

Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Office of Evaluation and Research
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Miami, Florida 33132

Title I Prekindergarten Programs
Evaluation Report
2002-03

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beginning in the 2002-03 school year, Title I funds have been used to operate the majority of the prekindergarten programs offered to disadvantaged children in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS). This major change in the funding and reporting structure, along with changes in the student assessment procedures, spurred the request for an evaluation of the program. The evaluation is intended to examine the efficacy of the program. In this initial year, the scope of the evaluation is limited to an examination of program implementation. In subsequent years, measures of student achievement will also be examined to ascertain the impact of the program on its participants.

The focus of the evaluation in its initial year is twofold: to determine whether the prekindergarten programs funded by Title I had been implemented according to the program specifications; and to ascertain whether all required student assessments had been administered and utilized as intended. To answer these questions, data was gathered from a variety of sources including interviews with district staff, a review of district records, observations in prekindergarten classes, and a survey of prekindergarten teachers. The evaluation examined the two primary models of program delivery: the standard High/Scope model, and the Montessori model. The High/Scope curriculum, supplemented with the Building Early Language and Literacy (BELL) program, is utilized in the vast majority of the prekindergarten classes in the district. The Montessori curriculum is offered in only a few of the classes funded by Title I.

The findings of the evaluation indicate that the standard High/Scope prekindergarten classes are fine examples of developmentally appropriate prekindergarten education, taught by professional educators. The average number of students per class was in keeping with program specifications, although only about 60% of the classes included an exceptional student. In regard to the educational program, the classrooms were set up in accordance with the program design; structured daily routines were evident; and the variety of activities and adult-child interactions observed were considered to be conducive to the development of the students' cognitive, social, and physical development. Furthermore, the teachers have indicated that they believe the curriculum to be appropriate for their students, and that they receive the support they need from administration at both the school and district levels. Thus, it appears that the standard High/Scope model is effectively implemented according to program specifications.

The findings regarding the implementation and utilization of the student assessment battery for the High/Scope model were not as encouraging. Initially, three formal assessments were to be administered to each student on a pretest/posttest basis during the 2002-03 school year. This requirement was reduced, calling for the administration of all three pretests, but only one posttest. Still, the time required to administer the formal assessments was judged to take much valuable time away from student instruction. Additional problems regarding the assessment process were also identified by the teachers, including late arriving materials, insufficient training in administration and score interpretation, and failing to provide results for tests that had been administered and submitted for scoring. Nonetheless, the teachers generally felt that the assessments provided information to enable them to better meet their students' needs.

The Montessori model is the other major prekindergarten used in the district. It is a unique educational approach, utilizing multi-age classes, a challenging curriculum, and its own method

of student assessments. A high degree of variation was found among the classes operating the Montessori model, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the program as a whole. Variation was found in the construction of mixed age classes, adherence to the instructional model, and administration of the Montessori assessment component. As such, it does not appear that the Montessori model is being uniformly implemented according to program specifications in the prekindergarten classes funded by Title I.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made.

1. Continue to make available the resources necessary to provide high quality prekindergarten programs for the district's most vulnerable young children.
2. Given the concerns about the time required to administer the full student assessment component of the High/Scope model:
 - a. Reconsider the number of formal assessments administered to the prekindergarten students;
 - b. Provide training in methods to integrate assessments into the instructional program; and/or
 - c. Provide staff to administer the assessments.
3. Ensure that assessment results are provided to the teachers on a timely basis.
4. Work with staff from the Division of Exceptional Student Education to facilitate the inclusion of exceptional students in each prekindergarten class.
5. Provide additional support to schools and prekindergarten teachers offering the Montessori program in order to ensure its faithful implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) Title I program assumed the funding responsibility for the bulk of the prekindergarten programs offered to disadvantaged children in public schools during the 2002-03 school year. This was a change from the past when a few specialized programs for pre-school children were funded by Title I, but most of the programs were funded by the state. The change in funding and reporting structure, together with major changes in student assessment procedures, spurred the request for an evaluation of the prekindergarten program

Description of the Programs

There are prekindergarten classes in virtually all of the elementary schools in the MDCPS, including fee-driven programs and programs that enroll specifically targeted groups of young children. Currently, prekindergarten programs enroll only about one-third as many students as are enrolled in any other primary grade level (Office of Evaluation and Research, 2003). With the approval of the Universal Preschool Amendment to Florida's Constitution this will change. Beginning in the 2005 school year, every four year old child must be provided with the opportunity to attend a "voluntary, high quality, free [preschool program that is] delivered according to professionally accepted standards"(Florida State Board of Education Universal Prekindergarten Education Advisory Council, 2003, p. i). This amendment will challenge the school districts' capacity to staff and equip increasing numbers of high quality prekindergarten classrooms.

Currently the Title I program funds most of the prekindergarten programs provided by the MDCPS for the population of at-risk young children in the district. The numbers of schools, classes and student spaces funded by Title I are summarized in Table 1. Generally, the programs are for children who are four years old on September 1, who reside in the attendance area of the school where the programs are located, and who are eligible to participate in the free or reduced price lunch (FRL) program. During the 2002-03 school year there were 166 such classes at 121 school sites. The district also offered variations of the standard prekindergarten program. There were classes for three year olds offered at two schools. Head Start classes were located at four schools that enrolled children who met certain additional eligibility requirements. In addition, the Title I Migrant Program offered two prekindergarten classes for three and four year olds. Each of the above programs utilized the High/Scope curriculum.

Since the High/Scope curriculum is implemented in the vast majority of the classes, this description of the programs focuses primarily on that curriculum. However, another curriculum, the Montessori method, is implemented in nine Title I schools. In each of these schools, the prekindergarten students and kindergarten students share the same classroom, but only prekindergarten enrollment is included in Table 1. The general criteria for admissions, including qualification for FRL and location within the attendance area of the school hold for these classes.

An additional program, the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) serves the parents of 329 children between the ages of three and five, who qualify to receive FRL. This program is not tied to a specific school, since the program activities take place primarily in the families' homes. Paraprofessional parent educators work with the parents, who in turn provide

developmentally appropriate activities for their own children. The parent educators are supervised by two educational specialists. Since HIPPY is administered as a Title I parental involvement activity, it will not be included in this evaluation.

