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The Impact of Prekindergarten Participation Upon Academic Placement

Mary Suddarth

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in Educational Administration at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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The Impact of Prekindergarten Participation
Upon Academic Placement

BY
Mary Suddarth

FIELD STUDY
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
Specialist in Education
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1996

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether participation in the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure had impact on a child’s future academic placement. Current uncertainty regarding continued ISBE or federal funding of programs makes such a longitudinal study imperative. This study examined the 1995-1996 academic placement, including additional resources required, i.e., Title 1, speech, or learning disabled services, for 40 children who participated in the 1990-1991 Hamilton-Jefferson Counties Educational Service Region cooperative prekindergarten program in Jefferson County. Results indicated that all children reached expected placement, regardless of one or two years’ prekindergarten participation. Jefferson County results were also compared to the same age groups in the annual ISBE Prekindergarten Program Summary Report. Local results compared favorably for promotion rates, as well as for children requiring self-contained special education. Larger percentages of local children required additional resources than did those same age groups in the Summary Report. A recommendation for longitudinal studies at the district-level is included.
Chapter I

Overview of the Project

Early childhood education programs for children ages three to five considered at risk of academic failure were first funded by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in 1985 under Article 2-3.71 of The School Code of Illinois. In Illinois, 352 such programs were funded in 1995. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of participation in an ISBE prekindergarten program upon a child’s future academic placement.

While such early childhood education programs for at-risk children are currently fully funded by ISBE, school districts may eventually be required to decide whether these programs are worth the cost or to assume some of that cost. Therefore, determination of the impact of participation in an ISBE prekindergarten program upon a child’s future academic placement is essential.

Statement of the Problem

The School Code of Illinois (1994) states that funds shall be distributed for the benefit of children who have been determined as a result of screening procedures to be at risk of academic failure because of their home and community environment and who may also be subject to language, cultural, economic, and like disadvantages (Article 2-3.71). Future academic success is hypothesized as strongly influenced by the character of early experiences. Children identified as being at risk of academic failure can realize greater opportunities for success through early identification and participation in developmentally
appropriate early childhood education programs. This study was designed to test that hypothesis.

For purposes of this study, the 1995-96 academic placement of children who participated in the cooperative ISBE prekindergarten program administered by the Hamilton-Jefferson Educational Service Region (ESR) in Jefferson County during the 1990-91 school year was studied. This prekindergarten program serves children who reside in one of the 12 elementary districts in Jefferson County, excluding Mt. Vernon District #80, which operates a separate prekindergarten program. During the 1990-91 school year, 40 children were enrolled in the ESR’s combination home and center-based prekindergarten program. Each child received a one and one-half hour home visit per week and also attended a center-based session one-half day per week.

Additionally, this study examined the impact of prekindergarten participation for one or two years on a child’s future academic placement. The years of prekindergarten participation for the 40 children in this study were divided into two groups: (a) 26 children who completed two years in the prekindergarten program; and (b) 14 children who completed only one year. This study compared 1995-96 academic placement for the two groups of children.

Specific Study Objectives

The judgments made in this study related to information collected annually by each at-risk prekindergarten program and reported to the ISBE via the Prekindergarten Follow-Up Report (see Appendix A). This ISBE report identifies current academic placement for former prekindergarten children and also collects information to measure performance of
children in succeeding school years. For this study, the 1995-96 recommended placement by elementary grades will be examined for 1990-91 ESR prekindergarten students to determine:

1. How many students advanced to the next regular grade?
2. How many students advanced to the next grade with supplemental services?
3. How many students advanced to the next grade with special education services?
4. How many students were placed in self-contained special education classes?
5. What impact did the number of years of participation in the prekindergarten program have on a child’s academic placement?
6. How did the results for Jefferson County students compare to results for the same age groups across Illinois as reported by the ISBE Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure Summary Report?

This study was designed to provide understanding of the impact of a child’s participation in a prekindergarten program upon his/her future academic placement.

Assumptions of the Study

In conducting this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The Jefferson County prekindergarten program is representative of the 352 other state-funded prekindergarten programs in the Illinois.
2. Participants in the Jefferson County ESR prekindergarten will be placed in the regular academic program.
3. Teachers in the ESR prekindergarten program are assumed to be equally capable of teaching young children.

4. Prekindergarten program designs are tailored to individual community needs and may differ across the state, yet program impact is typical, regardless of location and design.

5. Participation in a prekindergarten program for more than one year will have a greater impact on future academic success.

Limitations of the Study

For this study the following limitations existed:

1. This study is limited to children who participated during 1990-91 in the cooperative prekindergarten program in Jefferson County administered by the Hamilton-Jefferson ESR.

2. The ESR program serves children in Jefferson County outside Mt. Vernon District #80, which operates a separate prekindergarten program, and is, therefore, excluded from this study.

3. No attempt was made to follow up on children who had moved out of Jefferson County at the time of data collection.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions of terms are included in order to provide consistency in the interpretation of background information, methods, and findings:

At risk of academic failure. A designation applied through a screening process to children who have language, cultural, economic, and other disadvantages because of their
home and community environment. A disproportionate share of all children considered to be at risk come from low-income families, including low-income working families, families where English is not the primary language spoken in the home, or families where one or both parents are teenagers or have not completed school (ISBE, 1995).

Center-based programs. Half-day or full-day prekindergarten sessions with certified staff, usually meeting four days per week, and which are usually housed in school district facilities or in leased space (ISBE, 1995).

Certified staff. Any person employed as a prekindergarten teacher after December 31, 1989, who must hold Early Childhood Education Certification, Type 02 or Type 04; Elementary Education Certification, Type 03 with preschool or kindergarten experience; or baccalaureate degree in child development. After 1998, all teachers will be required to hold 02 or 04 certificates (ISBE, 1995).

Developmentally appropriate practice. An environment planned to recognize the age span of the children within a group so that all activities are implemented with attention to different needs, interests, and developmental levels of those individual children. Child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987).

Early childhood education/prekindergarten: Two terms used interchangeably in this study to represent any part-day or full-day regular preschool education program for children ages three to five operated by school districts.

Home-based programs. A regularly scheduled visit by a certified teacher who provides (in the home language) examples of and support for educational strategies to
parents who then use these and other educational activities with their child. A regularly scheduled weekly or bi-weekly center-based experience must be included in a home-based prekindergarten program to enable children to interact with peers and adults (ISBE, 1995).

**Parental involvement.** A plan which must be developed and implemented by every prekindergarten program to include, at a minimum, orientation to the child’s educational program; opportunities to volunteer and be otherwise involved in class activities; provision for communication with parents (in the home language) about the program; methods of linking parents with community resources/services; and activities designed to strengthen the parent’s role as the child’s primary educator. All parental involvement should be culturally appropriate and meaningful (ISBE, 1995).

**Prekindergarten Follow-up Report.** An instrument designed by the Department of Planning, Research and Evaluation of the Illinois State Board of Education. The report identifies current academic placement and also collects information to measure performance of children in succeeding school years. The report must be completed and returned to ISBE annually (ISBE, 1995).

