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A Program Evaluation of Prekindergarten Program in One School District

Alicia Eubank

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A Program Evaluation of the Summer Voluntary Prekindergarten Program
in One School District

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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A Program Evaluation of Prekindergarten Program in One School District

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Abstract

I explored the potential impact of position and salary change on prekindergarten teachers in a public-school district in a southern state. I provided an educational, economic, political and moral/ethical analysis in partial support of this change for the district.

The current policy in the district is that the school year prekindergarten teaching positions are considered non-instructional. However, the summer prekindergarten program teachers are certified teachers as per state requirements. The new policy will make all prekindergarten teaching positions require state certification. This change would give them the financial pay and benefits included with the position change and keep them in the early childhood field instead of leaving for other positions.

While reviewing data concerning the teaching knowledge and practices of prekindergarten teachers with a bachelor's degree and without a bachelor's degree it was found that certified teachers produced a higher percentage of students ready to enter kindergarten. I make the case for this policy to ensure that highly qualified teachers remain in the early childhood program and increase the quality of the prekindergarten program.

Preface

Early childhood education is the foundation of our educational system. This is where professionals take over and give children their first explicit teaching experiences. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. I taught in the classroom for eighteen years before leaving the classroom to become a District Literacy Coach. I was out of the classroom for eleven years and then I began my dissertation studies. It reminded me why I received a degree in early childhood education.

All certified teachers, regardless of what age they teach, should be considered professionals. Early childhood teachers have long been excluded from being considered professionals. The value placed on early childhood education in our country has been ignored. I chose to study the early childhood program that was available to all young children in the district under study, the summer Prekindergarten program.

During my collection of data, observations, and interviews, I was again reminded how vastly undervalued and misunderstood our early childhood programs were. I loved to see the children learning and being excited about learning. They did not care what the data showed, they only wanted to show off what they had been learning or what they had accomplished. As I observed in the classrooms, I was given a chance to see the hope in our future; the children are our future. Watching teachers do what they love to do was an honor and convinced me to go back into the classroom as an early childhood teacher. I have been an early childhood classroom teacher since then.

During the data analysis I was able to see that there is data to prove what needs to be done to enhance early childhood education. Certified early childhood teachers had the skills to provide the students with what was necessary to become successful in

kindergarten. I felt more strongly that early childhood instruction by certified teachers and the importance it plays on children's long-term academic success have been ignored.

I learned that writing something that you are passionate about comes easily. However, remembering that the reader does not have the same background knowledge or context was hard. There were things I just assumed were known that I had to go back and clarify so that anyone reading it could understand. I also learned that when I thought I had finished a section and it was perfect, I was almost always wrong, and I had to go back and fix it. Writing is a process. It took time, patience, and support from others to help me make it all work.

As a leader, the lesson I learned is to not give up; the children are worth it. I let my dissertation sit on the back burner because I was upset by the findings. I did not help anyone by doing that. I had to decide to lead the way. I had to decide that the children in the district under study deserved an advocate who would fight for them. I had been in the administrative pool for years. I felt that being a school-based leader would afford me the opportunity to help impact more children. After doing my dissertation, I realized that is not where I can make the most difference. I need to find a way to get the information about early childhood education and its importance into the right hands. A leader does not need a title. A good leader is someone people follow because what they say or do is something worth working towards.

I hope to inspire others to start looking at early childhood teachers as professionals. I want to show the parents, administrators, and the community the value of investing in our youngest learners. I want them to know that if they invest in our children's education before kindergarten then we will have better success in the later

years. During the last years of my educational career, I am going to advocate for early childhood education, early childhood teachers, and young children. My goal is to make long-lasting changes in the early childhood education of my community, my state, and our country.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Lorrie Butler, Dr. Carla Sparks, Dr. Daniel Buckman, and Dr. James Schott for their leadership, guidance, and support as I pursued my doctoral degree from National Louis University. Words cannot express my gratitude to Dr. Terrace Brown for motivating me to finish my dissertation by supporting me and encouraging me right up to the very end. I would like to acknowledge the parents, teachers, and administrators who were involved in helping me gather and collect my data. I could not have undertaken this journey without the young children without whom there would have been nothing to study.

I would like to acknowledge my mother, Bobbie Lee Holden, and my brother, Robert Alan Eubank. Though they are no longer with us, I believe they would be proud of the work that I have done. I'm extremely grateful to my dad, Fredrick Wesley Eubank, and brother, Frederick Wesley Eubank, II. These two have supported any endeavor I have undertaken. Even though they did not know that I was completing my doctorate, they will be beyond proud as I become the first Eubank to earn a doctoral degree. Kara, the sister I gained in 1976, thank you for holding down the fort so I could finish.

To my children Mary Charlotte Klettner, Gracelyn Emery Klettner, Wrenn Charles Klettner, son-in-law Damien Thaddeus Boada, and my grandchildren Cade Alan Mills, Juniper Lee Boada Klettner, Atlas Grove Boada Klettner, and my future Boada Klettner grandchild, I want to acknowledge that you are my inspiration, my motivation, and my proudest accomplishments, thank you for making me a better person.

To all members of Lakemont Elementary's NTA, you were there at the beginning of my career and have been my supporters through it all, I thank you!

Thank you to: Lissa Campbell, who pushed me and encouraged me for years to complete my degree, she may not be here to see me receive my degree, but she was here to support me along the way. Gail Billingsly, a constant source of support and encouragement, thank you for always listening! Scott Zofnas, who did daily check-ins to keep me on track. Jean Wilson, my colleague turned friend who has supported me without question for almost 20 years. And last, but not least, to all my Terwilliger Twister colleagues, your support during this time has been appreciated, I love working with all of you!

And finally, to my Aunt Beth, who showed us all that age does not matter when it comes to fulfilling academic dreams and goals. You may not be here to celebrate, but your example served as a beacon of hope!

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to Lennox James Allen, who made me a better teacher, mother, grandmother, and person. He influenced countless people in his too-short time here on earth. Our world is a better place because of his time in it. He continues to motivate me to do better and to be better.

I miss you and look forward to the day we meet again. "I just love you."

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Chapter One: Introduction

The mission of the district under study was “We are committed to the success of every student” (citation withheld to protect confidentiality). The district under study served 27,000 students. The district consisted of 26 elementary schools, with 23 qualifying as Title I schools. In order to qualify as Title 1, at least 75% of the student population had to qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. That meant that 88% of the schools served significant numbers of students who came from families living below the poverty line. The student demographics of the district under study were as follows: 46% White, 33% Black, 8% Hispanic, 7% multiracial, 5% Asian, and less than 1% Native American.

The state Department of Education assigned a grade to each school in the district under study. This grade was determined based on the results of the state standardized assessment. The basic model used in the school grade calculation included student achievement in reading, math, writing, and science, reading and math learning gains for all students, learning gains for ESE students, and learning gains for low-performing students (citation withheld to protect confidentiality). Additional considerations for high school grades included grade acceleration, graduation rates, college readiness, and United States history. The school scores were then combined to calculate an overall district grade. State leaders monitored school and district grades. Schools and districts receiving state-assigned grades of D and F were the objects of state oversight until their grades increased.

During the year of my study, the district earned a state-assigned B grade. Of the elementary schools receiving school grades, seven earned a letter grade of A. There were

three schools that earned a B, six schools earned a C, and three schools earned a D. The remaining four schools earned a letter grade of F. Middle schools performed better than the elementary schools with one A, three Bs, two Cs, and one D. High schools also performed better than elementary schools, with four As, two Bs, and one F.

The prekindergarten program was instituted in 2005 by the state legislature of the state under study (citation withheld to protect confidentiality). State leaders allocated funding for the program to serve all children who were four years old by September 1 of the start of the school year. A child remained eligible for prekindergarten until they were eligible for kindergarten or started attending kindergarten. District and school leaders at the district under study had to meet guidelines put forth in the state statute regarding staff credentials, curriculum, attendance, and inclusion of any eligible child until the program reached maximum capacity.