Table 1
Prekindergarten Programs Funded by Title I, Fall 2002

Program type	Schools	Classes	Capacity
High/Scope			
General	121	166	3,320
Three Year Old	2	2	32
Head Start	4	4	80
Migrant	-- ^a	2	40
Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Co-teaching Model ^b	5	5	60
Montessori	9	9 ^c	217
Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)	-- ^a	-- ^a	329
Total	128 ^d	188	4,078

Data source: Program staff records.

^a Program does not meet in a school.

^b Not included in this evaluation.

^c The number of prekindergarten students corresponds to one class per school, but as they are usually combined with kindergarten students, they are located in two classrooms.

^d The total number of schools is less than the sum across programs since some schools offer multiple prekindergarten programs.

Exceptional Students

Starting in the 2002-03 school year, inclusion principles apply to all of the prekindergarten programs. As a result, most of the classes serve 20 four year olds, and include 19 regular education students and one exceptional student. The exceptional student is recommended for placement in the class because of his or her exceptionality; eligibility for the FRL program is not required. Additional funds generated by the exceptional students are used to pay for consulting services of an exceptional education teacher, who visits the classroom at least once a month. This person can help with testing in addition to training the regular classroom teachers in adaptations and strategies appropriate for the exceptional student.

An alternate model for the inclusion of exceptional prekindergarten students is administered and primarily funded by the Division of Exceptional Student Education (DESE). This model features co-teaching by an exceptional education teacher, one exceptional education paraprofessional, and a second paraprofessional who has at least 60 hours of college credit. The second paraprofessional is funded by Title I and assists with tasks including testing the regular education students. Classes implementing this model include 12 exceptional students and 12 regular education students. Five such classes were operated in Title I schools during the 2002-03 school year. Because the DESE, rather than Title I, oversees these classes, they will not be included in this evaluation of Title I prekindergarten programs.

The High/Scope Model

The High/Scope model is a full prekindergarten program, offered from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. daily. At the core of its curriculum is a philosophy of active learning carried out by the provision of key experiences and opportunities for the children to exercise initiative toward their own learning. The key experiences are outlined in “a series of statements describing the cognitive, social and physical development of children from the ages of 2 ½ - 5 years” (The School Board of Miami-Dade County, n.d., p. 5). They fall into six categories: Creative Representation; Initiative and Social Relations; Language and Literacy; Movement; Music; and Logic and Mathematics. Both the teacher and paraprofessional interact with the students to provide learning experiences.

The “High/Scope Preschool Wheel of Learning” defines an organized structure for teachers to follow. The four components of this wheel are learning environment, a structured daily routine, assessment, and adult-child interaction. Staff development that addresses these four topics is fundamental to the successful implementation of the High/Scope curriculum. The teachers must learn how to create a learning environment that integrates activity areas and materials with ample storage. They must be able to establish a daily routine that includes both small-group and large-group times, and involves the application of a Plan-Do-Review process. Assessment skills involve teamwork and include daily anecdotal notes, daily planning, and child assessment. Teachers also learn adult-child interaction strategies that include encouragement and a problem-solving approach to conflict. In addition to the High/Scope curriculum, teachers are expected to “understand the broad nature of literacy and mathematics and [be] familiar with the concepts (scope), processes (sequence) and content (subject matter) that comprise these domains” (The School Board of Miami-Dade County, n.d., p. 3-4).

Because the High/Scope model is a complex program for teachers to implement, district support personnel generally expect a three-year learning period for new teachers and paraprofessionals. Specifically, they encourage first year teachers to concentrate on implementing a structured day for students. In their second year, teachers should master the evaluation instruments. In their third year, the curriculum as a whole should be implemented.

Although the High/Scope curriculum is comprehensive, principals have expressed concerns that literacy has not been targeted as specifically as would be desired. The Building Early Language and Literacy (BELL) program was developed and piloted during the 1999-2000 school year to respond to this desire to ensure that literacy is addressed specifically. Expanded to all High/Scope prekindergarten programs in subsequent years, the BELL curriculum is utilized during two 15 minute time periods each day. Activities such as oral language development, phonological awareness, and shared reading take place during these time periods. An assessment, which was developed as part of BELL, is administered in the fall and again in the spring so that teachers can see how well their students have progressed. The administration is designed to take 45 minutes per child, but subscales may be administered a few at a time.

In addition to the BELL assessment, two new assessments are being phased in during the 2002-03 school year. The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) is the diagnostic portion of a program designed to help teachers identify and address their students’ emotional and social strengths and weaknesses. A series of ratings, which measure attachment, self-control, and

initiative, are carried out by both the teacher and parent. The results of the assessment are used to provide feedback to families and to develop plans for further growth. The DECA administration is designed to take 5 to 10 minutes per child.

The Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic Standardized Assessment (LAP-D) is designed to measure cognitive and language development as well as gross and fine motor development. This instrument was adopted by MDCPS to meet the needs of the Florida Legislature for information regarding children's readiness for school. Administration of the LAP-D takes 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the age of the child, testing conditions, and the experience of the administrator. A few subscales may be administered at a time, rather than all at once, to facilitate the students' best performance without loss of interest.

Staff development is provided for the administration of each of these assessments, as well as the interpretation and utilization of their results. Administration of the DECA and the LAP-D was designed to take place in the fall and the spring. However, during the initial implementation in 2002-03, each assessment took place as a pre-test only. The DECA was administered between September 23, 2002 and December 20, 2002, and the LAP-D between October 27, 2002 and February 7, 2003. Once administered, these instruments were submitted to collaborators at Florida International University for scoring.

In addition to these formal assessments, were two other means of gauging students' progress. In past years, teachers recorded anecdotal notes on the behavior and performance of individual students, which were the basis for High/Scope's Preschool Child Observation Record (COR). The COR report was used to communicate the students' progress with their parents. During the 2002-03 school year, the report was replaced with the formal assessments just described, but the teachers were instructed to continue to record anecdotal observations as part of the High/Scope program. In addition, an assessment of language proficiency, the Oral Language Proficiency Scale, was also administered in the fall and spring to children for whom English is a second language.