**Screening.** Developmental assessment for the purpose of gathering specific information on each child’s mastery of skills in order to plan appropriate educational activities for that child (ISBE, 1995).
Chapter II
Rationale and Review of the Literature

Rationale

The preschool and early school years are crucial for young children and parents. The report from the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) National Early Childhood Education Task Force (1988) stated that when children experience success in responsive, high quality programs, they learn essential skills and knowledge, and their parents learn to be confident partners with teachers and administrators. However, when children lack the benefit of successful early education, they often fall behind their peers in achievement and suffer low self-esteem -- and parents may feel they lack the ability to work with professionals in support of their child’s education. (NASBE Task Force, 1988).

Katz (1994) pointed out that when early childhood programs succeed in getting children off to a good start, families, schools, and communities will be strengthened. For the most part, according to Katz, a good-quality program is one in which both children and the adults responsible for them find the quality of their lives together satisfying.

Bredekamp (1987) stated that The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes that although the quality of an early childhood program may be affected by many factors, a major determinant of program quality is the extent to which knowledge of child development is applied in program practices -- the degree to which the program is developmentally appropriate. NAEYC believes that high
quality, developmentally appropriate programs should be available to all children and their families.

On May 9, 1985, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) adopted a policy statement on early childhood education (see Appendix B). Legislation enacted in 1985 authorized the State Board of Education to administer a new grant program which enabled school districts to operate prekindergarten programs for children ages three to five years (see Appendix C). Under Article 2-3.71, The School Code of Illinois (1994) identified the eligible population to be served in this program as children who were at risk of academic failure because of their home and community environment. According to Article 2-3.71,

... funds shall be distributed for the benefit of children who, because of their home and community environment, are subject to such language, cultural, economic and like disadvantages that they have been determined, as a result of screening procedures, to be at risk of academic failure.

While these prekindergarten programs continue to be fully funded by ISBE, school districts may eventually be required to decide whether such programs are worth the cost or to assume some of that cost. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of participation in an ISBE prekindergarten program upon a child's future academic placement.
Review of the Literature

A review of research related to effective early childhood programs and to longitudinal studies into the long-term benefits of those programs was conducted in order to provide insight into current programming in Illinois, as well as nationally.

Illinois Prekindergarten Program Requirements

The Request for Proposals for Providing Screening and Educational Programs to Young Children Ages 3-5 Who Are At Risk of Academic Failure (ISBE, 1995) described the two separate but interrelated program components:

**Screening.** Funds are provided to school districts to screen 3- to 5-year-old children in their attendance area to identify those in need of prekindergarten at-risk services. Screening should be conducted on a community-wide basis and developed and implemented in cooperation with other similar programs operating in the district (e.g., special education, Head Start, Prevention Initiative, Early Intervention and Child Find).

**Education.** An appropriate education program is established for those children the screening process identified as being at risk of academic failure. An education program is developed for each child from individual assessments. This education program also includes a parent education and involvement component. In addition, programs should work in collaboration with other services and resources available in the community (p. 3).
The ISBE (1995) stated that prekindergarten at-risk programs should be designed to provide positive, nurturing experiences to help at-risk children develop physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally. Children who are identified early and participate in early childhood education programs are more likely to have future academic success. Since significant cultural, home language, and developmental differences exist among children, prekindergarten programs should be developed so that they address these individual differences.

Research indicated a disproportionate share of at-risk children come from poor families where English is not spoken as the primary language in the home or have parent(s) who either are teenagers or have not yet completed high school. Children at risk may also include children who were born prematurely or who had a low birth weight; these children may be developmentally delayed neurologically, but are not physically disabled. The procedures used to identify children who are at risk of academic failure are based on the results from individual screening and assessment and are not determined by an individual’s membership in a given group or the characteristics of his/her family (ISBE, 1995).

The ISBE indicated that although children’s potential need for prekindergarten at-risk services may be based on certain socioeconomic characteristics of their families, children’s eligibility for the program must be determined through a screening process. Screening, the first step in the assessment process, is designed to give a developmental overview. The opportunity for participation in screening should be open to all children. Once the screening has been conducted, a decision must follow: further diagnosis,
preliminary eligibility for a program, or recommendation that no special program or intervention is needed at this time.

The ISBE stated that because screening programs survey large numbers of children in a short period of time, most children pass through the screening without being identified in need of a special service or program. The screening procedure acts as a selection device in this manner. Because screening procedures are designed to review large numbers of children quickly and because a quick review is a survey picture of a child at a particular moment in time, the results of screening must be used quickly. The younger the child, the more limited the time line, which is due to the rapid nature of developmental change in young children. Rescreening is necessary if a long time delay between screening and program delivery is planned.

The ISBE indicated that results obtained from screening must be validated in one of three ways. If placement in a program for children at risk results, teacher assessment must extend the outlined screening results, and plans for educational intervention must be made accordingly. If a tentative review indicates a special education program may be needed, a diagnostic evaluation by qualified professionals must be conducted. If no intervention is planned, then parents or others must be invited to bring their child back for rescreening if a concern about the progress of development occurs.

The ISBE stated that a number of factors must be considered in choosing a screening instrument or procedure. First and foremost, a developmental screening review should be comprehensive in reviewing all aspects of development: cognitive, language, physical, and social/emotional. Activities conducted with the children should be seen as
play: concrete materials should form the basis of the activity. The procedures should reflect the cultural diversity of a particular community. That is, the procedure should reflect the use of primary language of children being reviewed. If the child's language is not English, the assessment should be conducted in the child's language. Parents should be interviewed in their language or through translators. The teacher or other evaluator should be familiar with social customs of children and families so that assessment procedures and plans can reflect those customs. Parents should be involved to provide primary information about child history and perceptions of current functioning. Often, paraprofessionals or trained parent volunteers can provide expertise in these social customs and lead teachers to enhanced comprehension of important variables in the child's life.

The ISBE recommended that, in choosing a screening system, technical qualities of reliability, validity, overreferral, and underreferral must be considered. The procedure or plan should be quick to administer to individual children so that the child's optimum attention can be given to the task and so that the procedure is efficient for the screening agency.

The ISBE pointed out that screening procedures and instruments have important limitations. These instruments cannot be used to diagnose children; they are appropriately used to select children who may be at risk of academic failure or developmental delay. In addition, these instruments cannot be used to definitively determine individual developmental profiles. Further assessment is necessary to determine eligibility for special education placement or to plan for educational intervention.
Preparing Children to Enter School: A National View

One of the few universally accepted milestones of childhood is the transition to school (Ramey & Ramey, 1994). As each child crosses the threshold into kindergarten, the child embarks on a remarkable course of learning accompanied inevitably by successes, failures, friends made and lost, and interests turned on and off. Entering school represents the child's entrance into the real world, with implications that what happens there will matter -- now and forever. After the family, the school is likely to be the most profound influence on the course of a child's life.