Students could attend a program that went through the entire school year or a summer program. Based on the state statute, programs operated during the school year would provide at least 540 instructional hours. Summer programs would provide at least 300 instructional hours. Leaders in the district under study determined that the program would run three hours daily for the 180-day school year to meet the instructional hours requirement. The summer program would run nine hours per day for 33 days.

Even though district leaders made the decision to have the school year prekindergarten program last three hours each day, they wanted to provide parents with a full-day program. Therefore, they partnered with the local Head Start organization to combine funding to achieve the full-day program even though Head Start was an income-based program whereas prekindergarten was not. In the district under study, the Head

Start program provided a comprehensive program, providing more than just academic instruction. The Head Start program included addressing health and dental needs, nutrition, and parenting classes. The Head Start program had a long-standing relationship of providing early childhood education with the district under study. There were 30 Head Start/prekindergarten classrooms located throughout the district elementary schools. These classrooms served a total of 735 students, with 500 of these students being eligible and enrolled in prekindergarten. The remaining 235 students were students enrolled in the Head Start program but were too young for the prekindergarten program.

Students entering kindergarten in the fall who had not participated in the district Head Start/prekindergarten program, or any other state-funded prekindergarten program were eligible to attend a summer program. In the district under study, many of those who attended the summer program were Pre-K Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students. These students were enrolled in ESE programs during the school year, so they had not had the opportunity to attend a general education prekindergarten program. School and district leaders encouraged the parents of the Pre-K ESE students to enroll them in the summer prekindergarten program.

The prekindergarten teacher qualifications varied depending on whether the program operated as a school year or a summer program. School-year prekindergarten teachers had multiple options to be qualified. The state statute dictated that teachers during the school year would be qualified if the teacher had to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or a State Childcare Professional Certificate (SCCPC) Birth through Five Credential. In addition to one of those two credentials, the teacher also had to complete courses in emergent literacy training and student performance standards. In

place of the credentials and training courses listed, teachers could substitute one of the following: a bachelor's or higher degree in elementary education, an associate's or higher degree in child development or early childhood, a bachelor's or higher in prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, or in family and consumer sciences. Other options for teacher eligibility were a bachelor's degree or higher in family and child sciences and a minimum of 480 hours of training or experience in providing birth through 8 years of age childcare, a bachelor's degree or higher in special education, exceptional student education, or any other special education-specific field. Physical therapists and speech language pathologists were also qualified to be instructors in the school year prekindergarten program. The state had required prekindergarten training related to literacy instruction, and the district under study required this training for all teachers of Head Start/prekindergarten and the summer prekindergarten program.

The summer prekindergarten teachers were required to be certified teachers or have a bachelor's degree in a specific subject area. The certificate could be temporary or professional. The bachelor's degree had to be in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, family and consumer sciences, or elementary education if the teacher had been or was currently certified to teach birth through sixth grade.

Purpose of the Program Evaluation

I evaluated the summer prekindergarten program in the district under study. The purpose of this program evaluation was to determine the impact of the summer program on student kindergarten readiness. Kindergarten readiness relies strongly on the student's phonological and phonemic awareness skills. "As early as kindergarten, children's

phonological awareness and rapid naming abilities are potent indicators of risk for reading failure. Deficits or weaknesses in phonological awareness indicate that the student may have difficulty understanding the relationship between letters and sounds which is important for reading and spelling unfamiliar words” (Felton & Pepper, 1995, p.409). In my evaluation, I specifically analyzed the amount of time and emphasis placed on phonological and phonemic awareness during daily instruction within the summer program. Using data gathered from the summer program, the fall kindergarten readiness scores, and the data collected from surveys, interviews and observations, I determined if students had the academic background necessary to succeed in kindergarten. In addition, using school year data from classes that had non-certified teachers (instructors), it was clear that students performed better when they had certified teachers in regard to kindergarten preparation.

Rationale

The state required the district under study to provide a summer prekindergarten program to allow students entering kindergarten a chance to be academically prepared. This program was free to all students who were four years old on or before September 1 of every year. The district was responsible for providing students with the best possible education to prepare them for kindergarten. Early childhood education is the starting block for education; it is imperative that educators provide students with the tools to be successful. “Early literacy skills (e.g., phonological and phonemic awareness, print structures, decoding) provide the needed tools for decoding text and are related to subsequent reading comprehension” (Bratsch-Hines, 2018, p. 74). State leaders tied district level funding to having a successful program. If students at a site scored below a

certain point on academic testing, the state identified the site as a Low Performing Provider (LPP). Sites risked losing state funding if designated as an LPP for three consecutive years.

The district served over 2000 kindergarten students in public and charter schools. Students from low-income homes come to school with fewer academic skills than students from higher-income homes (Inglett, 2021). The overall percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch in the district under study was 67.2%, higher than the state average of 63.4%. The locations that housed the Head Start/prekindergarten programs had higher than 75% of their students qualifying for free and reduced meals, with five of the locations having 100% of students qualifying for free and reduced meals.

Phonological and phonemic awareness skills are the building blocks of reading. “Two of the best predictors of how well children will learn to read and write in the first 2 years of school are *phonemic* awareness (i.e., awareness of individual sounds in words) and LSK (i.e., phonics). Phoneme awareness is an important subset of skills under the umbrella term, phonological awareness (PA)” (Carson et al., 2022, p. 2). Students provided with instruction that includes these are more prepared to advance to phonics and then on to reading. “Performance below the 20th percentile in PA ability at 6 years of age has been linked to a 3-year lag in reading comprehension ability by 10 years of age” (Carson et al., 2022, p. 2). Early childhood programs, such as prekindergarten, allow students to receive instruction in these critical areas.

“In the last decade, our understanding of how young children learn and the critical importance of development from infancy through the early years has exploded” (citation withheld to protect confidentiality). Too many children are entering kindergarten without

the necessary skills to be successful. “As many as half of children from low-income families are not ready for the first day of kindergarten with regards to their academic and social-emotional skills” (Pianta et al., 2019, p. 1). This is setting children up for a future of struggles and even eventual failure if they cannot keep pace with the expectations of kindergarten. If the school district can provide children with developmentally appropriate learning experiences before they reach kindergarten, the road for them will be easier.

Long-term, the impact of having students prepared for kindergarten will increase passing rates at the schools in the district. As the children progress through high school, there is the potential to have more college or career-ready young adults. For the community at large, the impact is enormous. Children deserve the best education public schools can offer, and the most realistic way to do this is to provide a strong foundation for all the children.

Goals

The goal of this study was to determine the impact on kindergarten readiness for students who attended the 300-hour summer prekindergarten program. In the study, I focused specifically on early literacy skills (phonological and phonemic awareness), which are critical to the students' future academic success. In my study, I assessed the amount of literacy instruction, the strategies used to teach phonological and phonemic awareness, and its overall impact on reading readiness in the prekindergarten summer program. I used this information to determine whether the investment in using certified teachers during the summer prekindergarten program provided a positive Return on Investment (ROI) for the district.

Research Questions

I had several research questions for my study. They included:

1. How effective is the summer prekindergarten program in the district under study in preparing students with the skills necessary literacy skills to be successful in kindergarten according to the established goals of the state?
2. What is working well in the summer prekindergarten program in the district under study?
3. What is not working well in the summer prekindergarten in the district under study?

Conclusion

The prekindergarten program was instituted during the 2005-2006 school year in the district under study and provided academic instruction to rising kindergarteners free of cost. The availability of research specifically about the summer prekindergarten program was non-existent. I examined the 300-hour summer prekindergarten program and determined if the district under study was providing the instruction needed to make students successful on the state kindergarten readiness assessment. Early literacy skills are vital for future success in reading. By acquiring these skills before entering kindergarten, students are more prepared to learn the literacy skills needed in kindergarten.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Effective Pre-K programs can provide children with enrichment and support at an early age that can prepare them for kindergarten. School readiness is the most common goal of state Pre-K programs (Phillips et al., 2017).

