



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
P.O. Box 11867, Room 227 Blatt Building
Columbia, South Carolina, 29211
Contact: Dana Yow, (803) 734-6164, cell (803) 477-6439

For Immediate Release

January 15, 2015

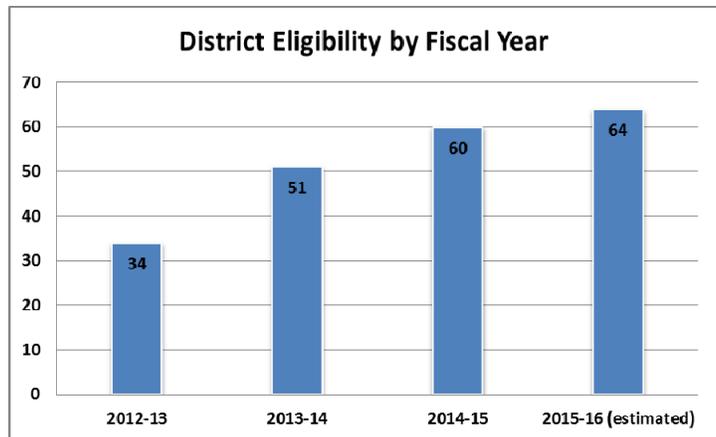
Over 12,000 students being served in 4K child development program; modest academic gains achieved over time

Publicly funded program for at-risk 4-year-olds needs to focus on quality while expanding, report finds

Editor's Note: Copies of the "Report on the South Carolina Child Early Reading Development and Education Program," which includes an Executive Summary, can be found online at www.eoc.sc.gov.

Columbia – The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) released a report today evaluating the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP), a full-day educational pre-kindergarten program for at-risk four-year-olds. The program, which was written into permanent law as the Child Early Reading Development and Education Program last legislative session, began in 2006 as a pilot program for children residing in the plaintiff districts in the school funding lawsuit, *Abbeville County School District et al. vs. SC*. The program is implemented in both public and private centers across the state.

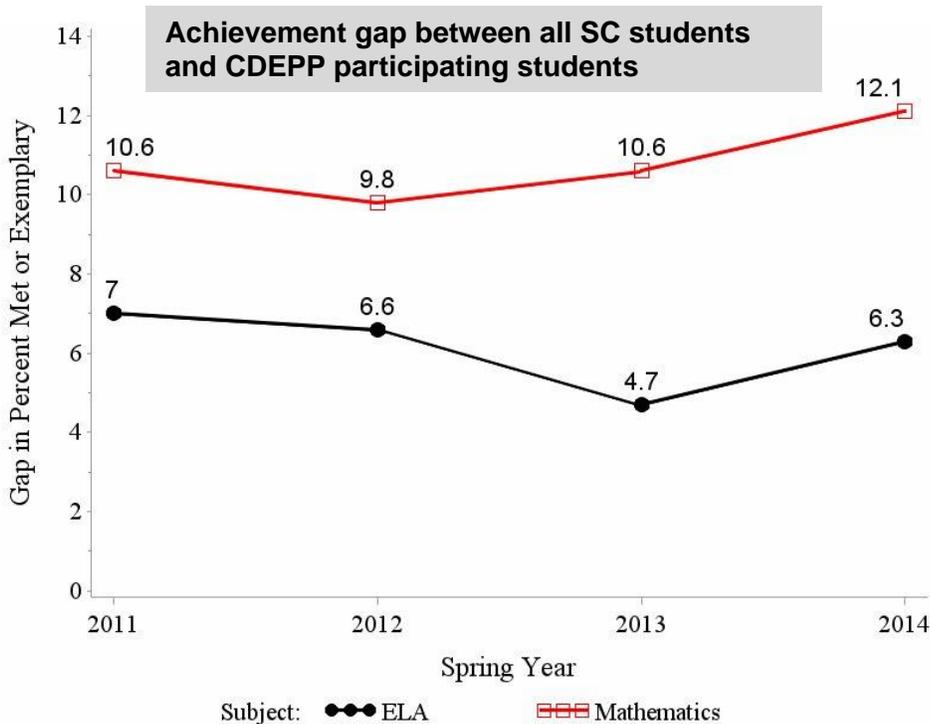
According to the report, at-risk four-year-olds residing in 60 school districts are currently eligible to enroll in a program in either a public school or in a private child care center, a significant increase from the 34 eligible school districts in fiscal year 2012-13. The expansion in accessibility comes as a result of the S.C. General Assembly expanding the eligibility criteria in Fiscal year 2013-14 to include districts with a poverty index of 75 percent or more. In Fiscal year 2014-15, the General Assembly further expanded the eligibility criteria to include districts at a poverty index of 70 percent or higher. The General Assembly currently funds the full-day, 4K program at \$75 million.