In addition, Ramey and Ramey stated that the relationship between the family and the school makes a significant difference in how well a child adjusts to school and how much a child benefits from school. The beginning of this relationship occurs prior to a child's entrance into the classroom and is expressed in the ways the family talks about and prepares the child for school. Optimal early learning environments serve both to promote children's development and to foster positive attitudes toward learning itself (Love et al., 1992). Children who have received only minimal preparation prior to school entry -- a situation applying to increasing numbers of kindergarteners, according to teachers at that level -- are likely to require specific prevention and compensatory strategies.

Walker et al. (1994) indicated that evidence is growing that children's family backgrounds affect how fully prepared they will be for school. For example, parents who have recently immigrated to this country may have little firsthand knowledge about their children's schools. Thus, those parents may form incomplete or incorrect impressions of what parental roles should be in their children's education in America. Similarly, parents
who had negative experiences as children in school may be unwilling to become informed about what is expected of their own children.

Duncan et al. (1994) pointed out that across all socioeconomic groups, parents face major challenges when providing optimal care and education for their children. For families in poverty, these challenges can be formidable. Sometimes, when basic necessities are lacking, parents must place top priority on housing, food, clothing, and health care. Educational toys, games, and books may appear to be luxuries, and parents may not have the time, energy, or knowledge to find innovative and less expensive ways to foster young children's development. Love et al. (1992) stressed that even in families with above average incomes, parents often lack the time and energy to invest fully in their children's preparation for school, and parents sometimes face a limited array of options for high-quality child care -- both before their children start school and during the early school years.

During the past five years, increased support for young children and their families has been emphasized on a national level with the realization of the importance of the early years (Kagan, 1994). Because of this emphasis, Kagan stated that America has become concerned with school readiness. Indeed, the first national goal for education focuses on young children: by the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn. Three attendant objectives to that goal call for education and support for parents, attention to health and prenatal care, and universal access to appropriate preschool environments. Few legislators ignore the fact that, for every dollar invested in early intervention, "x" times the amount is later saved. Kagan also notes that, in a marked departure from past
policies, the first education goal and its objectives have set the stage for a national commitment to all young children, as well underscoring the critical role of parents in the educative process.

Bowman (1994) indicated that while early childhood programs cannot serve as vaccinations against later failure, such programs have demonstrated that they can make a difference in how children develop and learn. That first national goal for education reflects the country’s appreciation of the connection between early childhood and later school achievement. However, Bowman stated that the way the goal is formulated unfortunately suggests that early school success is exclusively a function of children’s development before school. In fact, the schools children attend -- including their preschools -- also facilitate or impede learning. Failure begins early, and by the third grade educational trajectories are often fixed. According to Bowman, educators must understand the nature of the problems faced by children at risk of school failure and design educational solutions that take into account not only how children learn, but also the importance of the social context in which learning takes place.

Bowman stated that at risk is the term applied to all children whose personal or family characteristics are associated with school difficulties, and that socioeconomic markers are robust correlates of school performance. In some instances, the assaults on a child’s physical, social, intellectual, and emotional development that are the inevitable consequences of poverty result in developmental injury. Bowman pointed out that most poor and minority children, however, are not necessarily at risk for developmental failure; those children are able to exercise the full range of human talents and abilities as they
interact with their environments. The risk for these children lies in the dissonance between the schools and the economically and culturally diverse students, families, and communities they serve. A mismatch exists between what these children know and can do and what is expected of them by schools that are organized to accommodate and reinforce white, middle-class values, beliefs, and behavior. The social world of the school operates by different rules from the ones these children and their families know and use.

Bowman stated that schooling is both individual and cultural. The education of poor and minority children needs to begin, not from an assumption of deficiency, but from a recognition of cultural competence. Instruction must begin with what children already know, allow them to use their own learning styles, and then gradually shift to classroom practices that include new content and new ways of relating. Such an approach requires teachers to have a thorough knowledge of developmental sequences, subject-matter goals, and cultural styles.

Shepard (1994) reported that the United States Department of Education responded to the need for national data to document the condition of children at school entry, as well as measuring progress toward the first national goal by commissioning the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Kindergarten Cohort. Beginning in the 1998-99 school year, a representative sample of 23,000 kindergarten students will be assessed and then followed through grade five. The content of the assessments used will correspond closely to the dimensions recommended by the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup. In addition, data will be collected on each child's family, community, and school/program. According to Shepard, large-scale studies of this type service both program evaluation
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...poses (How effective are preschool services for children?) and research purposes that is the relationship between children’s kindergarten experiences and their academic access through elementary school?).

The traditional idea of school readiness has been expanded to require a planned and coordinated approach by families, educators, and the community to ensure a successful transition (Ramey & Ramey, 1994). Ramey and Ramey reported that such a coordinated approach can only be accomplished through open discussion, mutual adaptation, and respectful understanding among key adults in children’s lives.

Responsibility for readiness rests not only with children and their families, but also with all the adults, institutions, and agencies that serve them.

Early signs of successful transitions, according to Ramey and Ramey, included (a) children like school and look forward to going to school regularly; (b) children show steady growth in academic skills; (c) parents become actively involved in their child’s education at home, in schools, and in the community; (d) classroom environments are positively for both teachers and children; (e) teachers and families value each other; (f) schools celebrate the cultural diversity in their communities and in the nation as a whole; (g) developmentally appropriate practices are visible in all classrooms; the community shows consistent investment in the education of children and strives to increase the learning opportunities available.

Sameroff and McDonough (1994) emphasized the fact that understanding developmental changes in children during the ages of five to seven is especially important for educators because these are the years during which a child’s institutionalized learning
begins. Educators are aware that the social and emotional condition of the child is a major
determinant of whether schooling will be effective. Therefore, awareness of changes in
these capacities in the child is an important attribute of the successful teacher of young
children.

In the elementary school classroom increasing attention is paid to social
comparisons rather than to individual accomplishments. Regardless of the high quality of
a child's school activities, they are judged relative to the activities of other children in the
class. Sameroff and McDonough reported that how these comparisons are handled by the
teacher has consequences for the child's sense of self-worth.

Sameroff and McDonough emphasized that children do not enter kindergarten
with a clean slate. Based on their previous time spent in school-like settings, children have
many expectations about the experiences they will encounter. Just as teachers need to be
aware of the quality and range of intellectual capacities children bring to the classroom,
teachers also need to be aware of the quality and range of children's social experiences.
The child's prior experience with social interactions, social comparisons, and self-esteem
experiences in the home, in day care, and in the preschool are especially important.
General differences exist in these settings that produce problems for children who expect
the elementary school experiences to be a continuation of the preschool experience.

According to Sameroff and McDonough, social interactions in the home and in the
preschool tend to be collaborative, whereas in the elementary school pressure for
individual behavior and self-control increases. In the typical classroom situation, academic
skills are learned apart from a meaningful cultural context. The primary achievement of
this five- to seven-age period, may be the attainment of this capacity for abstraction, the capacity to learn for learning's sake.