High-quality preschool education can substantially increase children's chances of succeeding in school and in life. Children who attend high-quality prekindergarten programs are less likely to be held back a grade, less likely to need special education, and more likely to graduate high school. They are less involved in rhyme and delinquency. They also earn more as adults and are less likely to become dependent on welfare. (Kennedy-Salchow, 2005, p. 17)

The explicit teaching of phonological and phonemic awareness, as well as teacher qualifications are areas that allow Pre-K programs to prepare students for kindergarten successfully.

I began my literature review with an overview of prekindergarten programs throughout the United States. I discussed the various types of programs, funding, and return on investment. As part of my literature review, I discussed research on reading instruction, phonological awareness and phonemic awareness, instructional strategies, and teacher qualifications.

I found the literature for this review using the National Louis University and the University of Florida online Journal Storage (JSTOR) and Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO) databases. I included articles from peer-reviewed journals, trade publications, books, and white papers. The years reviewed were from 1994 until 2023, with most information coming from the latter years.

Prekindergarten Programs

The Organization for Economic Cooperation found that the United States ranks 42nd out of 48 countries in early childhood enrollment (Shapiro, 2021). Pre-K programs are designed to help students become kindergarten ready:

A wealth of evidence shows that children who attend Pre-K and other early childhood programs have higher pre-academic skills at kindergarten entry than those who don't attend, and the academic, social, and personal benefits of attending Pre-K can last long into adolescence and adulthood.”

(Shapiro, 2021, p. 10)

Shapiro estimated that to make universal Pre-K available to all of the four-year-olds in the United States, it would cost \$40 billion dollars. By definition, “Universal Pre-K is any state-funded preschool program in which age is the only criterion for eligibility” (Stanford, 2023, p .2). In 2023, eleven states (Alabama, California, Georgia, Florida, Iowa, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Vermont) provided universal Pre-K (Potts, 2023). There were four states (Idaho, Montana, Dakota, Wyoming) with no state-funded Pre-K programs (Potts, 2023). All other states had Pre-K programs. but the programs were not universal.

Prekindergarten programs varied from state to state. These programs were available mainly to 3- and 4-year-olds, with some 5-year-olds qualifying. According to County Health and Rankings & Roadmaps (2022), “Publicly funded Pre-K programs vary from state to state; they can be universally available regardless of family income or focus on specific populations, usually children from low-income backgrounds” (para. 1). Pre-K

funding is often paid for through more than one source. Sources that provide funding are federal, state or local governments, and grants.

Some prekindergarten programs operated as voucher programs because parents could choose private or public institutions using public funds. According to Ed Choice: School vouchers give parents the freedom to choose a private school for their children, using all or part of the public funding set aside for their children's education. Under such a program, funds typically spent by a school district would be allocated to a participating family in the form of a voucher to pay partial or full tuition for their child's private school, including both religious and non-religious options. (Ed Choice, 2023, para. 1)

The only requirement for using the voucher was that the parent chose a state approved prekindergarten provider.

Different states had different prekindergarten requirements for age and length of programs. According to Child Care Resource (2016), prekindergarten programs in Vermont required a minimum of 350 hours of instruction for all 3-year, 4-year, and 5-year-olds, as long as the 5-year-olds were not enrolled in kindergarten. The program operated for 10 hours per week for 35 weeks. In Florida,

To be eligible, children must live in the state under study and be 4 years old on or before September first of the current school year. Parents whose children are born between February second and September first can postpone enrolling their 4-year-old until the following year when their child is 5. (Florida Department of Education, para. 3)

According to the Division of Early Learning Annual Report, Pre-K programs could be in private centers, public schools and in the state under study, providers could structure their days in order to meet hour requirements (Florida Department of Education). The program operated for 540 hours if the program was a school year program. The program operated for 300 hours if it was a summer program.

States also varied on the quality of the Pre-K program. Alabama was one of three states that met all 10 of the National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER) quality benchmarks (Jacobson, 2019). The benchmarks included “structural aspects, such as ratios, class sizes and teacher qualifications, as well as process quality, including professional development and having a continuous improvement system” (para. 6). In addition, Alabama had demonstrated long-term academic gains as a result of their Pre-K policies.

The latest results from an evaluation conducted by researchers at the University of Alabama finds children who have attended First Class Pre-K — who are more likely to be black and from low-income families — have higher proficiency scores in reading (1.6%) and math (3.2%) through 7th grade on the ACT Aspire Assessment System than those who didn't attend the program. (para. 10)

High quality Pre-K programs produce high quality results for students.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) conducted research about the prekindergarten program in the state under study. The NIEER study found that 56% of eligible students in the state under study were enrolled in the prekindergarten school year program (2006-2007) or the summer program (2007). According to the Division of Early Learning Annual Report for the 2020-2021 school year, 136,142

students were served in state funded prekindergarten programs in the state under study. Most of these students (69%) were served in licensed private centers. Only 21% were served in public school programs. Due to funding constraints and enrollment caps, not all eligible students would be able to receive a spot. NIEER considered states as providing universal Pre-K when 70% eligible students were enrolled. In the 2019-2020 school year, Florida, Oklahoma, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Washington D.C. met this requirement (Stanford, 2023).

Kennedy-Salchow (2005) analyzed Florida's Voluntary Pre-K Program when it began. She detailed who was allowed to offer a prekindergarten program, who was responsible for funding and what benchmarks were covered. Private and public-school providers had the same requirements for class size, instructor qualifications, attendance, instructional hours, and student eligibility. The curriculum was at the provider's discretion unless the provider failed to meet the Readiness Rate minimum score of students passing the kindergarten screener. If a provider did not meet the minimum rate, they were put on probation and must choose from a state-approved curriculum. One issue that arose based on the program was participation. Since private providers were allowed to choose their students, this prevented all parents from having complete control over where or even if their child participated in the prekindergarten program. Prekindergarten providers had class size limits, meaning there were not enough prekindergarten slots for eligible students to attend within specific counties. This limited participation in the state funded Prekindergarten programs.

States and cities have worked to expand the participation in Prekindergarten programs. In New York in 2014, then Mayor de Blasio increased Pre-K funding to create

full-day Prekindergarten programs. “Backers say Pre-K can erase the disadvantages faced by low-income children who start kindergarten behind wealthier peers whose parents can afford spending thousands of dollars a year for private preschool” (Matthews, 2014, para. 10). According to Matthews, when then Governor Cuomo refused to allow de Blasio to increase taxes to cover the cost, under political pressure, Governor Cuomo found \$340 million dollars to provide funding for universal Pre-K for five years. Pre-K for All was launched in New York in 2014 and- school they were able to serve 53,000 students with a goal of 73,250 students by 2015 - 2016. Pre-K for All sites varied in quality of instruction, yet the overall scores showed that New York students were outscoring students in areas that had long standing programs (Goldstein, 2016).

Danielson and Thorman (2022) provided information about public preschools in California. The authors stated, “High-quality preschool improves short- and long-term outcomes such as school readiness, high school graduation, and earnings” (para. 1). During the 2018-2019 school year, California had three separate preschool programs, Head Start which served 70,000 students, the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), and Transitional Kindergarten (TK) which combined serve 260,000 children. The goal in California was to serve 70% of four-year-olds in state preschool programs.

Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2020) conducted a statewide evaluation of the Pennsylvania’s Pre-K Counts Program (PA PKC) to determine the impact of program all students in kindergarten. The Pre-K Counts Program was for children at risk of school failure due to lack of opportunities or environment. The authors of the study analyzed the academic skills of students in kindergarten and the differences in performance in kindergarten students who had been in the PA PKC for one or two years compared to

kindergarten students who had not attended any early childhood program in the two years before kindergarten. The authors found that there were positive effects in language and math skills, the two most important readiness skills in predicting future success. The study results were broken down into three groups – two years in the program (ages 3 and 4), one year in the program (age 4), and not in the program. “In kindergarten, children who attended PA PKC had significantly higher levels of language skills (Picture Vocabulary, $d=.30$) and math skills (Applied Problems, $d=.22$, Quantitative Concepts, $d=.22$) compared to children who did not attend PA PKC” (p. 1). These differences “were equivalent to an increase of approximately 4-5 months of learning, a substantial difference in terms of skills development, particularly for young children” (p. 2). The results were obtained in the spring of the 2018-2019 school year, after the children had been in kindergarten for half a year. “These results suggest that early Prekindergarten experiences in PA PKC may provide an important buffer, particularly for children from low-income families or who are otherwise at greater risk for school failure” (p. 21). The authors also determined that the outcomes for children between participation for one year as a 4-year-old and two years as a 3- and 4-year-old did not differ significantly.