The Montessori Model

The Montessori model utilizes a unique curriculum and accompanying assessment procedures. The program stresses individualized and self-initiated learning. Classrooms are outfitted with a wealth of stimulating materials selected to support such a philosophy. The teachers are trained in very explicit methods of implementation and assessment. The program advocates mixed ages, so classes of 28 students are usually comprised of half prekindergarten and half kindergarten students. There were no changes in the support of the Title I Montessori program in 2002-03; the classes funded by Title I in the 2002-03 school year were the same ones that have been funded by Title I in prior years.

DESIGN OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation of the prekindergarten program funded by Title I in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools was spurred by changes in the funding and reporting structure, together with major changes in student assessment procedures. During this initial year, the evaluation is limited to issues of program implementation. Subsequent evaluations will examine measures of academic achievement in order to address the impact of the program on the students who participate.

The following questions delineated the specific focus of the evaluation during the 2002-03 school year.

1. Was the Title I prekindergarten program implemented according to the program specifications?
2. Were all of the facets of the prekindergarten assessment battery implemented and utilized as intended?

In order to address these questions, both qualitative and quantitative research procedures were used. Data was gathered from a variety of sources, including interviews with district staff, a review of district records, observations in Title I prekindergarten classes, and a survey of prekindergarten teachers.

Interviews were conducted by the evaluators with district staff from the two district offices involved with the implementation of the prekindergarten programs: Early Childhood Programs and Title I Administration. The interviews were unstructured, and initially focused on providing a description of the prekindergarten programs in the district. District enrollment records were also examined.

The primary source of data used in the evaluation was a survey of all prekindergarten teachers with salaries funded by Title I. The survey was designed to ascertain the teachers' perceptions of the prekindergarten program. They were asked to rate various aspects of the program, including the appropriateness of the curricula, adequacy of materials, parental involvement, and training and support for program delivery and assessment. To ensure confidentiality and still allow for follow-up contact with non-respondents, the survey instruments were coded. The teachers' names appeared on the forwarding envelopes but not on the return envelopes or the instruments themselves. A copy of the Teacher Survey may be found in the Appendix.

Data was also obtained through visits to selected prekindergarten classes funded by the Title I program. Stratified random sampling was used to select a sample of approximately 5 percent of the classes funded by Title I. Stratification was used to ensure that each model of prekindergarten program was represented. An Observation Worksheet was developed to be used by the evaluator to structure the visits to each classroom. The worksheet addresses ten general attributes thought to be important to an effective prekindergarten program. These attributes are: 1) a clean, well maintained classroom; 2) a neat, organized environment; 3) a variety of centers for student exploration; 4) a variety of materials/equipment available for large/small motor development; 5) a routine in place; 6) activities that foster a wide range of academic, social, and

motor development; 7) a balance of large group, small group, and individual activities; 8) staff that facilitates the children’s learning activities; 9) anecdotal notes to document children’s progress; and 10) documented student assessments. A copy of the Observation Worksheet may be found in the Appendix.

A summary of the sources of data and the specific evaluation questions they addressed is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2
Sources of Data for the Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Question	Sources of Data			
	Staff Interview	Observation	District Records	Teacher Survey
Program implementation	X	X	X	
Assessment procedures	X	X		X

Note. See above for the full text of the evaluation questions.

RESULTS

The evaluation of the prekindergarten program during its initial year of funding by the Title I program took place in Spring, 2003. The purpose of the evaluation was twofold: to determine whether the program was implemented according to the program specifications, and to ascertain if the assessment battery had been administered and utilized as intended. To answer these questions, data was gathered from a variety of sources including interviews with district staff, a review of district enrollment records, observations in Title I prekindergarten classes, and a survey of prekindergarten teachers.

Program Implementation

The primary source of data concerning implementation of the prekindergarten program was a survey of all prekindergarten teachers whose salaries were funded by Title I. The survey instruments were forwarded to 180 teachers in May 2003. Completed surveys were received from 152 teachers, yielding an 84.4% return rate. This high rate of return allows for generalization of the survey results to the population of Title I funded prekindergarten teachers.

The survey instrument, titled Teacher Survey, calls for the teachers to provide information about themselves and the classes they teach, in addition to their perceptions of the program. A copy of the survey may be found in the Appendix. The teachers' self-reported mean number of years teaching in Miami-Dade County was 14.0 years (n=151), with the level of experience ranging from ten first year teachers to one teacher with 41 years of teaching experience. The prekindergarten teachers were well educated, with more than half of the 152 respondents having completed graduate degrees (47.4%, B.A./B.S.; 47.4%, M.A./M.S.; 3.9% Specialist; 1.3% Ph.D.).

Overall, 144, or 94.7% of the teachers, indicated that they taught classes using the High/Scope curriculum. Of these, 123 also noted that they implemented the Building Early Language Literacy (BELL) curriculum, which is included as part of the standard prekindergarten model in the district. Of those who did not use BELL, 14 teachers used other programs in conjunction with High/Scope. These included two implementing Head Start along with High/Scope; five implementing the Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction program; and two implementing the Early Learning and Literacy Model (ELLM), a pilot research project offered by the University of North Florida. Representing the other major model implemented in the MDCPS, six of the respondents, or 3.9% overall, indicated that they taught Montessori classes.

The mean number of students in the High/Scope classes, as reported by the teachers, was 19.4 (n=144 teachers), with responses ranging from 16 to 21 students. A review of enrollment data obtained from the district's Student Data Base System, validates the self-reported data, with a mean of 19.3 students, and enrollment ranging from 16 to 25 students per class (n=158 classes). The mean number of students is in accordance with the number specified by the program design, calling for 20 students per class. However, the findings regarding the specification that one ESE student be included in the class of 20 were not as consistent. Only 60.0% of the identified classes included at least one student enrolled in the ESE program.

It may be recalled that eligibility for the free/reduced price lunch program is a condition for participation in the prekindergarten program for the regular education students. Based on district enrollment data, the vast majority, in fact 98.8%, of the identified regular education students (n=2,915) were found to be eligible for the free/reduced price lunch program. Only 35 students, or 1.2%, were found to be ineligible or recorded as having not applied.