Understanding the nature of the five-to seven-year shift is a major prerequisite if educators are to help children make a successful transition into the elementary school. The timing and quality of this shift is influenced by characteristics of the child, the home environment, the cultural context, and previous experiences with group learning. When the resulting heterogeneity of children's characteristics and capacities is met by a uniformity of teacher expectations and behavior, many children become cognitive and social casualties.

In March 1994, NAEYC published a conceptual framework for the professional development of early childhood educators that included what early childhood professionals must know and be able to do. The listed items included: (a) to demonstrate and apply in practice an understanding of child development, (b) to plan and implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum, and (c) to establish and maintain productive relationships with families. Deciding what to do and when to do it is an act of interactive creation that is based on relationships and that takes into account who the children are, who their parents are, and what the profession has endorsed as age-appropriate practices (Phillips, 1994).

Ramey and Ramey (1994) offered ways to smooth the transition process and to promote cognitive development and good attitudes toward learning:

**Encouragement of exploration.** Children need to be encouraged by caring adults to explore and to gather information about their environments.
Mentoring in basic skills. Children need to be mentored by trusted adults in basic cognitive skills, such as labeling, sorting, sequencing, comparing, and noting relationship between means and ends.

Celebration of developmental advances. Children need to have their developmental accomplishments celebrated and reinforced by others -- especially adults with whom they spend a lot of time.

Guided rehearsal and extension of new skills. Children need to have responsible adults help them rehearse and then elaborate on (extend) their newly acquired skills.

Protection from inappropriate disapproval, teasing, or punishment. Children need to be spared the negative experiences associated with adults' disapproval, teasing, or punishment for behaviors that are necessary in children's trial-and-error learning about their environments (e.g., mistakes in trying out a new skill or unintended consequences of exploration or information seeking). Such protection does not mean that constructive criticism and negative consequences cannot be used for behaviors that children have the ability to understand are socially unacceptable.

A rich and responsive language environment. Children need to have adults provide a predictable and comprehensive communication environment in which language is used to convey information, provide social rewards, and encourage learning of new materials and skills (p. 197).
Ramey and Ramey reported that environments cannot be static if they are to help promote a child's intellectual development. On the other hand, environments cannot be so chaotic or change so fast that the child fails to grasp what the changes mean. Children who are engaged in active and responsive learning and who experience a personal sense of achievement and enjoyment will be well-prepared for what good schools have to offer them.

Benefits of Early Childhood Programs

Schweinhart (1994) stated that high quality educational programs for young children living in poverty have demonstrated the promise of lasting benefits and return on investment more than other educational innovations. Various longitudinal studies, including those of Gray et al. (1982), Irvine (1982), Levenstein et al. as reported in the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) (1983), and Schweinhart (1993), found that significantly fewer program participants than nonparticipants were ever placed in special education classes. Gotts (1989) and Irvine (1982) reported significantly fewer program participants than nonparticipants were ever retained in grade.

Each program examined in the longitudinal studies reported by Schweinhart (1994) served young children living in poverty who were at risk of school failure. Schweinhart reported that all children entered the programs at some point before age five and remained for at least one year. Programs studied included either classes for children or home visits to parents and children or both. Some programs studied followed participants only a few years, while other studies lasted into adulthood.
Schweinhart reported that all studies collecting data on intellectual performance found that participants had significantly better intellectual performance than nonparticipants during program attendance and for a year or two afterward. A comprehensive analysis identifying 50 Head Start studies (McKey et al., 1985) found evidence of immediate gains in children's intellectual and socioemotional performance and health which lasted several years. Schweinhart reported that clear evidence of gradual decline in positive program effects is available only for gains in test scores of intellectual performance, and not for other positive effects.

High school graduation rates are significantly higher among participants than nonparticipants (Fuerst & Fuerst, 1993; Gotts, 1989; Schweinhart et al., 1993). One study reporting data for adults found that program participants had significantly higher monthly earnings, higher rates of home ownership and fewer lifetime arrests than nonparticipants (Schweinhart et al., 1993).

The 1993 Schweinhart et al. study also involved a systematic analysis of the costs and benefits of the High/Scope preschool program and its effects, expressed in constant 1992 dollars discounted annually at 3%. The study reported that the program returned to taxpayers $88,433 per program participant in the following ways (a) savings in schooling, due primarily to reduced need for special education services, and in spite of increased college costs for program participants; (b) higher taxes paid by participants because of higher earnings; (c) savings in welfare assistance; and (d) savings to the criminal justice system and to potential crime victims.
Schweinhart et al. (1993) found that for the participants attending the program for two years, the average program cost per participant was $12,356. The study concluded that cost provided taxpayers a return on each invested dollar of $7.16.

Schweinhart (1994) stated that only high-quality preschool programs produce significant long term benefits by empowering young children, parents, and teachers. Young children are empowered through encouragement to initiate learning activities on their own rather than acting as passive recipients of information from others. Such active learning encourages children to solve their everyday intellectual, social, and physical problems, and to assume a measure of control over their own environment.

High-quality programs empower parents by engaging them as partners with teachers to support their children’s development, Schweinhart stated. Programs achieved long-term benefits through weekly home visits and other parent involvement which strengthened parents’ ability to view their children as able, active learners. High-quality programs encourage parents to become partners to provide a gradual and supportive transition from home to school for young children (NASBE Task Force, 1988).

Such programs empower teachers through provision of inservice curriculum training and supportive curriculum supervision to help teachers engage in practices which support children and parents (Schweinhart, 1994). Such training is most successful in promoting quality when agencies and schools have supportive administration and trained curriculum specialists who provide teachers with hands-on workshops, observation and feedback, and follow-up sessions (Epstein, 1993).
The FY94 Summary Report of the Illinois Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure (ISBE, 1995) related that a total of 169,712 children had been served by the program since its inception in 1986. The Summary Report followed up on a random sample of 20% of children in each grade from kindergarten through sixth who had participated prior to 1994 in the prekindergarten program to determine program success. Promotion rate was one variable used to determine program success. For FY94, the ISBE reported 97% of the random sample of previous prekindergarten participants were promoted to the next regular grade. The percentage of children advancing to the next grade decreased from 80% in kindergarten to first through fifth grades (77-73%) but increased to 80% in sixth grade. The percentage of children in the random sample being promoted with supplemental services followed a similar pattern. Retention rates for the random sample ranged from 3.6% in the first grade to 1.6% in the sixth grade.

Specifically, for children at the same grade levels reported for this study, the ISBE FY 94 Summary Report showed the state average as 76.0% for second graders advancing to the next regular grade and 76.8% for third graders. Those children advancing to second grade with supplemental services averaged 12.6%, with 12.1% for those advancing to third grade. Children advancing to second grade with special education services averaged 5.4%, and children advancing to third grade with those services averaged 6.3%. Children retained at the second grade level averaged 1.5% at the state level, while children retained in the third grade averaged 1.6%.