Hustedt et al. (2015) studied the impact of the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Pre-K program on students who were in ABC in the beginning of their kindergarten year. In this single state study, assessment scores of students who attended Pre-K were compared to the assessments cores of students who did not attend Pre-K. The classrooms that were used for the study were randomly selected unless only one classroom in a district was selected. When that happened, the researchers exchanged that classroom for a classroom in a district with multiple classrooms. The researchers strived for a goal of four

children from each of the selected classrooms. The four children were also randomly selected.

The researchers collected data on the students' receptive vocabulary, mathematical skills, and print awareness. Results from this study showed "that ABC Pre-K has positive and statistically significant impacts on children's early language, literacy, and math development (Hustedt et al., 2015, p.210). Print awareness had the largest effect size. "The estimated effect sizes were 0.28 SD for receptive vocabulary ($p < .05$), 0.33 SD for applied math ($p < .05$), and 0.82 SD for print awareness ($p < .001$)" (p.210). Based on these results, the ABC Pre-K program was effective and could provide a model for a large-scale expansion of Pre-K programs in other states.

Return on Investment

Early childhood programs cost money. The benefits of providing early childhood programs are for the children and their parents as well as society at large. Although the benefits may not show up immediately, there are long-term benefits that have an impact on society (The Center for High Impact Philanthropy, 2015). "Studies show that participation in high-quality early care can help children avoid special education, grade repetition, early parenthood, and incarceration – all outcomes that imply large costs for government and for society" (p. 2).

State and local governments use tax dollars to provide funding for Pre-K programs. When tax dollars are invested in education, stakeholders want to know the return on investment (ROI). "The return on investment, or ROI, is a common performance measure used to evaluate and compare the efficiency of financial

investments” (p. 1). Researchers have calculated the ROI for Pre-K programs for decades.

Heckman et al. (2010) cited studies conducted as early as 2003 on the ROI of one of the first Pre-K programs, the High/Scope Perry Preschool program. The High/Scope Perry Preschool program began in the 1960’s and was specifically for disadvantaged children. Heckman et al. used protocols different from ones used in earlier analyses to address some of the concerns with data. Heckman et al. calculated the ROI and the benefit-to-cost ration of the Perry Preschool program based on the benefits to the students in the following areas: education, employment and earnings, criminal activity, tax payments, and use of the welfare system. They found that taxpayers received a rate of return of 5.8% on their investment. The researchers pointed out that “benefits on health and the well-being of future generations are not estimated due to data limitations” (p. 19). While Heckman et al. found a meaningful ROI based on their criteria, the factors they could not include might have significantly increased it.

A study conducted by Garca et al. (2020) calculated ROI of two preschool programs, the Carolina Abecedarian Project (ABC) and the Carolina Approach to Responsive Care (CARE). The ABC/CARE programs began in the 1970’s. Garca et al. used longitudinal data from the programs that followed the students from the time they entered the program through their mid-30’s. Garca et al. calculated the ROI of the program based upon the benefits of “enhanced parental income, health, and reduced rhyme” (p. 2535). These researchers did not include results of academic attainment in their study. Garca et al. determined the ROI for the ABC/CARE programs was 13.7%.

One factor that influences the amount of funds needed for Pre-K programs is teacher salary. Some states require certified teachers and other states only require instructors with childcare credentials, or a Bachelor's (BA) or Associate of Arts (AA) degrees. Arkansas is a state that does not require teachers in the Pre-K program to have a BA or teacher certification. Yet, when Hustedt et al, (2015) conducted their study and found that Arkansas has an excellent Pre-K program they admitted that "in practice most Pre-K teachers serving children in the current study did have bachelor's degrees" (p. 212). The pay scale for certified teachers far exceeds the pay scale for non-certified instructors. While state leaders who chose to use lower paid employees may have a higher ROI, there is an ongoing discussion as to who can deliver the best classroom instruction.

California's Transitional Kindergarten (TK) teachers are certified and have requirements similar to kindergarten teachers (Powell et al., 2020). Although classes average 20 students, some classes have up to 30 students. Hourly pay for early childhood teachers ranges from \$12.29 (childcare worker), \$16.18 (preschool teacher) to \$38.33 (kindergarten teacher). The authors make an argument to increase the preschool teacher pay scale. If leaders provided higher pay, there may be a reduction in staff turnover. There is "an association between lower turnover and higher program quality, with measurable effects on children's development where turnover is below 10 percent of teachers" (p. 13). The funding level for preschool teachers in California is not enough to retain high-quality teachers. "High-quality ECE is good for children, parents, workers, businesses, and California's economy as a whole" (p. 21). State and local leaders need to value the long-term ROI when they invest extra funds upfront in the program.

Reading Instruction

The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) identified four concepts as foundational reading skills. These components are phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding, fluency, and print knowledge. In addition, they have identified the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Phonological sensitivity begins around ages three and four. Hudson (2021) noted that explicit instruction in foundational literacy skills would provide all students with the best opportunities for reading. Preschool students have larger gains in phonological awareness when provided explicit instruction than kindergarten students (Callaghan, 2012).

Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are often linked together.

Phonemic awareness is actually a part of phonological awareness:

Phonological awareness is an awareness of sounds in spoken (not written) words that are revealed by such abilities as rhyming, matching initial consonants, and counting the number of phonemes in spoken words. (Stahl & Murray, 1994, p. 221)

Some examples of tasks in phonological awareness are rhyming words, identifying the first sound of a word, and knowing how many sounds are in a word (Schuele & Murphy, 2014).

The most complex skill in phonological awareness is phonemic awareness.

“Phonemic awareness is the understanding that words are made up of individual sounds or phonemes and the ability to manipulate these phonemes either by segmenting, blending, or changing individual phonemes within words to create new words” (Chard &

Dickson, 1999, p. 262). Phonemic awareness tasks are more complex and involve onset and rhyme and blending and segmenting individual phonemes.

Phonics and decoding allow children to understand the letter-sound correspondence and how to use them to read and spell. Phonics is the ability to “acquire knowledge of the alphabetic system and its use to decode new words, and to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically” (NRP, 2000, p. 2-90). Decoding is the ability to “use graphemes and phonemes to blend words” (NRP, 2000, p. 2-11).

Fluency is an important component in a child’s ability to read. “Fluent readers can read text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression” (NRP, 2000, p. 3-1). Repeated oral reading in the classroom with teacher feedback and guidance as appropriate can lead to improved fluency.

Print knowledge “reflects children's knowledge of the forms and functions of print” (McGinty et al., 2011, p. 255) It also incorporates many skills that are interrelated. Those skills include alphabet knowledge, print concepts, and emergent writing.

School readiness has been tied to effective preschool instruction in letter sound knowledge and phoneme focused phonological awareness. According to Mesmer (2022), a “school-ready” child is influenced by his phonological awareness. Carson et al. (2018) stated “These two skills (letter sound knowledge and phoneme focused phonological awareness) are the strongest predictors of how well children will learn to read when they enter school” (p.53). Carson et al., studied the effect of explicit instruction of the two skills. They had two groups in their study. The control group had 40 students including ten students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), while the experimental group had 50 students including 13 with SLD. Carson et al. found that students who received

explicit instruction in letter sound knowledge and phoneme focused phonological awareness during Prekindergarten performed significantly higher than the students in the control group.