It may be recalled that the Montessori model calls for mixed-age classes of 28 students. The mean number of students reported on the Teacher Survey in Montessori classes was 20.2 (n=5), however this is not representative of the individual teachers' responses. There was a bimodal distribution, with the following responses: 25, 25, 23, 14, and 14 students. Variation was also seen in the enrollment records in the district's Student Data Base System. The mean number of prekindergarten students identified in Title I funded Montessori classes was 15.8 (n=8), with the numbers ranging from 11 to 24. However, this figure represents only the number of prekindergarten students, and does not include the number of older students that may have been enrolled in mixed-age classes.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Program

The survey responses discussed thus far have provided some descriptive data about the prekindergarten teachers and the classes they teach. In addition to these topics, eighteen items on the Teacher Survey query the teachers' perceptions of specific attributes of the program, including the appropriateness of the curricula, adequacy of materials, level of parental involvement, and training and support for program delivery and test administration. These items adhere to a Likert scale format. Each item consists of a statement, to which the teachers are asked to indicate their level of agreement using a four point scale. The responses were quantified for analysis as: "Strongly Disagree" = 1; "Disagree" = 2; "Agree" = 3; and "Strongly Agree" = 4. The response option "Not Applicable" is also provided, but is considered a non-response and is not included in subsequent analyses. The complete text of the items may be found on the copy of the Teacher Survey located in the Appendix.

Using the numeric values assigned to the response options, mean item scores were calculated for each item. These mean scores are presented in Table 3, along with the standard deviation and number of valid responses for each item. The mean item scores represent all survey responses; however, the mean scores were examined separately for teachers of High/Scope and Montessori classes and noteworthy differences between the two models are discussed in the text. The mean item scores could potentially range from a low of 1, indicating that all the teachers strongly disagreed with the statement, to a high of 4, indicating that all the teachers strongly agreed with the statement. A mean of 2.5 would indicate a neutral response, where the level of agreement and disagreement among the teachers "balanced out."

A preliminary review of the table reveals that all of the mean item scores were above 2.5, indicating some level of agreement with all of the items. This could possibly be due to positive response bias, a danger of forced-choice items, wherein respondents prefer to "be nice," by rating items positively rather than negatively. In such a situation, the relative standing of the scores becomes important in the interpretation of the results.

Five of the items address various aspects of the instructional program. The teachers' responses indicated that they are familiar with the scope, sequence and content of preschool education expected by the district (#15); and have had sufficient training to implement the curriculum (#10). They also indicate that the curriculum they use is appropriate for the students in their classes (#9). In addition, they generally concur that the classroom space provided is sufficient to create an appropriate learning environment for preschool children (#12). Finally, the mean item score regarding the adequacy of materials and supplies (#11) indicates that the teachers generally agree that materials are sufficient. However, this mean response was among the lowest across the items.

Table 3
Teachers' Perceptions of the Prekindergarten Program

Item	Mean¹	Standard Deviation	N
9. Curriculum is appropriate for my students	3.56	.58	152
10. Adequate training to implement curriculum	3.46	.66	151
11. Adequate materials and supplies	3.06	.84	151
12. Adequate space to create learning environment	3.28	.83	151
13. Support from the school's administration	3.35	.70	151
14. Support from district staff	3.31	.61	149
15. Familiar with preschool scope, sequence, and content	3.34	.59	152
16. Sufficient training on student assessments	3.28	.72	151
17. Assessments well integrated into instructional program	2.97	.81	145
18. More time on assessment this year than last	3.74	.59	133
19. Assessments provide information about students' needs	3.25	.68	150
20. Use assessment data to adjust instruction	3.19	.64	149
21. Assessments take away time from students	3.49	.73	149
22. Hold regular conferences with parents	3.52	.54	151
23. Parents comply with requests to call or come in	3.17	.68	151
24. Parents provide vital input which aids instruction	2.87	.66	151
25. Support on serious social interaction problems	3.15	.70	143
26. Students prepared for kindergarten	3.75	.43	151

¹ Mean item scores could range from a low of 1, indicating consistent strong disagreement, to a high of 4, indicating consistent strong agreement.

The teachers also addressed this topic in their responses to an open-ended item that invited them to comment on any of the other questions on the survey. The second most frequent topic noted by the teachers concerned the need for additional materials or supplies. Several teachers

commented specifically on needing more consumable materials, such as art paper. A summary of the teachers' comments to the open-ended item is found in Table 4.

Table 4
Summary of Comments Provided on the Teacher Survey

Comment	Frequency
Assessment problems (ex., too much testing, interferes with instruction, inappropriate for young children, no results provided, didn't receive materials, need training in administration)	43
Need materials (ex., didn't receive supplies, need consumables)	10
Program successful (various programs listed)	7
Program problems (ex., difficult to implement multiple programs, programs not compatible, Direct Instruction program not appropriate for pre-K children)	5
Assessments valuable (ex., useful information provided)	4
Need support from administration (ex., school support, district administration, consistency)	4
General negative comments	12

As stated previously, a reason for conducting this evaluation is the change in the funding and reporting structure for the prekindergarten classes. This topic was also addressed on the Teacher Survey. The mean item scores on Table 3, demonstrate that the teachers feel they receive adequate administrative support for their program at both the school and district level (#13 and #14). Nonetheless, several of the teachers' comments indicated some problems in this regard. The mean item score was somewhat lower for a related item which read, "I have sufficient support to deal with any serious social interaction problems in my class" (#25). However, this response could address a perceived need for additional classroom assistance as well as administrative support.

The survey also contains several items addressing parental involvement. These items as a whole received relatively low ratings from the teachers. The teachers did indicate strongly that they held regular conferences with their students' parents (#22). However, it should be noted that the mean item score for this item was higher for the teachers in the standard High/Scope program than for the Montessori teachers. The mean item score was somewhat lower overall for a related item regarding the parents' willingness to contact the teacher, when requested (#23). It may be recalled that parents have the opportunity to participate in the DECA assessment, used in the standard program, by providing their own ratings of their child's progress. Item #24, in part, addresses this practice; it reads, "The parents provide vital input which aids my instruction of their children." The mean item score for this item was the lowest of any survey item.