The NASBE Task Force (1988) emphasized that good early childhood education involves much more than a school readiness program for young children. Public schools
will receive the vast majority of "graduates" from every form of early childhood program. While high-quality program experiences pave the way for children to succeed in school and in life, children from poor quality preschool settings begin school at a disadvantage and pose additional challenges for schools. High quality early childhood education reflects a comprehensive vision of support for child development, encompassing teaching practice, relationships with parents and connections with other community agencies and institutions.
Chapter III
Field Study Procedures

General Design of the Study

This study investigated the impact of participation in a prekindergarten program upon a child’s future academic placement. The 1995-96 placement of children who participated in the cooperative program administered by the Hamilton-Jefferson Education Service Region (ESR) in Jefferson County during the 1990-91 school year was studied. The population for this study consisted of 40 children who were enrolled during the 1990-91 school year in the ESR’s combination home and center-based program, in which each child received a one and one-half hour home visit per week and also attended a center-based session one-half day per week. Data were collected in May 1995 to satisfy Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) program evaluation requirements. From this data collection, the impact of prekindergarten participation upon a child’s future academic placement was investigated. In addition, the number of years each child was enrolled in prekindergarten was considered.

In the spring of each year, each state-funded prekindergarten program must complete and submit to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) three data collection instruments: (a) the Prekindergarten Program Record, which collects information concerning program characteristics; (b) the Prekindergarten Student Record, which collects information concerning characteristics of students served, their status and performance; and (c) the Prekindergarten Follow-up Report, which collects information to identify current academic placement and other information to measure performance of a
random sample of children in succeeding school years. The data generated from these three reports are summarized and analyzed by the ISBE to produce the annual evaluation report required by The School Code of Illinois (Article 2-3.71[6b]).

The researcher was granted access to data collected in Jefferson County for all preceding prekindergartners by the prekindergarten staff of the Hamilton-Jefferson ESR during spring 1995. For this study, the 1995-96 recommended placement by elementary grades was examined for the 40 targeted 1990-91 prekindergarten students to determine:

1. the number of students advanced to the next regular grade.
2. the number of students advanced to the next grade with supplemental services.
3. the number of students advanced to the next grade with special education services.
4. the number of students placed in self-contained special education classes.
5. if the number of years of participation in the prekindergarten program had an impact on a child’s academic placement.
6. a comparison between the results for Jefferson County students and the results for the same age groups across Illinois as reported by the ISBE Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk Summary Report.

Sample and Population

Data for this study were limited to the 40 students who had participated in the ESR prekindergarten program during the 1990-91 school year. Children were divided
into two groups, depending upon whether they had participated in prekindergarten for one
or two years. Of the 40 children, 26 participated for two years, while 14 were enrolled
only one year prior to entry into kindergarten. Those 14 children entered kindergarten in
1991-92, making expected regular 1995 academic placement for that one-year group
fourth grade. The 26 children in the two-year group were subdivided according to
whether 1990-91 represented the first or second year of their prekindergarten experience.
For 11 of the 26 students, 1990-91 was the second year of program participation; the
following year, those 11 children were enrolled in kindergarten. Therefore, for this study,
1995 regular academic placement for those children was expected to be fourth grade.
Fifteen children in the two-year group remained for their second prekindergarten year in
1991-92; therefore, expected academic placement for that group in 1995-96 was third
grade. Data for the two groups were examined to measure the impact of one or two years
of prekindergarten participation.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data were obtained for the ISBE Follow-up Report in Jefferson County by the
prekindergarten staff which sent a letter (see Appendix D) and survey forms to every
teacher of kindergarten through fourth grade in each of the 12 elementary districts in
Jefferson County. The survey (see Appendix E) contained the former prekindergarten
children's names for each individual current teacher. The teacher was asked to rate each
student's progress in reading, math, language, and behavior during the 1994-95 school
year. The survey also requested information including days in attendance, current lunch
status, and the next year's recommended placement for each former prekindergarten
student. Letters and survey forms were delivered and returned to the prekindergarten staff via the ESR county-wide delivery system, Project Uplift.

Explanatory letters and survey forms were distributed April 25, 1995, with a requested return date of May 12, 1995. Any teacher not returning the form by that date was contacted by telephone and asked to return the form or to give the information by telephone. All survey forms were completed by May 30, 1995.

This study examined that part of the data collected by the Jefferson County prekindergarten program related to academic placement for 1995-96 and the number of years of prekindergarten participation. Percentages for each placement category were determined, and years of program participation were also studied as a means of establishing whether that issue contributed to a child’s academic placement.

Data Analysis

The ISBE Annual Summary Report (1994) of the Illinois Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure, required by The School Code of Illinois (Article 2-3.71), provided the framework for comparison with Jefferson County prekindergarten follow-up data. For the longitudinal portion of the ISBE Summary, a random sample of 20 % of the Illinois children who have participated in prekindergarten were selected from each current grade level. For this study all participants from 1990-91 in Jefferson County were investigated.

One or two years of prekindergarten participation were used to divide Jefferson County students into two groups. The 1990-91 sample year as first or second year of prekindergarten participation further subdivided the two-year group. Promotion and
retention rates for each group were determined first. For the students advancing to the next grade, the type of advancement was established for each group: (a) no additional services of any kind; (b) supplemental services, e.g., Title One reading services; (c) special education services, e.g., speech services; and (d) self-contained special education placement. Each of those rates was then compared with the corresponding rate for the random sample ISBE Prekindergarten Follow-up Report. Comparison of those rates among the Jefferson County students having one or two years of prekindergarten was made in an effort to determine whether that issue made a difference in academic placement.
Chapter IV

Results

Issues Addressed

The results described in this study were collected in Jefferson County by Hamilton-Jefferson Educational Service Region (ESR) staff to satisfy Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) requirements for evaluation of the state-funded Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure. These results provided individual local school districts with information related to the impact of prekindergarten participation upon a child’s future academic placement, as well as whether more than one year of such participation affected placement. Specifically, the results addressed these issues:

1. How many students advanced to the next regular grade?
2. How many students advanced to the next grade with supplemental services?
3. How many students advanced to the next grade with special education services?
4. How many students were placed in self-contained special education classes?
5. What impact did the number of years of prekindergarten participation have on a child’s academic placement?
6. How did the results for Jefferson County students compare to results for the same age groups across Illinois as reported by the ISBE Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure Summary Report?
Sample/Population Divisions

Data for this study were limited to the 40 students who had participated in the ESR prekindergarten program during the 1990-91 school year. Those children were divided into two groups, based upon one or two years of prekindergarten participation. The two-year group was further subdivided by the year of kindergarten entry: 1991-92 or 1992-93, creating a total of three groups. The one-year group contained 13 children whose expected placement was fourth grade in 1995-96. The 1991-92 two-year group contained 12 children for whom 1995-96 expected placement was also fourth grade. The 1992-93 two-year group consisted of 15 children who were expected to be in third grade in 1995-96. Two children had moved, one from the one-year group and one from the 1992-93 two-year group, bringing totals for those groups to 12 and 14, respectively. Results for this study were based on the remaining 38 former 1991-92 prekindergarten students in Jefferson County.