Phonological Awareness and Phonemic Awareness

Early acquisition of phonological and phonemic awareness skills is vital for future success in reading. “The relationship between phonological awareness and early reading has been well established since the 1970s” (Rice et al., 2022; Stahl & Murray, 1994, p. 221). “Phonological awareness (PA): the ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language (including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables, or phonemes), independent of meaning” (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2002, p. 3). Phonemic awareness is a phonological awareness skill:

Phonemic awareness, the most complex part of a phonological awareness continuum that includes rhyming and segmenting words and sentences, is the ability to identify the phonemes (smallest identifiable units of sound) of spoken language, and how they can be separated (pulled apart or segmented), blended (put back together), and manipulated (added, deleted, and substituted). (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004, p. 8)

Children must have mastery of this skills to move to higher level skills in reading.

The National Reading Panel identified phonemic awareness as one of the pillars necessary for literacy instruction. Children benefit from having explicit lessons in phonemic awareness. “Explicit instruction in phonological awareness is likely to improve early reading for children who lack phonemic awareness” (Nicholas & Rouse, 2020, p. 9). Phonemic awareness instruction can begin as early as two years old. This

instruction should be given by the beginning of first grade in order to be effective in helping with reading success (Groth, 2020). Explicitly taught lessons in phonemic awareness provide students with a foundation to which further literacy skills can be added (NRP, 2000).

Phonemic awareness instruction directly impacts future reading skills. “When children moved to phonics without understanding phonemic awareness skills, children missed the building blocks of reading that phonemic awareness instruction provided” (Groth, 2020, p. 7). Children in preschool and kindergarten are developmentally ready to learn phonemic awareness skills. Teaching phonemic awareness explicitly will allow students the opportunity to develop the needed early literacy skills that will enable them to be successful readers. The delivery of instruction must be structured in such a way that the students will have repeated opportunities to have phonemic awareness skills (such as blending, segmenting, and identifying sounds) taught, modeled, and then practiced. Students that do poorly in phonemic awareness are more likely than their peers to become poor readers (Vaughn, Redding, & Linan-Thompson, 2004, p. 9).

Most children, once they move past kindergarten, are ready to begin phonics instruction. “Phonemic awareness training provides the foundation on which phonics instruction is built. Thus, children need solid phonemic awareness training for phonics instruction to be effective” (Bottari, 2022). Phonics instruction is when knowledge of sounds is connected to letters (Groth, 2020). “Phonemic awareness skills were shown to be necessary for the development of early literacy skills” (Groth, 2020, p. 36). If children do not receive instruction in phonemic awareness, they will not have the necessary building blocks to be successful in phonics instruction. “Once students are engaged in

phonics instruction, we can see the evidence of phonemic awareness skills in their reading and spelling” (Bottari, 2022).

Al-Bataineh and Sims-King conducted a qualitative study in 2013 to compare two groups of kindergarten students. The researchers wanted to determine if

Struggling students could show growth and close the academic gap with those students who enter Kindergarten and are strong in phonemic awareness as they progressed towards early literacy and reading abilities by receiving direct phonemic awareness instruction in small and large groups. (p. 75)

All the students had identical instruction in phonemic awareness. The struggling students were given 15 minutes of extra phonemic awareness instruction, three times per week. The students who were struggling were able to close the gap with the students who started the year strong in PA. Groth’s (2020) findings supported Al-Bataineh and Sims-King finding that targeted intervention can close the gap.

Wilkowski and Freeley (2012) evaluated an emergent literacy program used with 171 kindergarten students. They found:

The results of this study suggest that the early intervention program implemented in School 1 was successful in raising the level of performance of kindergarten students on measures of phonics and phonemic awareness skills compared with the control group. Following the program implementation, while both groups made progress, the students who received the additional intervention instruction achieved significantly higher scores. (p. 10)

Wilkowski and Freeley’s (2012) results were further supported by Al-Bataineh and Sims-King (2013) and Groth (2020).

Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are critical areas of learning for early childhood students as they provide opportunities for future literacy skill acquisition (International Literacy Association, 2023). Even though the importance of phonological awareness instruction is noted, it does not come without the risk of taking away from other areas of instruction. With this in mind, it is possible to teach phonological awareness while teaching other skills. Oral language experiences, including poems, nursery rhymes, and songs teach vocabulary and print knowledge skills while also providing experiences with sounds. Blending and segmenting of words allows students to distinguish between sounds and sound placement. Teaching alphabetic knowledge while teaching phonemes provides students with a deeper understanding of the way words work. Vocabulary and concept word knowledge is crucial so that children can understand words once they know how to put them together, without understanding what the words mean, the words are useless.

Explicit and focused teaching of one or two phoneme skills proved to be more effective than teaching three or more skills at a time (NRP, 2000). Teaching students in small groups increased students' abilities as opposed to whole group instruction. In classrooms where more instructional time (from five to eighteen hours) was devoted to PA students showed greater success. However, standardized assessments did not show the same gains in success as the study's experimenter created assessments did. Teaching the manipulation of phonemes in correlation with letters increased students' abilities. Preschool students had the highest growth supporting the use of PA instruction in Pre-K classrooms. Although computer instruction showed positive results, students taught by teachers had greater improvement.

“Phonemic awareness is a small piece of early literacy that has much larger implications to academic skills” (Groth, 2020, p. 48). The literacy skills acquired in early childhood have a direct impact on future literacy skills. “Early literacy skills have a clear and consistently strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills, such as decoding, oral reading, fluency, reading comprehension, writing, and spelling” (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2002). Alphabet knowledge, letter naming fluency, and phonological awareness are some of the vital skills that contribute to later literacy success.

Instructional Strategies

Children come into school in varying places based on prior knowledge and experiences. This means that there is not one teaching strategy that will meet the needs of all students at one time. “Good teachers bring into play a variety of teaching strategies that can encompass the great diversity of children in our schools” (International Literacy Association, 2019). The development of early literacy skills such as phonemic and phonological awareness are important. It is the job of a high-quality teacher to teach students how to use the tools that they have in order to enhance their thinking and reasoning abilities.

According to Gullo (2013), literacy instruction in early childhood is crucial to future success in reading. Placing emphasis on early childhood literacy instruction and using data-driven decision making will improve student outcomes. Documenting students’ abilities through assessment allows teachers to make decisions based on individual student needs. Collecting data from different sources allows decisions to be based on the whole picture. Since early literacy abilities can indicate future proficiency, using data to make curriculum decisions can improve student outcomes.

In 2014, the Hanover Research group examined the need for quality literacy instruction. In their publication, Hanover Research cited The National Research Council's (NRC) five classroom teaching strategies to improve the development of reading. Those strategies were:

1. Teach Essential skills and strategies.
2. Provide differentiated instruction based on assessment results and adapt instruction to meet students' needs.
3. Provide explicit and systemic instruction with lots of practice with and without teacher support and feedback, including cumulative practice over time.
4. Provide opportunities to apply skills and strategies in reading and writing with meaningful text and teacher support.
5. Do not just "cover" critical content; be sure students learn it – monitor student progress regularly and reteach, as necessary. (p. 13)

Using these classroom strategies, teachers have the ability to give students the literacy foundation needed to be successful in later years. District-level and school-level support are essential for the classroom strategies to be effective. Administrators should ensure that there is professional development for their teachers. In addition, the administration should collect/analyze data to monitor student progress. Teachers need to have time and resources in order to support student learning (Hanover Research, 2014).

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), best practices that are used to support literacy instruction for early childhood students are independent of the curriculum. Curriculum is what is being taught and instructional strategies are how

teachers teach the skills. Instructional strategies differ based on whether they are code-focused or meaning focused skills. According to Strang and Piasta (2016), code-focused skills include phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. While an instructional strategy may be considered a best practice, it sometimes depends on what the teacher does. For example, shared reading is the best practice for teaching early literacy skills. The report of the National Early Literacy Panel defined shared reading as teachers reading to and interacting with children using books. If the teacher focuses on the print, then it may not be an effective strategy for phonological awareness. Similarly, if the teacher focuses on the sound structures that are found in the words of the book, then phonological awareness would be the target of instruction. Meaning-focused skills such as vocabulary and meaning would benefit if the teacher provided instruction in word meanings and vocabulary embedded in the shared reading. Differentiation, skill combining (alphabet and phonological awareness), and mnemonic devices have been identified as best practices for teaching early literacy skill. (Strang & Piasta, 2016).

