

September 2012

JOHN W. GARDNER CENTER for Youth and Their Communities

Educational Outcomes for *Preschool for All* Participants in Redwood City School District – Update

Background

At the request of community partners, the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University updated the [June 2011](#) analysis examining academic outcomes for San Mateo County *Preschool for All* (PFA) participants who go on to attend elementary school in Redwood City School District (RCSD). PFA San Mateo County was established in 2004 as a five-year demonstration project aimed at reducing the achievement gap by supporting high-quality preschool programs for high-risk three- and four-year old children. PFA participants were more likely to be Latino, have a parent who did not complete high school, be an English learner, and receive Free or Reduced Price Lunch once they entered elementary school. This study builds upon the findings from the 2011 JGC analysis by examining first and second grade outcomes for PFA participants using the Youth Data Archive (YDA) to link individual records of PFA students to their records in RCSD. The previous study followed 876 PFA participants as they transitioned into kindergarten in RCSD. The updated analysis follows 780 of those students into first grade and 467 through second grade. Due to data limitations, this study compared PFA participants to children who we know from other research likely attended private preschool.¹ This update also uses the California Standards Test (CST) in addition to report card outcomes to examine student performance.

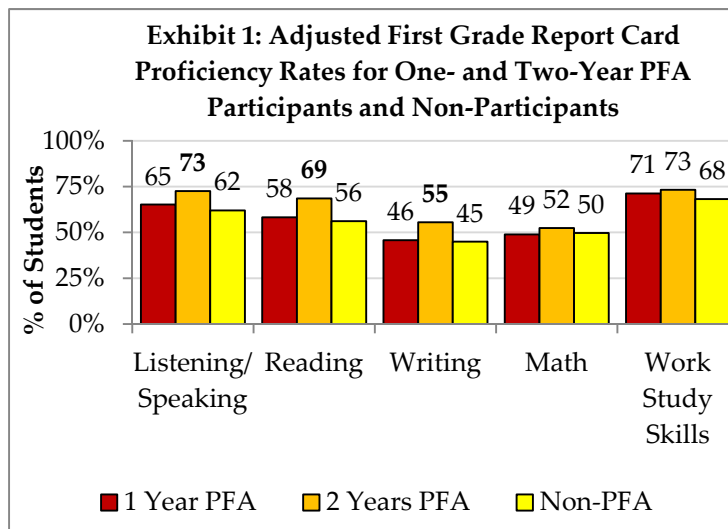
Key Findings and Interpretation

- PFA students performed on par with – and sometimes better than – their non-PFA peers in first and second grade after adjusting for PFA participants' demographic and background characteristics, which placed them at higher risk of academic failure.
- First and second grade students who attended PFA for two years had higher adjusted proficiency rates in some report card subjects compared to children who did not attend PFA (Exhibit 1). In work study skills, two-year PFA participants outperformed their non-PFA peers even before adjusting for student demographics. This finding illustrates that the PFA program was

¹ Applied Survey Research. (2009). School Readiness in San Mateo County: Results of the 2008 Assessment. San Jose, CA.

successful in bringing two-year participants' unadjusted report card proficiency in line with their peers.

- Second graders who participated in PFA had similar standardized test outcomes compared to their non-PFA classmates, after adjusting for student background characteristics. Two-year PFA participants had higher adjusted outcomes than their non-PFA peers on second grade standardized tests in math and similar outcomes in English Language Arts.



Note: Figures in bold denote statistical significance, indicating where we are 95% confident that two-year PFA participants' proficiency rates are discernibly higher than non-participants'.

- Students in some of the highest-risk groups benefitted from PFA:
 - PFA graduates participating in the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch program in elementary school had higher adjusted report card proficiency rates than their non-PFA peers in various report card subjects, depending on their grade level.
 - PFA participants in high-risk groups (e.g. students from lower educated households) had higher adjusted proficiency rates in work study skills. These higher rates were mostly seen in the earliest grades, indicating that the effects may fade over time.

Policy Implications

Our findings demonstrate that providing high-quality preschool experiences to traditionally underserved students can help prepare them to succeed in elementary school. As early learning programs like PFA continue to lose funding in an exceptionally difficult state fiscal climate, there is an even greater need to increase the quality of the programs that remain. Potential strategies for addressing quality in existing programs include:

- The Pre-K to third grade approach, which aligns early childhood educational experiences with elementary school and provides continuity and consistency between these settings.
- A recent trend toward broad planning and coordination of preschool efforts across the state, emphasizing the need for *quality* in targeted preschool programs. For example, First 5 California's Child Signature Program, the California State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care's California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan (CCELP), and the federal government's "Race to the Top" Early Learning Challenge Grant.

With high quality preschool programs like *Preschool For All*, in combination with integrated instruction and support through third grade, we hope that the achievement gap will shrink and that these children will have the opportunity to thrive in every future setting they encounter.