Promotion/Retention Rate

The promotion rate among the remaining 38 children in the follow-up study proved to be 100%. Promotion rates for the two groups of children expected to be promoted to fourth grade in 1995-96 are shown in Table 1. Thirteen children who entered kindergarten after one year of prekindergarten participation were expected to advance to fourth grade in 1995-96. Of those original 13 children, one child had moved; therefore, results for that group were based upon the remaining 12 children. The 12 children (100%) in the one-year group advanced; none were retained. All 12 children (100%) who
completed the second year of prekindergarten participation in 1990-91 and who were also
expected to advance to fourth grade in 1995-96 did advance to fourth grade.

Table 1

Students Reaching Expected Fourth Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enrolled in Pre-K One Year</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
<th>Enrolled in Pre-K Two Years</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced to Expected Grade Level</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Advance to EGL</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promotion rates for the children expected to be promoted to third grade in 1995-96
are shown in Table 2. Among the 15 children who entered kindergarten in 1992-93
following two years of prekindergarten participation and who were expected to advance
to third grade in 1995-96, one child had also moved. Fourteen of the remaining 14
children (100%) in that group reached expected placement.

Table 2

Students Reaching Expected Third Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enrolled in Pre-K Two Years</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced to Expected Grade Level</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Advance to Expected Grade Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Group</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Promotion With Additional Services

The numbers of children advancing to expected placement in fourth grade with additional services are shown in Table 3. Among the 12 children who had one year of prekindergarten participation and advanced to fourth grade in 1995-96, eight children (67%) achieved regular placement with no additional services. One child (8%) required supplemental resources, i.e., Title 1; and two children (17%) required special education services, i.e., speech services or learning disabled (LD) resource room. One child (8%) was referred for self-contained special education placement. No children were retained; however, one child in that original group was no longer living in Jefferson County.

Table 3

Students Advancing to 4th Grade With or Without Additional Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enrolled in Pre-K One Year</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
<th>Enrolled in Pre-K Two Years</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Without Additional Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Supplemental Resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Special Education Resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Self-contained Special Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Group</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the 12 children who completed two years of prekindergarten and advanced to expected placement in fourth grade in 1995-96, nine children (75%) advanced to regular placement with no additional services. One child (9%) required supplemental resources, and one child (9%) required special education services. One child (9%) in that group was
referred for self-contained special education placement. There were no children retained in that group.

Numbers of children promoted to expected placement in third grade are shown in Table 4. Among the 14 children with two years of prekindergarten participation who advanced to expected placement in third grade in 1995-96, eight children (57%) achieved regular placement with no additional services. Three children (21%) required supplemental resources, and three children (21%) required special education services. No children in that group were retained or referred for self-contained special education placement. One child in that group could not be located because the family had moved.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Advancing to 3rd Grade With or Without Additional Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in Pre-K Two Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Additional Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Supplemental Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Special Education Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Self-contained Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 illustrates in concise form a comparison of results for Hamilton-Jefferson ESR children who participated in the prekindergarten program for one year and for those who participated two years, regardless of expected grade level. These results were previously itemized in discussions of promotion/retention and in each area of additional service requirements.
Table 5

Comparison of Results for Years Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One Year Participation</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
<th>Two Years Participation</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced to Expect Grade Level</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Advance to EGL</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Additional Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Supplemental Resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Special Education Resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Self-contained Special Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Group</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of Jefferson County Results With the ISBE Summary Report

In order to compare results from Jefferson County with the Illinois Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure FY 94 Summary Report (ISBE 1995), results for children advancing to expected placement in fourth grade in 1995-96 in Jefferson County were combined, regardless of the number of years each child participated in prekindergarten. No distinction was made for that issue in the Summary Report. Comparison results for that fourth grade group are shown in Table 6. Summary results revealed that 97% of the children randomly sampled were promoted to fourth grade as expected while 100% of Jefferson County former prekindergarteners were promoted. Comparison of the Summary Report results for former prekindergarten children advancing to regular fourth grade placement with no additional services showed that 73% of the random sample, compared to 71% of Jefferson County children accomplished that placement. Among the Summary sample, 16% required supplemental
resources, while .08% of Jefferson County children required the same resources. Those
requiring special education services were 8% of the sample and .12% in Jefferson County.
Self-contained special education placement was required for 0.8% among the random
sample, and among Jefferson County children, .08% were in self-contained special
education placement.

Table 6

Comparison for ISBE Summary and Local 4th Graders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent State</th>
<th>Percent Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced to Expected Grade Level</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Advance to EGL</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Additional Services</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Supplemental Resources</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Special Education Resources</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Self-contained Special Education</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Group</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison rates for children expected to advance to the third grade level in
Jefferson County and those sampled for the ISBE Summary are shown in Table 7.
Comparison of promotion/retention rates for children expected to advance to third grade
showed that 98% of the children sampled at the state level were promoted, and that 100%
of Jefferson County children were promoted. Among the former prekindergarten
participants randomly sampled for the Summary, 77% advanced to regular third grade
placement with no additional services, while 57% of Jefferson County children advanced.
Those children advancing with supplemental resources were 12% of the random sample
and 21% of children in Jefferson County. Advancing with special education services were 6% of the children in the random sample and 21% of Jefferson County children. While 2% of third graders in the sample were referred for self-contained special education placement, no third graders in the study in Jefferson County were referred.

Table 7

Comparison for ISBE Summary and Local 3rd Graders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent State</th>
<th>Percent Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced to Expected Grade Level</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Advance to EGL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Additional Services</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Supplemental Resources</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Special Education Resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Self-contained Special Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Group</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ISBE Summary Report collected data for a 20% random sample of the total former prekindergarten participants at each grade level across the state. For this study, the total population of former prekindergarteners served by the Hamilton-Jefferson Educational Service Region program at each grade level in Jefferson County was investigated.
Chapter V
Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

Investigation into the impact of participation in the Illinois Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure upon a child’s future academic placement was the focus of this study. Data for this study were limited to 40 children who had participated in the Hamilton-Jefferson Educational Service Region (ESR) cooperative combination home and center-based prekindergarten program during the 1990-1991 school year. In that program each child received a one and one-half hour home visit per week and also attended one center-based session for one-half day each week. For this study, the 1995-1996 academic placement for those 40 children was investigated, as well as the number of years each child was enrolled in prekindergarten. The researcher was given access to data collected in May 1995 in Jefferson County by ESR prekindergarten staff to satisfy Illinois State Board of Education annual program evaluation requirements. This study investigated that part of the data related to academic placement to determine:

1. How many students advanced to the next regular grade?
2. How many students advanced to the next grade with supplemental services?
3. How many students advanced to the next grade with special education services?
4. How many students were placed in self-contained special education classes?
5. What impact did the number of years of prekindergarten participation have on a child’s academic placement?
6. How did the results for Jefferson County students compare to results for the same age groups across Illinois as reported by the ISBE Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure Summary Report.