Teacher Qualifications

According to Workman et al. (2018), early childhood teachers should be properly prepared for working with young students. There are inconsistencies in states' universal Pre-K programs in teacher qualifications. In 2018, Workman et al. used New America's Education Policy program research and policy to examine the impact of a bachelor's degree on Pre-K teacher quality. The authors started by looking at the qualifications required for Pre-K teachers. They found:

Thirty-five state-funded Pre-K programs, or 58 percent of all state-funded Pre-K programs, require that lead teachers have a bachelor's degree, and 17 programs

require degree specializations in a field related to early childhood education or child development. (p. 7)

Teacher qualifications vary by state as well as by setting, public or other. “The chance of a young child receiving a highly credentialed teacher depends upon what state she lives in and what type of program she attends” (p. 8). Some states that do not require a bachelor’s degree or teacher certification may require the credential, Child Development Associate (CDA).

Workman et al.’s (2018) research found that there was a correlation between post-secondary degrees and the quality of Pre-K instruction. “A large body of research, dating back to the 1980s, suggests that higher levels of teacher education are correlated with improved teaching practice and child outcomes in early care and education settings” (p. 7). Raising teacher qualifications may improve student outcomes and teacher quality, however a degree alone will not guarantee the quality of instruction or the student outcomes. There are discrepancies in current early childhood preparation programs which cause inconsistent findings regarding the impact of requiring Pre-K teachers to have a bachelor’s degree. Another concern related to which specific bachelor’s degree should be required for Pre-K teachers, any bachelor’s degree or one that is focused on early childhood. (Workman et al, 2018)

Teacher qualifications directly impact the quality of the instruction that is provided to students. “While many factors determine the quality of a Prekindergarten program, none is as important as the quality of the teachers” (Whitebook, 2003, p. 3). Years of experience do not determine teacher quality. In Graham et al.’s (2020) study of

teachers in Australia, beginning teachers were not less qualified than experienced teachers:

Teaching quality is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that is theoretically derived from empirical research identifying a range of teaching practices that make a positive contribution to students' emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes. (Graham et al, 2020, p. 3)

Graham et al. also found that in some areas beginning teachers outperformed their experienced counterparts; although, "the findings do suggest that placing emphasis on accreditation, content, and availability of high-quality mentoring and ongoing professional learning for all teachers may be more appropriate" (Graham et al, 2020, p. 7). One of the conclusions from this study was that providing teachers with professional development targeted to individual's areas of weaknesses could increase teacher quality.

Whitebook was commissioned by The Trust for Early Education (2003) to report on the best qualifications for early childhood teachers. For her report, she reviewed eight studies and reports conducted from 1989 through 2001. Whitebook found that the studies and reports all had the same message: that teachers with bachelors' degrees and specialized training in early childhood development or education were best for teaching Prekindergarten. Whitebook found in seven out of eight studies that teachers with a bachelor's degree provided higher quality environments for learning that were comfortable and productive. In addition, all eight studies indicated that teachers with a bachelor's degree had more positive interactions with students and tended to be more sensitive. Advantages of having a bachelor's degree were seen in the classroom in

creativity of activities, positive behavior management, more frequent language activities and sensitivity to children.

In Alabama, Pre-K teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree. Not all states pay their Pre-K teachers the same as the K-12 teachers, even if the requirements are the same. In Alabama however, they are paid the same as the K-12 teachers. Jeana Ross, Alabama's secretary of the state's Department of Early Childhood Education, attributed the long-term success of Pre-K students to teachers being required to have a bachelor's degree (Jacobson, 2019).

Teacher Retention

Retaining teachers in Pre-K requires state leaders to think out of the box. Steven Barnett is the senior co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). He stated that, "When Pre-K teachers have bachelor's degrees and are certified to teach, they often move on to jobs in the elementary grades where they can earn more money — which contributes to high turnover rates in early-childhood programs" (Jacobson, 2019, para. 4). Some states are looking to pay community-based teachers an amount closer to school-based teachers. Other states have professional development requirements for Pre-K teachers, yet all states do not pay them for professional development in the same way they pay the K-3 teachers to attend. There are some states contemplating legislation to provide incentives for teachers to work with younger students or attract new teachers into the field. Tax credits, loan forgiveness and even scholarship programs are being proposed to keep early childhood teachers. The co-director of the Center for the Study of Child Care, Marcy Whitebook said, "State-funded

Pre-K programs have made the “most headway” toward addressing teacher compensation and qualifications” (Jacobson, 2019).

Retention of highly qualified teachers in early childhood should increase the effectiveness of the program. Requiring a bachelor’s degree for Pre-K teachers may improve the program quality if there is funding to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers. “If there is insufficient funding to pay salaries competitive with K-12 teachers’ salaries, requiring a BA degree for Pre-K teachers might lower quality by restricting the hiring pool or increasing teacher turnover” (Bartik, 2011, p. 139).

Conclusion

Pre-K programs vary from state to state, and from public schools to private centers. Funding, eligibility, and space all impact the way students receive Pre-K education. Teacher qualifications, explicit instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness and instructional strategies are three critical areas in prekindergarten programs. Since requirements for prekindergarten teachers vary, it is important to find what high-quality teachers look like in early childhood. As more states add funding into public prekindergarten programs, rigorous and appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies are crucial. “Children who have good phonological awareness skills in preschool are more than likely to become good readers in the early grades” (Callaghan, 2012, p. 18). Providing students with building blocks for later literacy instruction will allow children to be successful as they move on into elementary school and beyond.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In my study, I examined the outcomes for students in the summer prekindergarten program in terms of kindergarten readiness and compared them to the outcomes for students in the school year prekindergarten program. In this mixed-method study, I examined phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction and how the instructional strategies used by teachers impacted readiness. I collected data from teachers, parents, and administrators. I also collected assessment and observational data. This variety allowed me to analyze data from different perspectives in order to explore the impact of quality instruction on summer prekindergarten students.

Research Design Overview

I used a formative evaluation (Patton, 2008) to learn from the stakeholders' experiences associated with the prekindergarten program. District leaders can use the experiences and the data collected to inform the future of prekindergarten in the district under study. The data from my formative evaluation provided leaders with valuable information to make decisions impacting prekindergarten and prekindergarten students in the future.

In my study, an effectiveness focus directly supported the formative evaluation.

Patton (2008) stated two questions based on the effectiveness focus:

1. To what extent is the program effective in attaining its goals?
2. How can the program be more effective? (p. 301).

I examined data to determine how effectively prekindergarten prepared students for kindergarten success. I compared data from the summer prekindergarten program to the

school year program data. The results of my data examination enabled me to make recommendations on how to make the program more effective for all students.

Participants

There were four stakeholder groups who participated in my study. The first group was administrators. There were five administrators; three were district-based, and two were site-based. The district-based administrators were the superintendent, the Director of Head Start, and the Prekindergarten Director. The school principal and assistant principal were the school-based administrators. The assistant principal was new to her position at the school as of June of the summer of the study.

The second group of stakeholders was teachers. There were two teachers in my study. The state provided specific requirements for district leaders regarding the teacher/student ratio, 1:11, so thirteen students required two teachers.

Interns were another stakeholder group. Not only were they there to assist the teachers, but they were also there to learn and practice instructional skills and strategies. The interns were required to come on either two days a week for three hours or three days a week for two hours. Leaders developed the schedule so that only one intern was in the class at a time, and all had the opportunity to do some instruction during the literacy instructional block.

Parents were the last group of stakeholders in my study. Each parent received a survey at registration or during the first week of school. Because each parent received a survey, some families received two surveys. A total of 15 parents responded to the survey.

Data Gathering Techniques

I collected data through surveys, interviews, and observations. I surveyed administrators, teachers, interns, and parents. I interviewed teachers and administrators. I conducted observations of teachers in the summer and school year programs. I also used two sources of extant data. One source was assessment data publicly available through the state Department of Education website. The other was data generated through curriculum-based assessments from the Scholastic curriculum program, which district leaders gave me permission to use.