One final item on the survey addresses the teachers' perception of the overall impact of the program on their students. It reads, "Because of their prekindergarten experience, my students will be prepared to enter kindergarten in the fall" (#26). The teachers agreed strongly with this statement, resulting in the highest mean item score among all of the survey items. The

Montessori teachers, in particular, appeared confident of the impact they had made, with a mean item score of 4.0, indicating that they all “strongly agreed” with the statement.

Classroom Observations: High/Scope

Observations in selected prekindergarten classes provided qualitative evidence of program implementation, but were more limited than the survey of teachers, in terms of both scope and focus. The visits lasted approximately one hour per classroom, and were conducted by an evaluator between May 12 and June 6, 2003. It may be recalled that stratified random sampling was used to select ten Title I schools to participate in the classroom observation portion of the evaluation. This represented 7.8% of the 128 schools with prekindergarten programs funded by Title I. As stated previously, stratification was used to ensure that each model of prekindergarten program was represented. At each selected school, observations were conducted in one class implementing each model offered at that school. In this manner, fourteen classes were visited in the ten schools, or 7.4% of the 188 prekindergarten classes funded by Title I. These included nine standard High/Scope classes; two Montessori classes; and three classes offering variations of the standard High/Scope program. The variations were one three year old class; one Head Start-High/Scope class; and one class operating High/Scope in conjunction with the ELLM pilot research project. This description of the findings will focus primarily on the standard High/Scope classes and the Montessori classes.

The observations were conducted using qualitative research techniques, although an Observation Worksheet was used by the evaluator to provide structure to the data collected during visits. The worksheet lists ten general attributes thought to be important to an effective prekindergarten program. In the High/Scope curriculum, these attributes are incorporated into four “prongs,” previously described as the “High/Scope Wheel of Learning”: learning environment, a structured daily routine, assessment, and adult-child interactions. A three-point scale is provided on the Observation Worksheet to rate each attribute, as determined by the consistency of the evidence gathered. The possible ratings are: “Consistent Evidence,” “Some Evidence,” and “No Evidence.” An additional response option, “Unable to Determine” was available to be used if there was no opportunity to gather evidence about a particular attribute during a classroom visit. In addition, space is provided on the form for notes and a summary of the findings. A copy of the worksheet may be found in the Appendix.

Among the nine standard High/Scope classes visited, remarkable consistency was seen in the physical design of the classroom setting, in accordance with expectations for developmentally appropriate learning experiences for young children. Following is a composite description of a typical classroom and activities that were observed.

The physical classroom is partitioned off into separate “centers,” each of which is designed to facilitate a particular type of activity. In one center, a large rug delineates the area to be used for whole group activities. In this area the teacher meets with the class as a whole to read, sing, cover specific content (ex., phonological awareness), and encourage language development and interpersonal relationships by interacting with one another. In another center, child-sized tables and chairs are provided for small group activities. These include arts and crafts, written activities, and planning/review activities for individual work time. Individual work time, which those outside of the prekindergarten realm may think of as play time, is child-directed, and takes

place in the various centers. Usually included is a home and/or store setting for imaginative play, in addition to centers for building, puzzles, games, computers, reading, puppets, and more. The Plan-Do-Review process is used during work time. The students meet in small groups with the teacher or paraprofessional to plan what they intend to do. The students choose where they wish to spend their time. In some classes they have individual markers that are displayed at the center they have chosen. This ensures that no one center becomes too crowded. Following work time, the students clean up and gather again in small groups to recall and discuss what they accomplished.

Table 5 shows a typical schedule of daily activities in a class implementing the High/Scope curriculum. The majority of the classrooms had a copy of their schedule posted. During the brief periods of observation, the students' reactions indicated that these activities are part of their daily routine.

Table 5
Typical Schedule for a High/Scope Class

TIME	ACTIVITY
8:30 – 9:00	Breakfast
9:00 – 9:15	Circle time
9:15 – 9:45	Small groups
9:45 – 10:05	Planning
10:05 – 11:00	Work time
11:00 – 11:10	Recall
11:10 – 11:40	Lunch
11:40 – 12:00	Music
12:00 – 12:30	Outdoors
12:30 – 12:50	Story time
12:50 – 1:30	Rest time
1:30 – 1:45	Story/Snack
1:45 – 2:00	Dismissal

The learning environment must store a myriad of materials and equipment. Blocks, journals, puzzles, books, tinker toys, dress-up clothes, trucks, story boards, games, tricycles, balls, dishes, pots and pans, wagons, paints, brushes, crayons, glue, all these and more must be organized and systematically integrated into the classroom so that the students can access them - and return them when they are finished. Storage systems in the various classrooms use shelves, bins, "cubbies," clear plastic storage boxes, and/or zippered bags. This organizational task was handled at various levels of success in the observed classes. The age of the materials varied also. In some classrooms, the majority seemed to be brand new, while in others, much of the furniture and equipment seemed to have put in years of service. However, in every standard High/Scope classroom there appeared to be a wide range of high quality materials and equipment for the students' use. During casual interviews with the teachers, two mentioned that supplies had been ordered, but had not been received; one teacher expressed an ongoing need for consumable materials.

Also central to an effective prekindergarten program are the interpersonal relationships among the adults and the children in the class. Each Title I funded classroom is staffed with one teacher and one paraprofessional. In the vast majority of the classes, the teacher and paraprofessional were observed to work cooperatively, sharing responsibilities for various activities. During large group time, the teacher usually led the group, while the paraprofessional monitored behavior or organized other activities in the classroom. Both adults interacted with the children, encouraging thoughtful work activities and productive child-child interactions. In all but one classroom, the teachers and paraprofessionals seemed to provide a learning environment that fostered the academic, social, and motor development of their students.

As mentioned previously, some classes offer variations of the standard High/Scope model, implementing additional curricula (i.e., Head Start and ELLM). Two such classes were visited, which generally conformed to the findings above with regard to the learning environment, routine and adult-child interactions. However, there was some concern as to the degree to which the requirements of two programs coincide. In particular, ELLM appears to foster a more academic, teacher-centered educational regime than the High/Scope curriculum, as far as could be seen from one limited observation. If this is the case, it may be difficult to incorporate both philosophies in one classroom.