Data were collected on former prekindergarten students in Jefferson County via the ISBE 1994-95 Follow-up Report. The ISBE Summary Report provided data from other former prekindergarten students for comparison with Jefferson County data.

Findings

The findings that follow represent information related to 1995-96 academic placement of former prekindergarten children collected from the current teachers of those children in Jefferson County in the spring of 1995. These findings also represent a comparison of those data with the annual ISBE Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure Summary Report. Because the Summary Report is compiled from a random sample of former prekindergarteners across the state at each grade level, it is possible that some Jefferson County children were part of that compilation.

1. All children who were expected to advance to fourth grade placement did so, regardless of whether their prekindergarten participation had been for one (50%) or two (50%) years. All the children in the group expected to advance to third grade also advanced. That group of children had participated in prekindergarten for two years. The area of promotion/retention was the most successful among the issues examined regarding expected placement for the former prekindergarteners since 100% of them were promoted.
2. Two fourth grade children advanced with the recommendation for supplemental resources, i.e., Title 1 services. One (8%) child had participated in prekindergarten for one year and the other child for two years (8%). Three third graders (21%) were recommended to advance with supplemental resources. Among the total group, 13% of the children advanced with supplemental resources.

3. Similar findings emerged among those advancing to fourth grade with the recommendation for special education services, i.e., speech services or learning disabled (LD) resources. One child (8%) who was a one-year participant and one (8%) two-year participant required those services. There were three children (21%) advancing to third grade with the special education services recommendation. Five (13%) of the total group advanced with special education services.

4. Two children (17%) who were one-year participants in prekindergarten advanced to fourth grade with referrals for self-contained special education, while one (8%) two-year participant was referred. There were no children advancing to third grade with self-contained special education referrals. Among the total group, three children (.07%) advanced with referral for self-contained special education.

5. The number of years a child participated in prekindergarten had the most significant impact in the area of placement in self-contained special education classrooms. For the total group, one child (.02%) who had participated in prekindergarten for two years advanced to expected grade placement with a referral for self-contained special education. Two children (.05%) who were in the one-year group advanced with similar referrals.
6. Comparison of the Jefferson County results with those for the same groups reported across the state in the ISBE Summary Report revealed that 100% of Jefferson County students were promoted at both fourth and third grade levels. The Summary Report showed that 97% of students were promoted to fourth grade, while 98% of students were promoted to third grade.

Jefferson County results compare favorably for each placement category at the fourth grade level. The Summary showed that 2% more students advanced requiring additional services than did Jefferson County students. Those Jefferson County children requiring supplemental resources, i.e., Title 1, at fourth grade level comprised .08%, while the Summary reported 16%. Special education services, i.e., speech or LD resources, were required by 8% among those students sampled for the Summary, with .12% reported for Jefferson County fourth graders. The Summary reported that .8% of the sample were referred for self-contained special education while that placement was recommended for .08% of former prekindergarteners in Jefferson County.

Findings for those children advancing to third grade in Jefferson County were less favorable when compared to the same group for the ISBE Summary Report than were those for fourth grade. The Summary showed that 77% of children sampled advanced to third grade with no additional services; in Jefferson County, 57% of the students required no additional services. For Jefferson County children, the percentages were the same in two areas; 21% of those advancing to third grade required supplemental resources and 21% required special education services. The Summary reported 12% and 6%, respectively, for the sample children in those areas. Results were most favorable for
Jefferson County students when the comparison was made regarding referrals for self-contained special education placement at the third grade level. The Summary reported 2% of the sample group were so referred, while no Jefferson County children required that placement.

Conclusions

Several conclusions may be drawn from this study. Prekindergarten participation does positively impact a child's future academic placement. All of the children who had participated in the 1990-91 Hamilton-Jefferson Educational Service Region (ESR) prekindergarten program achieved expected placement for the 1995-96 school year.

Jefferson County percentages for children requiring additional services at the expected grade level did not compare favorably with the ISBE Summary Report for each area of those additional services. However, it is important to note that in comparing percentages for a group of 14 third graders with those of a group of 1,786 third graders, for example, one or two children requiring supplemental or special education services may skew results. The significant issue for this study is that the entire group of former prekindergarten children was working at expected grade levels even though additional support services were required for some of the students.

Comparisons for local students at the fourth grade level with the ISBE Summary were more favorable than were comparisons for third graders, which does not typify the expected trend at the state level. Impact of prekindergarten participation has a tendency to fade as children progress through grades. Perhaps more typical of that tendency, three
fourth grade children were found to require self-contained special education placement while no children at third grade level required such placement.

This study assumed that participation in a prekindergarten program for more than one year would have a greater impact on future academic success. However, this assumption was not found to be accurate for the area of achieving grade level with supplemental resources, i.e., Title 1 services; nor for the area of special education services, i.e., speech or LD resources. In each of those areas, four of the 26 children participating two years, or 17%, had advanced with recommendations for those services. However, only one child (.03%) among those who participated two years was in self-contained special education placement. Two children (17%) among the 12 one-year participants were referred for that placement. Establishing definitely whether years of participation did, indeed, have an impact on academic placement is unclear from the data; however, the data do suggest that more than one year of participation may have impact.

Recommendations

These recommendations are made based upon this study and on the basis of current research into the elements which constitute effective early childhood education programming. If the first national goal that all children in America will start school ready to learn by the year 2000 is to be met, effective programs for those most at risk of meeting that goal must be made available.

1. Local districts should use the ISBE Prekindergarten Follow-up Report as the impetus for establishing a data base and acquiring longitudinal data measuring the performance of every former prekindergarten student from that district, rather than only
for the random sampling required by the ISBE. Such data could then be useful in
determining appropriate support mechanisms to delay/prevent fading effects of
prekindergarten and other preschool participation frequently noted. This data also would
provide the local district with the information upon which to base decision-making in the
event that ISBE funding for at-risk prekindergarten should be reduced or should cease.

2. As part of a long-range school improvement plan, each district should
collaborate with the area special education district’s annual Child Find preschool screening
process and circulate a needs assessment to establish the numbers in need of at-risk
prekindergarten. Districts then having no prekindergarten program should develop a plan
and respond to the ISBE request for proposals (RFP) for prekindergarten at-risk funds.
Small neighboring districts may form a cooperative and serve the at-risk population of two
or more districts in one classroom. In districts where classroom space is not available, the
program could be home-based, a better option than not providing a program. Districts
may also subcontract at-risk prekindergarten as long as program specifications are
followed.

3. Results cited for this study may not adequately prove the impact of
prekindergarten participation upon future academic placement because of the model
chosen for service delivery of the ESR program, i.e., one home visit and one-half
classroom day per week. More definitive results might be obtained by studying a
classroom-based program meeting four days per week, with the fifth day reserved for
home visits and parent activities, as approximately 95% of the state-funded
prekindergarten programs currently meet. The ISBE Summary Report does not identify
service delivery models within the data collection. A recommendation to compare academic success rates of former prekindergarteners from various program designs in a similar study is suggested.