Administrator Survey

I developed a survey to give to administrators (See Appendix A). The survey was conducted using a paper and pencil format. I provided surveys to the principal, assistant principal, superintendent, district Prekindergarten Director, and district Head Start director. Participants completed the survey anonymously with four of the five (80%) surveys returned.

There was a total of nineteen questions on the survey. The survey included seven questions to evaluate the administrator's phonological and phonemic awareness understanding. There were three questions to evaluate the administrator's perception of phonological and phonemic awareness in the prekindergarten program under study. I included four questions related to professional development. I also included five questions to elicit how the administrator planned to track student performance.

Teacher and Intern Survey

I developed a survey for teachers and interns. (See Appendix B). The survey was provided in paper and pencil format. The surveys were completed anonymously. There

was a 100% return rate on the surveys. The teacher and intern survey included demographic information, multiple choice questions, questions that required a yes or no answer, and open-ended questions. There were twenty-six questions on the survey. The surveys had nine multiple-choice questions, six questions with checkboxes that could have more than one answer, four open-ended questions, and seven yes or no questions. The answers from these surveys gave me information about the participant's qualifications, teaching experience, level of understanding about phonological and phonemic awareness, knowledge about instructional practices, level of training provided for phonological and phonemic awareness, and teachers' individual perceptions about their strengths and weaknesses.

Parent Survey

I developed a survey to give to parents (See Appendix C). The survey was provided in paper and pencil format. The survey was available in English and Spanish. The surveys were collected anonymously. There were 15 surveys returned. Because only 13 students were enrolled in the program, this meant some students may have had more than one parent respond, and some students' parents may not have responded. The parent survey had fourteen questions. There were seven yes/no questions and seven open-ended questions. I designed many of the open-ended questions to elicit information from the parents that were specific to their children.

Administrator Interview

I conducted semi-structured interviews with four administrators: the principal, the assistant principal, the Director of Head Start, and the Prekindergarten Director (See Appendix D). I created the interview to focus on the early childhood department, the

summer prekindergarten program, kindergarten readiness, and phonological/phonemic awareness instructional practices. For the convenience of the participants, I sent them a copy of the interview questions before the interview. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the interviewees an opportunity to provide additional information they felt was needed. I designed the interviews to understand the district- and school-level administrator knowledge of phonological and phonemic awareness instructional practices and their expectations for the summer prekindergarten program. Additionally, I used these interviews to understand the connection between the district and school administrators regarding the summer prekindergarten program.

Teacher Observations

I observed teachers twice a week throughout the summer program (See Appendix E for a copy of the instrument). The observation instrument was created specifically for the prekindergarten program to focus on the instructional strategies, with an emphasis on literacy. The literacy emphasis was on phonological and phonemic awareness. Observations were completed during the morning literacy instruction time. The length of the observations varied from 30 minutes to an hour.

I observed teachers during the school year program approximately two times per week. The observations used in my evaluation were completed during the school year prior to the when data from the summer prekindergarten program was collected. The same data collection instrument was used for both programs.

Extant Data

I gathered extant data from the state Department of Education website and the assessment website of the district-selected curriculum program. Extant data from the state

Department of Education were the prekindergarten Readiness Rates for the students in the elementary school under study I used Readiness Rates for the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 school year prekindergarten program and the summer prekindergarten program. I also used extant data from the curriculum-based assessment of the Scholastic program.

I analyzed quantitative survey data from each participant group of surveys by compiling the responses and then comparing the percentage of times responses were selected. I analyzed the qualitative data from the surveys by compiling the responses and identifying similar phrases and common themes. With the teacher, intern, and administrator surveys, this method allowed me to identify the participant's depth of knowledge about phonological awareness and phonemic awareness and instructional strategies. In addition, on the administrator surveys, this method allowed me to determine how district and school-based administrators viewed the summer prekindergarten program. My analysis of the parent survey qualitative data allowed me to determine the parent's experience with Prekindergarten, their knowledge of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness, and to understand their child's specific needs.

I also analyzed qualitative data from administrator interviews. I transcribed the interviews and coded the responses. I identified common phrases and similar themes. The data helped me to understand further each participant's background and perception of the value of the prekindergarten program.

I analyzed the quantitative data from the two extant data sources to identify the percentage of prekindergarten students who were kindergarten ready. I used the assessment data and rubric from the state department of education and the curriculum

assessment data and rubric to determine the relationship between phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction to the students' kindergarten readiness level. I then compared the summer program students' readiness outcomes to the school year program students' readiness outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

I received written permission from the district research coordinator in order to collect and use the data. All parties were provided with an informed consent which they returned before receiving a survey. All surveys were kept confidential and maintained in a locked file.

I conducted the interviews either face-to-face or via phone in a private office. I assigned each participant a number and did not reveal their identities in my findings. I keep the transcripts of the interviews in a confidential location.

Observations were held during the regular school day. During the observations, I focused on the teacher or intern and the instruction they were providing students. I did not interact with students during the observations.

The assessments were given as part of the program and were not extra assessments. The state department of education assessments were given during the regular school day during the testing windows provided by the state. The curriculum assessments were given at the beginning of the summer prekindergarten program and the end of the summer prekindergarten program. The students were tracked using initials to maintain their confidentiality.

Limitations

The largest limitation of this study was sample size. The district under study only had one summer prekindergarten unit, so the number of participants was limited. Due to the nature of the summer prekindergarten program in the district under study, enrollment was targeted to students who participated in the school year Pre-K ESE (Exceptional Student Education) classes, so the number of ESE students in the program was higher than the district's percentage of disabled students.

Another limitation of this study was the parent survey. Since some students had more than one parent involved in registration or during the first week, there is no way to know if out of the fifteen returned surveys there may have been two surveys returned from the same student. This might have made a difference in the interpretation of the results.

A final limitation was the fall state assessment that had been given to all entering kindergarten students was not given in the fall of 2015. The test had been moved online and, due to technical issues, the state cancelled the assessment. This assessment had been used to provide prekindergarten programs with Readiness Rates. These Readiness Rates showed whether or not the prekindergarten programs prepared students for kindergarten. Without this additional data, the study did not have the ability to compare the summer prekindergarten students' results with other entering kindergarten students.

Conclusion

I utilized multiple strategies to obtain quantitative, qualitative, and extant data to analyze in my research study. I maintained the confidentiality of all participants. In the next chapter, I will describe the findings of my study.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the summer prekindergarten program on the student's kindergarten readiness. My study specifically analyzed the teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness and phonemic awareness, their use of literacy practices, and the amount of time and emphasis being placed on phonological and phonemic awareness during daily instruction during the summer prekindergarten program. "Correlational studies have identified phonemic awareness and letter knowledge as the two best school entry predictors of how well children will learn to read during their first 2 years in school" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 2-1). In addition, I looked at school based and district-based administrators to determine their level of understanding about phonological awareness and phonemic awareness and how they determined the success of the summer prekindergarten program. Teacher qualifications and years of experience were also used during this study to determine whether having high-quality teachers increased the students' kindergarten readiness rates. "The research suggests a positive relationship between postsecondary training, Pre-K teaching quality, and child outcomes" (Workman, 2018, p. 7). Scores from state assessments and curriculum-based assessments were used to determine if the students made progress during the summer prekindergarten program and if their progress qualified them as kindergarten ready.