Overall, the High/Scope model appears to offer an excellent foundation for the districts' most vulnerable young children. The model provides a developmentally appropriate learning environment that is conducive to the development of the students' cognitive, social, and physical development. Moreover, the High/Scope model appears to be implemented according to the program specifications in the schools funded by Title I.

Classroom Observations: Montessori

In addition to the High/Scope classes that were visited as part of this evaluation, two of the nine classes implementing the Montessori model were observed. Although two classes comprise a very limited sample from which to draw conclusions about the Montessori model, they do serve as indicators of the status of the Montessori model in district schools. The implementation at the two sites appeared to be very different. Therefore, it is impossible to describe a "typical" Montessori class. The teachers in both classes mentioned that little district level guidance was provided for the Montessori program. This apparent lack of guidance could account for the differences that were observed. Brief descriptions of each Montessori classroom follow.

In one Montessori classroom, the teacher has had eight years of experience with the program. In addition, the school recently discontinued an extended primary-grade Montessori program, and a school administrator serves as a building-level source of knowledgeable support. Montessori materials from the discontinued program had been made available to the prekindergarten teacher. The learning environment is large, clean, well organized, and effectively designed with various "centers." The classroom is comprised solely of prekindergarten students, contrary to the Montessori model of multi-age classes. As in the High/Scope model discussed above, the teacher leads large group activities, while both she and the paraprofessional interact with the students during work time. The activities observed during the visit to this classroom were somewhat more academically advanced than those observed in the High/Scope classes. Center time was

adult directed and organized around a theme, with formal activities. This emphasis on academics did not preclude students singing and having books read aloud to them.

The other Montessori classroom includes both kindergarten and prekindergarten students. During the observation, the students came together for organizational activities in a circle at the center of the room. However, the teacher and paraprofessional stated that the students are separated by grade level for learning activities: the teacher with the kindergarten students; the paraprofessional with the prekindergarten students. Work areas appear to be similarly divided by grade level. The teacher stated that she had received training in the Montessori model; but the paraprofessional had not. The paraprofessional described a typical day for prekindergarteners as including circle time with the kindergarteners (reading a book), talking about the “letter of the week,” doing worksheets, and maybe some outside time. The students are instructed not to touch the displayed Montessori materials (i.e., glass measuring pitcher on a foam tray) unless working with a teacher.

Thus, considerable differences were identified in the classes implementing the Montessori model. These included differences in class composition, activities, materials, and adult-child interactions. As such, it does not appear that the Montessori model is being uniformly implemented according to program specifications in the prekindergarten classes funded by Title I.

Assessment Procedures

The battery of student assessments administered in the prekindergarten program is a primary focus of this evaluation. For that reason, several survey items address the assessment process. It should be recalled that the two major prekindergarten models differ substantially in their use of student assessments. The Montessori program utilizes its own explicit method of student assessment. On the other hand, the assessments scheduled to be used during the 2002-03 school year in the district’s standard High/Scope program were: the BELL assessment (pretest and posttest administrations); Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA); Learning Accomplishment Profile – Diagnostic Standardized Assessment (LAP-D); Oral Language Proficiency Scale (OLPS, for bilingual students); and informal anecdotal observations. Based on the average time of administration for the three formal assessments (i.e., BELL, DECA, and LAP-D), 120 minutes per child is required for the pretests, and 45 minutes for the posttest. For a class of 20 students, this amounts to 40 hours required to administer the pretests in the fall and 15 hours for the posttest in the spring.

The numbers of teachers in the standard High/Scope program who indicated that they administered each type of assessment to their students are displayed in Figure 1. Nearly all of the 144 teachers in the standard program reported having administered the BELL (n=140, 97.2%), DECA (n=135, 93.8%), and LAP-D (n=141, 97.9%) assessments. Almost all of the teachers also reported that they had completed anecdotal observations concerning their students (n=132, 91.7%). Incidentally, the two teachers participating in the Early Learning and Literacy Model (ELLM) project listed ELLM assessments as “other.” These assessments were required for participation in the project, and were administered by researchers from University of North Florida, rather than the classroom teachers.

The OLPS assessment is administered to students who speak languages other than English in their homes. Overall, 128, or 88.9% of the teachers in the standard prekindergarten program indicated that they had such students in their classes. Of these, 117, or 91.4% of the 128 teachers, had administered the OLPS assessment.

Teachers in Montessori classes are not required to administer the BELL, DECA, or LAP-D assessments. Of the six Montessori teachers who responded to the survey, only three, or 50.0% listed the Montessori assessment as an “other” assessment. It is not clear whether the other three teachers failed to administer the Montessori assessment to their students, or merely failed to list it on the survey.

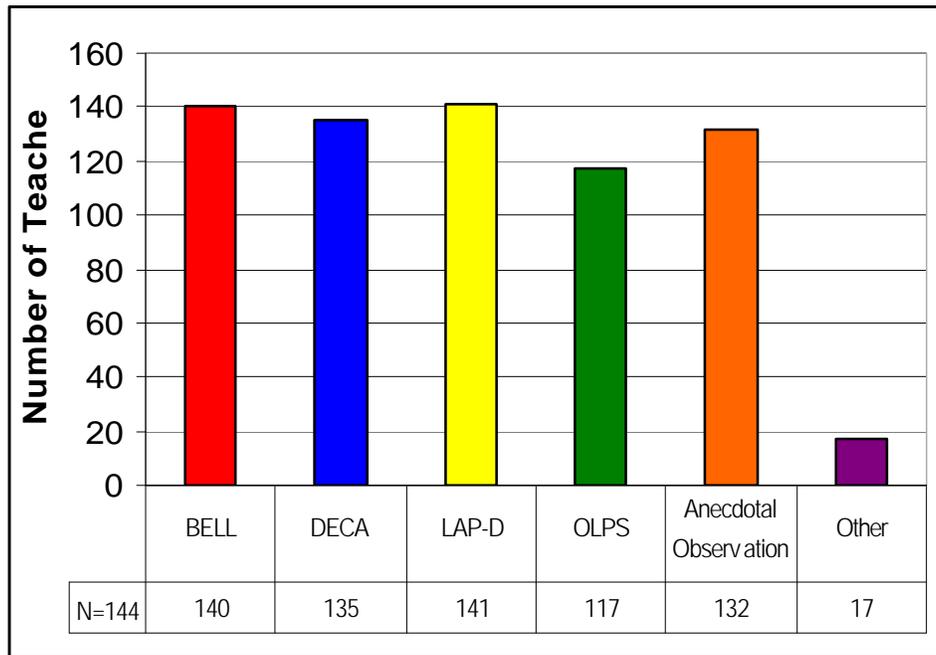


Figure 1. Number of teachers in the standard prekindergarten program who reported administering each type of assessment.

