sampling design. The sampling design could have its own flaws or it may not be fully implemented within the actual study. It is always possible that the sampling procedures may lead to the selection of a sample that

- is convenient, available, or is made up of volunteers;
- does not represent the entire population; or
- is too small because several subjects dropped out of the study.

With any sampling problems, the sample may not be representative of the entire population. Basing decisions on findings of a nonrepresentative sample may lead to poor management of Programs and/or their funding sources. When researchers plan to study only a small portion of the former participants, great care must be taken to obtain a representative sample.

APPENDIX B
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
THE 1999-2000 STARTING POINTS PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

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| FUNDING AND PURPOSE | The Louisiana Fund (established with Tobacco Settlement money) and the U. S. Block Grant Matching Fund provided \$5,019,500 for the <i>1999-2000 Starting Points Preschool Program</i> . Funding was used to provide pre-kindergarten services to at-risk children (based on screening test results) who met two Federal and three State eligibility criteria. |
| SCHOOLS AND CLASSES | By November 1999, 53 systems, 97 public schools, and two nonpublic schools were serving children in 109 classes. Of the 109 teachers, 93.6% were fully certified in Nursery School, Kindergarten, or Early Childhood Education. The majority of the schools served Starting Points children in the previous school year; 94 of these schools had received a school performance score in 1999. |
| ELIGIBILITY AND CHILDREN SERVED | For the 1999-2000 Program, 3,317 student applications were received; 2,098 children (63.2%) were eligible. Most systems used the <i>Brigance Preschool Screen for Three- and Four-Year-Old Children</i> (54.7%) or the <i>Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning</i> (28.3%) as the screening instruments. As the school year began, 1,686 children were enrolled, with an additional 297 children on waiting lists. Family size and income data were reported on 1,650 participants; 50.2% of these children were from families with four to six people in the household. In addition, 78.1% of these Starting Points participants were from families with a monthly household income under \$1,997 and 72.5% of the children were from single-parent homes. The October 1, 1999 <i>Student Information System (SIS)</i> record count for Starting Points was 1,567 children. These <i>SIS</i> records identified the majority of children as Black (62.6%) or White (33.8%). |
| PARENT/ GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT | <p>Of the 2,105 parents/guardians of the Starting Points children, 1,823 (86.6%) were working full-time, 160 (7.6%) were enrolled full-time in a job training/education program, and 91 (4.3%) were working and in a job training/education program on a part-time basis.</p> <p>The most frequently-used techniques for involving parents were to inform parents of activities through calendars, newsletters, or other formal communication mechanisms (71.7%); to hold individual parent/teacher conferences (64.2%); to send frequent messages to parents relating to each child's activities (54.7%); and to allow parents to visit the classrooms at their convenience (39.6%). Workshops/parent meetings were held in 92.4% of the participating systems; 19 coordinators indicated these were frequently-used parent involvement activities. The percentage of parents/guardians most often cited as typically attending workshops/parent meetings was 25% to 49% (cited by 34.0% of the coordinators).</p> |
| HEALTH AND SAFETY FINDINGS | <p>In all 53 systems,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Schools serving Starting Points children have a policy concerning the administration of first-aid and/or medications. . By system policy, children who have contagious health conditions may not attend class until they are well. . The state or city fire departments inspect the schools annually. . Classroom materials, mats, and furniture are sanitized on a regular basis. . Starting Points children participate in fire/safety drills. . Well-balanced meals are provided each day. . The daily schedule includes planned, physical exercise and/or outdoor play activities. . The curriculum includes child-centered, developmentally-appropriate instruction on health, good hygiene, and safety. |

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