4. Research indicates that significant long term benefits will be shown from high-quality programming for young children at risk. Therefore, every effort should be made to ensure that prekindergarten programs provide positive, nurturing experiences addressing individual needs of at-risk children to help them to develop physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally. High-quality programs will empower not only young children, but also their parents and their teachers. Such empowerment can occur for children through child-initiated activities made relevant to their lives, which encourage active learning. Parents are empowered when they are encouraged and supported by teachers to become partners in their children's development through viewing their children as able, active learners. Teachers are empowered with supportive curriculum supervision and inservice opportunities, as well as through administration which recognizes the importance of a strong parental involvement initiative beginning with prekindergarten and building throughout the remaining grades to graduation.
References


Illinois Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure FY93


Request for proposals for providing screening and educational programs to children ages 3-5 who are at risk of academic failure (1995). Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

1995-96 ISBE Prekindergarten Follow-up Report
### 1996-97 Followup Report
For the Children Who Were in Prek-At Risk Program

**Illinois State Board of Education**
Planning, Research and Evaluation
100 North First Street
Springfield, IL 62777

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**Appendix A**

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APPENDIX B

State Board of Education Policy Statement on

Early Childhood Education
Appendix B

State Board of Education Policy Statement on Early Childhood Education
Adopted May 9, 1985
Springfield, Illinois

Early childhood education, for the purposes of this policy, constitutes those educational programs, practices, and services which have as a primary focus the developmental needs of children prior to the time they enter first grade. It will be the policy of the Illinois State Board of Education to seek such support as is necessary to encourage the development of early childhood education programs based on the following considerations:

A) Positive, nurturing experiences in the early years of life are essential in helping children develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally, and future academic success in school is strongly influenced by the character of early experiences.

B) Children identified as being at risk of academic failure can dramatically improve their chances for success through participation in early childhood education programs.

C) Significant developmental differences exist among children, and particular attention should be given to such individual differences in the development of early education programs and services.

D) Meeting the education, health, welfare, and safety needs of young children requires collaboration among various child care providers.

E) The quality of instructional staff and leadership are especially critical elements in effective early childhood education programs.

Concurrent with Board action, the agency will:

A) Design a comprehensive public awareness program to inform Illinois policymakers, citizens, parents, and educational personnel of the importance of early childhood education, and of the importance of parental involvement in such programs;

B) Identify exemplary prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, widely disseminate findings and coordinate the training necessary to the wide adoption of such programs;

C) Initiate and support efforts to improve the preservice and inservice training of early childhood education teachers, elementary teachers, and principals; and

D) Engage in future study of the issue of parent education in Illinois schools, identify the range and character of needs, explore alternatives, and offer appropriate recommendations to the State Board of Education.
APPENDIX C

The School Code of Illinois, Sec. 2-3.71
Appendix C

The School Code of Illinois

Sec. 2-3.71 Grants for preschool educational programs. (a) The State Board of Education shall implement and administer a grant program consisting of grants to public school districts to conduct preschool educational programs for children ages 3 to 5 which include a parent education component. A public school district which receives grants under this Section may subcontract with a private school, not-for-profit corporation or other governmental agency to conduct a preschool educational program. Except as otherwise provided in paragraphs (2) and (3) of this subsection (a), all teachers of such programs shall either (i) hold early childhood teaching certificates issued under Article 21, or Section 34-03 of this code, or (ii) hold elementary certificates issued under Article 21 with kindergarten or preschool experience, or (iii) hold baccalaureate degrees in child development, or (iv) shall meet the requirements for supervising a day care center under the Child Care Act of 1969, as amended.

(2) After the effective date of this Amending Act of 1989, any persons newly hired to teach in the program authorized pursuant to this Section shall hold the certification required pursuant to subparagraphs (i), (ii) or (iii) of paragraph (1) of this subsection.

(3) After July 1, 1998, any teacher in the program authorized by this Section shall hold an early childhood teaching certificate.

(b) The State Board of Education shall provide the primary source of funding through appropriations for this program. Such funds shall be distributed for the benefit of children who because of their home and community environment are subject to such language, cultural, economic and like disadvantages that they have been determined as a result of screening procedures to be at risk of academic failure. Such screening procedures shall be based on criteria established by the State Board of Education.

(c) The State Board of Education shall develop and provide evaluation tools, including tests, that school districts may use to evaluate children for school readiness prior to age 5. The State Board of Education shall require school districts to obtain consent from the parents or guardians of children before any evaluations are conducted. The State Board of Education shall encourage local school districts to evaluate the population of preschool children in their districts and provide preschool programs, pursuant to this Section, where appropriate.

d) The State Board of Education shall report to the General Assembly by July 1, 1989, and every 3 years thereafter, on the results and progress of students who were enrolled in preschool educational programs, including an assessment of which programs have been most successful in promoting academic excellence and alleviating academic failure. The State Board of Education shall assess the academic progress of all students who have been enrolled in preschool educational programs.
APPENDIX D

Cover Letter
ROME SCHOOL

TO: Kindergarten, First, Second, Third, and Fourth Grade Teachers

FROM: Even Start Staff

DATE: April 25, 1995

RE: Required ISBE Follow-up

The Even Start staff is required by ISBE to do a follow-up evaluation on each child previously served by our program. We would greatly appreciate your cooperation in completing the attached form for the children you currently have in your class.

Please use the indicated codes whenever possible, and return to Even Start, 1710 Broadway, via Project Uplift by May 12.

Thank you for your help. Call us at 244-80046 if you have any questions.
APPENDIX E

Prekindergarten Follow-up Survey
1994-95 Placement
3. Kindergarten Classroom (Half-day Program)
1. Kindergarten (Full-day Program)
4. Kindergarten Classroom with Supplemental
   Academic Help
   Resources
6. Transitional Classroom
7. 1st Grade Classroom (Regular Program)
8. 1st Grade Classroom with Supplemental
   Academic Help
9. 1st Grade Classroom with Sp. Ed. Resources
10. 2nd Grade Classroom (Regular Program)
11. 2nd Grade Classroom with Supplemental
    Academic Help
12. 2nd Grade Classroom with Sp. Ed. Resources
13. 3rd Grade Classroom (Regular Program)
14. 3rd Grade Classroom with Supplemental
    Academic Help
15. 3rd Grade Classroom with Sp. Ed. Resources
16. 4th Grade Classroom (Regular Program)
17. 4th Grade Classroom with Supplemental
    Academic Help
18. 4th Grade Classroom with Sp. Ed. Resources
95. Sp. Ed. Self-Contained Classroom
97. Headstart Program/Chapter 1 Classroom
98. Private School/Non-public School
99. Unknown-No Records Available

The numbers preceding each choice are CODE NUMBERS. Please use CODE NUMBERS ONLY.