According to Melanie Barton, Executive Director of the S.C. Education Oversight Committee, the agency charged in proviso with evaluating the program, 46 percent of all at-risk four-year-olds statewide are now being served in a publicly funded program, a percentage that also includes children being served by federally funded ABC voucher programs as well as Head Start.

A majority of the approximately 12,000 students being served by CDEPP in school year 2014-15, 86 percent, are being served in public schools in 57 school districts. Three CDEPP eligible school districts -- Barnwell 45, Horry, and Union -- chose not to participate in CDEPP during 2014-15. Approximately 144 private providers serve the other 14 percent of students statewide in the program, including students in the eligible, non-participating school districts.

While access to the program has significantly expanded, an analysis of the academic achievement of students participating in the program does not support a dramatic improvement in student achievement. While a greater percentage of CDEPP students met or exceeded state standards in ELA and mathematics than did low-income students who resided in the CDEPP districts but who did not participate in the program as four-year-olds, the statewide achievement gap between CDEPP students and all other students in the state is not narrowing.



“We are encouraged to see expanded access to at-risk four-year olds as well as the growth of these students,” stated Barton. “However, we remain concerned that we are not succeeding with this at-risk population of young people. In math, the gap may be increasing.”

As was highlighted in previous EOC evaluations, Barton pointed out the need to focus on quality within the program to make an impact on student achievement.

“Ongoing, consistent quality enhancement strategies in

both public and private classrooms are essential to achieving positive student outcomes,” stated Barton. “Private providers should be required to participate in ABC Quality at a minimum. Additionally, the analysis of PASS results shows us there is need for enhanced training, technical assistance, and other professional development opportunities to improve instruction among all classroom settings.”

Barton also pointed out there may be a need to incentivize programs who focus their efforts on quality improvement and student growth, using data from classroom and student assessments.

The report also documents the implementation of the program by the SC Department of Education in the public schools and S.C. First Steps in private centers. A follow-up report will be published in mid-2015 to document the initial results of the recently-implemented CIRCLE assessment, which measures early literacy skills.

Eight recommendations are included in the report, which is required to be sent to members of the S.C. General Assembly. The recommendations follow:

- 1.) While expansion in the state-funded full-day 4K program has occurred, a more integrated, focused effort to leverage existing 4K program opportunities and enhance the quality of current 4K programs opportunities needs to be considered.
- 2.) Statewide, the number of four-year-olds participating in Head Start declined from 6,364 in 2013 to 5,975 in 2014. Consequently, at the state and local levels greater collaboration between the Office of First Steps, the South Carolina Department of Education and the Head Start Collaboration Office must occur to insure that parents have all relevant information to determine if and which 4K program best serves the individual needs of their children. The evaluation team would recommend all three 4K providers develop a joint, consolidated community outreach strategy that encourages families of students at-risk of school failure to enroll in voluntary full-day quality 4K programs. An example of such collaboration would be the joint publication and distribution of a brochure for families to use in understanding the program and in choosing a provider of services.
- 3.) The evaluation team could not find any statutory authority allowing the expenditure of funds for "advance payments" by the State Office of SC First Steps. To maintain fiscal accountability for the funds appropriated and expended for the program, the evaluation team recommends that the Office of First Steps cease making advance payments and only reimburse for actual services provided.
- 4.) Advancements in quality and improvements in young students' readiness should be incentivized, utilizing assessment data (for example: individual student growth, classroom environment, teacher:child interaction). At a minimum any private provider participating in state-funded full-day 4K should be required to participate in ABC Quality, a program administered by SC DSS.
- 5.) The Office of First Steps carried forward \$4.0 million in FY2013-14 and is projected to carry forward an additional \$5.0 million in the current fiscal year. No additional funds should be appropriated to the Office of First Steps for the program, even with the addition of four districts that will be eligible to participate in FY2015-16. Instead, the General Assembly should reduce the full-day 4K appropriation to the Office of First Steps by at least \$2.0 million and reallocate those funds to the South Carolina Department of Education. Public schools are serving 86 percent of the four-year-olds in the program but received 73 percent of the total funds appropriated for the program in FY2014-15. South Carolina should invest in improving the quality of CDEPP by addressing staff qualifications, implementation of formal, systematic continuous improvement initiatives with ongoing program monitoring. Program monitoring should include frequent assessments of the classroom environment, including the quality of teacher-child interactions. The evaluation team would point to the school district of Florence 1 as a model.
- 6.) Based upon analysis of PASS results, specific attention to the professional development and training of CDEPP teachers in math must be enhanced.
- 7.) When the results of the fall 2014 CIRCLE assessment can be analyzed, the data should be used to reinforce individualized instruction that meets the needs of each CDEPP student in 4K, 5K, 1st and 2nd grades, especially to prepare all students to be on reading level by 3rd grade.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.