Four of the six Montessori teachers, or 66.7%, indicated that students in their classes speak languages other than English. Of those four, only two, or 50.0%, indicated that they had administered the OLPS assessment. Paradoxically, one of the teachers who had no such students in her class noted that she had administered the OLPS assessment.

Referring again to Table 3, the teachers’ perceptions of the student assessments may be examined. The mean item scores indicate that the teachers generally felt that they had received sufficient training to administer the assessment instruments (#16), and that the assessments provided adequate information about their students’ strengths and weaknesses (#19). The mean item response for item #20, which addresses the usefulness of assessment information in adjusting instruction to meet the students’ specific needs, while still positive, is somewhat lower.

Three items deal with the process of student assessment. The teachers generally agreed that the assessments are well integrated into the instructional program (#17), however the mean item score is the second lowest overall. Two other items which deal with this topic, and specifically

with the amount of time spent on assessments, are stated in a negative fashion. These read: “I have spent more class time on assessment this year than I did last year” (#18); and “The assessments take away from time that I should spend interacting with the students” (#21). The mean item scores for these two items were among the highest, indicating relatively strong dissatisfaction with the amount of time spent on assessment. It should be noted that there were differential responses to these items for teachers in the standard High/Scope program and those in the Montessori program. As might be expected, given the testing requirements of the two programs, the teachers in the standard High/Scope program were much less satisfied with the time requirements of the assessment process than their counterparts in the Montessori program.

The teachers’ responses to the open-ended item provide additional information regarding their opinions on the assessment process. As shown on Table 4, 43 teachers, or over one-quarter of the survey respondents, provided comments regarding this topic. This is an uncharacteristically high proportion of respondents to write original responses regarding a single issue. Their comments addressed problems with nearly every aspect of the assessment process, including the burden the assessments placed on the teachers and the students, problems receiving materials and test results, requests for additional training in administration of the assessments and interpretation of the results, and questions regarding the appropriateness of testing for young children. In addition, several teachers provided suggestions to minimize the impact of the time required for the assessments: hire personnel to administer the assessments; provide funding for a substitute teacher to take over the class during assessments; or test students before/after school is in session.

Concerns regarding the assessment process were also identified during the observations that were conducted in selected classes implementing the High/Scope model. Problems mentioned during casual interviews with the teachers included late-arriving materials, little training in score interpretation, and the fact that no results were provided after submitting the assessments for scoring by university collaborators. It was not possible to document evidence of administration, as the completed assessments were not typically available in the classrooms.

There was also considerable variation among the classes in the use of anecdotal observations that are part of the High/Scope curriculum. It may be recalled that these observations were previously used to complete Preschool Child Observation Record (COR) reports. During the 2002-03 school year, the observations were to be continued without completing the formal report. This seemed to remove the structure from the activity, resulting in inconsistent records. Some teachers used post-it notes to record observations, others had devised various paper forms to facilitate record-keeping, one mentioned using a tape recorder, while another stated that she remembered different incidents and recorded them later using the computerized assessment kit that is part of the COR system. About half of the teachers queried had access to the computerized kit.

Differences in assessment procedures were also observed in the three classes that offered variations of the High/Scope curriculum. The three year old class did not conduct any student assessments. In the Head Start class, Head Start assessments were administered in addition to those required by the standard program. On the contrary, in the ELLM class, ELLM assessments were used in place of the BELL assessment required by the standard program; and staff from the University of North Florida administered and scored these assessments.

Differences were also apparent regarding the assessment procedures used in the two observed Montessori classes. In one class, two Montessori checklists (i.e., language and mathematics) were used in lieu of the student assessments used in the High/Scope program. In addition, students were assigned home learning and a chart was maintained in the classroom showing completion of their assignments. In the other class, district assessments were administered to the kindergarten students, but no assessments were given to the prekindergarten students.

In summary, while remarkable consistency was noted in the implementation of the standard High/Scope model in the district prekindergarten program funded by Title I, this was not true of the student assessment component. Despite a reduction in the number of formal assessments required in the 2002-03 year, the time required to administer them was judged to take too much valuable time away from student instruction. Additional problems regarding the assessment process were also identified by the teachers, including late arriving materials, insufficient training in administration and score interpretation, and no scores or results provided for tests that had been administered and submitted for scoring. Nonetheless, the teachers generally felt that the assessments provided information to enable them to better meet their students' needs. In the classes implementing the Montessori model, differences were apparent in both the implementation of the program and the assessment component.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the 2002-03 school year, the Title I program assumed the funding responsibility for prekindergarten programs offered to disadvantaged children in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS). Due to changes in the funding and reporting structures, along with major changes in student assessment procedures, an evaluation of the prekindergarten program was requested. Additional attention has been focused on prekindergarten programs due to the recent passage of the Universal Preschool Amendment to Florida's Constitution. The evaluation is intended to examine the efficacy of the district's Title I funded prekindergarten program. In this initial year, the evaluation is limited to an examination of program implementation. In subsequent years, measures of student achievement will also be examined to ascertain the impact of the program on its participants.

The specific focus of the evaluation was defined by two questions. To answer these questions, data was collected from a variety of sources, including interviews with district staff, a review of district records, observations carried out in prekindergarten classes, and a survey of prekindergarten teachers. The results obtained from a review of the data have been discussed, and the evaluation questions can now be addressed.

1. Was the Title I prekindergarten program implemented according to program specifications?

One or two Title I funded prekindergarten classes are found in almost all of the elementary schools that implement schoolwide Title I programs. Nearly all of these classes offer the High/Scope curriculum supplemented by the Building Early Language and Literacy (BELL) program. This "standard" model is the primary focus of the evaluation. Findings for classes offering the Montessori model are discussed separately.

The teachers of the prekindergarten classes funded by Title I are experienced, well-educated professional educators. Over half of the teachers have completed graduate degrees, and they have an average of 14 years experience teaching in the district. The mean number of students in the standard High/Scope classes was in line with program specifications of 20 students. Nearly all of the students were eligible for the free/reduced price lunch program, which is a condition for inclusion in the program, however there were occasional exceptions. On the other hand, only 60% of the classes included a student eligible for the exceptional student education (ESE) program, as specified.

Remarkable consistency was noted among the standard High/Scope classes in terms of program implementation. Observations in selected classes identified adherence to the program specifications in nearly every case. Specifically, the classrooms were set up in accordance with the program design; structured daily routines were evident; and the variety of activities and adult-child interactions observed were conducive to the development of the students' cognitive, social, and physical development. Furthermore, the teachers' responses to the survey indicate that they believe the curriculum to be appropriate for their students and that the support they receive from administration is adequate at both the school and district levels. As such, it appears that the standard

High/Scope model is implemented according to program specifications in the prekindergarten classes funded by Title I.

Such consistent findings were not the case for classes implementing the Montessori program. It should be noted that only nine Montessori classes were funded by Title I during the 2002-03 school year. The variability found among the classes makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the program as a whole. Somewhat fewer than the 28 students called for in the program design were enrolled in the classes. The composition of some classes also varied from the multi-age composition of a typical Montessori class, with some classes comprised entirely of prekindergarten students. In addition, the operation of the two classes that participated in the observation portion of the evaluation differed substantially in their adherence to the model. Thus, it does not appear that the Montessori program is consistently implemented according to program specifications in the Title I funded prekindergarten classes.

2. Were all of the facets of the prekindergarten assessment battery implemented and utilized as intended?

The requirements for administration of student assessments in the standard High/Scope classes were modified during the 2002-03 school year, reducing the frequency of administration for two of the components. The assessment battery includes three formal assessments (i.e., the BELL assessment; the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment, or DECA; and the Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic Standardized Assessment, or LAP-D) which were all originally scheduled to be administered twice yearly, as pretests and posttests. However, the DECA and LAP-D were administered only on a pretest basis during this initial year of implementation. In addition to the three formal assessments, teachers were required to administer the Oral Language Proficiency Scale (OLPS) to any students who speak languages other than English in their homes, and to maintain records of anecdotal observations about their students.

Almost all of the High/Scope teachers noted on the survey that they had completed each of the required assessments. It was not possible to verify this assertion during observations, as the completed assessments were not typically available in the classrooms. For a class of 20 students, the average administration time required for the three formal assessments in this initial year of operation represents a total of 40 hours for pretests in the fall, and 15 hours for posttests in the spring. The teachers' survey responses indicate that they believe the amount of time required to be excessive, taking away from time that they should spend interacting with their students. Additional problems regarding the assessment process were mentioned both on the survey and informally during the observations. The teachers cited problems in the following areas: late arriving test materials, excessive time required for administration, inappropriate testing of young children, no scores/results provided for tests that had been administered, and insufficient training in administration and score interpretation. Notwithstanding these unfavorable ratings, the teachers generally agreed that the assessments provided valuable information regarding their students' strengths and weaknesses, and that they were able to use the information to adjust instruction to meet their students' needs.

The Montessori program utilizes its own method of student assessment. Of the Montessori teachers who responded to the survey, only half indicated that they had administered any student assessments. In the two Montessori classes visited, only one teacher reported conducting student assessments with her prekindergarten students. Thus, the assessment component proved to be as variable as the other aspects of the Montessori program that were examined.

Overall, the assessment component of the prekindergarten program does not seem to have been implemented and utilized precisely as designed. The time required to administer the assessments in the High/Scope classes has proven to be a burden on the teachers, and reinstatement of the posttests for all three formal assessments in the future will only exacerbate the problem. Additionally, prompt scoring of the assessments and feedback to the teachers could have substantially increased the usefulness of the assessment process.

In summary, the prekindergarten program funded by Title I appears to provide a firm foundation for the district's youngest disadvantaged students. The standard High/Scope program is an excellent example of developmentally appropriate prekindergarten education. Its implementation is true to the model, and remarkably consistent in the vast majority of the classes visited. The assessment component is the one troublesome aspect of the program. Anecdotal observations, once the program's means of tracking the students' progress, now serve a minor role in the assessment battery. In their place are a series of formal, standardized assessments that are perceived to require an excessive amount of the teachers' time and provide little useful data in return. Still, the program as a whole seems to operate as designed. Such conclusions could not be drawn with regard to the prekindergarten classes offering the Montessori model, due to inconsistent implementation of the model.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Continue to make available the resources necessary to provide high quality prekindergarten programs for the district's most vulnerable young children.
2. Given the concerns about the time required to administer the full student assessment component of the High/Scope model:
 - a. Reconsider the number of formal assessments administered to the prekindergarten students;
 - b. Provide training in methods to integrate assessments into the instructional program; and/or
 - c. Provide staff to administer the assessments.
3. Ensure that assessment results are provided to the teachers on a timely basis.
4. Work with staff from the Division of Exceptional Student Education to facilitate the inclusion of exceptional students in each prekindergarten class.
5. Provide additional support to schools and prekindergarten teachers offering the Montessori program in order to ensure its faithful implementation.

REFERENCES

- Florida State Board of Education Universal Prekindergarten Education Advisory Council. (2003). *Report and recommendations to the Florida State Board of Education*. Retrieved November 25, 2003 from http://www.upkcouncil.org/docs/UPK_REPORT.pdf
- Office of Evaluation and Research. (2003). *Statistical Highlights, 2002-03*, Miami, FL: Miami-Dade County Public Schools.
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APPENDIX

**BUREAU RESPONSE/PLANS OF ACTION
TO ADDRESS EVALUATION FINDINGS**

The following section was developed by program staff. It consists of a bureau/office response and plans of action which are to be (or have already been) initiated by the relevant bureau/office.