Findings: Administrator Survey

The findings show that the administrators in the district under study did not know the importance of teaching phonological and phonemic awareness to Pre-K students. Even though three out of four administrators indicated that phonological awareness and

phonemic awareness instruction should happen daily, only one felt that the instruction should occur multiple times daily. When choosing materials to be used for phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction, all of the administrators chose magnetic letters. Magnetic letters are not appropriate during this type of instruction unless a student is making a connection. “In spite of its apparent simplicity, learning these arbitrary correspondences between letter forms and their names or sounds presents a challenge for many young children” (Roberts et al., 2019, p. 413). In addition, two administrators chose worksheets that would not be used for phonological awareness or phonemic awareness instruction. Worksheets would be more commonly used in phonics instruction. “Phonics involves the relationship between sounds and their spelling. Phonics is different from phonological awareness because phonics refers to printed text, whereas phonological awareness refers to oral language (the sounds we hear, not the letters we read)” (Kung, 2021, p. 5). (Please see Appendix F for complete results)

There was confusion about what should be taught first in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. “The development of phonological awareness is characterized by a child’s growing ability to be successful on increasingly complex phonological awareness tasks” (Schuele & Murphy, 2014, p. 8). Schuele & Murphy order phonological awareness tasks from simple to complex (Simple: segment words into syllables, rhyme, alliteration; Complex: onset-rhyme segmentation, segment initial sounds, segment final sounds, segment and blend sounds, deletion and manipulation of sounds). Two administrators thought letter sounds should be taught first. Administrator A justified her response by replying it is the “smallest part.” Administrator B said, “letter sounds are necessary to teach children to put sounds together to form words.” Administrator C chose

the correct response (sentence segmentation) stating, “This is the starting place for children to be able to segment. You go from big parts to smaller parts.” Administrator D chose a phonological awareness skill; however, she chose syllable or word segments which are not taught first. She explained her selection by commenting, “It is easy for students to hear syllables.”

When asked about letter/sound correlation and if it should be taught during phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction, three of the administrators said yes. Phonological awareness, or “phonology has nothing to do with the letters in our alphabet or the letter names (spoken or written)” (Wren, 2020, n.p.). Administrator A’s explanation was, “Letter/sound correlation has to be learned before you move to sounding out words.” Administrator B said, “This is what phonics is all about.” Administrator D stated, “Letter sounds are the foundation.” Only Administrator C chose no, letter/sound correlation is not taught during phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction. She responded, “Phonological/Phonemic Awareness is all about sounds and the manipulation of sounds, once you add letters, it becomes phonics.”

Administrator C was the only administrator who was knowledgeable about the Scholastic curriculum used during the summer prekindergarten and knew if it sufficiently covered phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction. The other three administrators did not know if the curriculum sufficiently covered phonological awareness of phonemic awareness instruction.

The administrators had mixed answers when asked about the amount of time that should be spent on phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction. Two chose “the majority of literacy time,” one chose “a small part of instructional time,” and

one chose “it depends.” Administrator C chose “it depends” and justified it by stating, “The length of time will depend on the individual students. While it can be covered in whole group instruction, different students will need different amounts of additional instruction in small group settings. As students become more proficient, the length of time necessary will decrease.” Administrator A chose “the majority of instructional time” and stated that “These skills are needed in order for children to read.” Administrator B also chose “the majority of instructional time” and said, “It is important that the students learn all of their letters and sounds before they go to kindergarten.” Administrator D chose “a small part of instructional time” and explained that “Writing, comprehension, vocabulary, and phonics are important to cover also.”

Of the four administrators, only two, Administrators B and C, felt trained well enough to instruct others in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction. Administrators A and D thought they were well-trained yet could not teach others. In regard to staff training, Administrators A and B felt that some of their staff were well-trained in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction. Administrator D did not know about the level of training of her staff. Administrator C felt her staff were well trained in phonological and phonemic awareness instruction.

Two administrators, Administrators A and D, did not know if the instructors from the state Early Learning Department (ELD) had sufficiently trained their prekindergarten staff in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction. Administrator B chose yes; the state ELD personnel sufficiently trained her staff. Administrator C chose that no, her staff was not sufficiently trained by state ELD personnel.

I had administrators provide feedback on plans to train staff. Two administrators, B and D, responded that they did not have a plan to train staff because it was not needed. Administrator A responded no; she did not have a plan in place. Administrator C responded yes; a plan is in place to train staff.

The next question on the survey was a follow-up question about staff training. If the administrator answered yes, they selected from a menu of training options. Administrator C was the only participant who responded yes. The responses Administrator C selected included: one day of face-to-face training, on the job, coaching and will use multiple strategies.

When responding about tracking student performance, all four administrators chose the state-provided assessment as their tracking instrument during the summer prekindergarten program. In addition, to the state assessment Administrator C chose observation, curriculum-provided assessment, and teacher input.

I asked the administrators how prekindergarten student performance would be tracked during their kindergarten year. Administrators A, B, and D chose only the state-provided assessment. Administrator C chose observation, the curriculum-provided assessment, the state-provided assessment, and teacher input.

When asked how many times the administrator would be observing the summer prekindergarten program, Administrator C chose that she would be observing in the classroom weekly. Administrator A chose monthly, and Administrator B chose that she would not be able to observe the summer program. Administrator D said she would observe one time during the summer.

The administrators provided different answers when asked how they would know how successful summer prekindergarten was in preparing students for kindergarten. Administrator A would use the state readiness score. Administrator B would use the fall state-provided assessment scores and the Readiness Rate. Administrator C planned to use data from the prekindergarten assessments, the Scholastic assessments, and the fall state-provided assessment scores and prekindergarten Readiness rates. Administrator D wrote that she would use the state assessment scores. (Please see Appendix F for complete results)

Findings: Teacher Survey

The findings show that the teachers of the summer prekindergarten program were very knowledgeable about the importance of teaching phonological awareness and phonemic awareness (Please see Appendix G for complete results). Both teachers had bachelor's degrees in early childhood and were certified teachers. One teacher also had a master's degree. The teachers both worked in the district, although one had been teaching for significantly longer and had taught the summer prekindergarten in prior years.

The teachers both thought phonological awareness and phonemic awareness should be taught daily at a minimum. As for appropriate materials for teaching these skills, they both chose picture cards, storybooks, and CDs. One chose unifix cubes and one chose small objects. The teachers chose sentence segmentation for the first skill to be taught and they both were able to explain their choice. Neither teacher felt letter/sound correlation was appropriate during phonological awareness phonemic awareness instruction. Again, both teachers justified their responses.

The teachers differed on whether the Scholastic curriculum sufficiently covered phonological and phonemic awareness instruction. The teacher who had taught summer prekindergarten in prior years had used the curriculum before. The teachers both chose that instruction should occur in varying amounts, both citing students' needs as a factor in deciding how much time was appropriate.

Even though both teachers were comfortable in their phonological awareness and phonemic awareness knowledge, they both said that they would like more training. They both chose modeling as the preferred delivery model for professional development. The teacher with less experience also chose coaching, while the teacher with more experience chose more opportunities for informal observations or walk-throughs with feedback. The teachers both felt comfortable assessing students, and planning for instruction, while being unsure how to explain the students' abilities to parents. Both teachers used curriculum-based assessments to group students. The teacher with more experience also used anecdotal records. Both teachers adjusted student groups weekly.

The teachers were able to provide multiple practices considered best practices in Early Childhood Literacy instruction. Again, even though they had a good knowledge of best practices, both teachers said they would like more training in this area. Both teachers chose modeling again as a preferred delivery model for professional development. The more experienced teacher wanted to have job embedded training while the less experienced teacher chose coaching again.

Findings: Intern Survey

Four interns responded to the survey (Please see Appendix H for complete survey results). All of the interns had graduated from high school and were pursuing bachelor's

degrees in early childhood education. Two of the interns had an associate in art (A.A.) degree in Early Childhood. None of the interns had teacher certification or prior teaching experience.

All the interns answered that phonological awareness should be taught daily. One intern believed this instruction should be taught multiple times a day. Two interns felt that phonemic awareness should be taught daily, while the other two felt it should be taught multiple times a day. When choosing appropriate materials for instruction, all four interns picked picture cards. Three interns chose storybooks and small objects. Two of them chose worksheets, CDs, and magnetic letters. One intern chose unifix cubes.

In deciding what should be taught first, two interns chose sentence segmentation and justified it with an explanation. Participant B said, "In phonological and phonemic awareness you start with the big things, so the children are able to hear the parts then go to smaller parts." Participant D said, "That is how my supervising teacher told me to do it." One intern responded that syllables/word segmentation should be taught first. Participant A said, "This comes before students are taught letter/sound correlation." Participant C chose letter sounds and said, "Kids cannot understand word parts if they do not understand sounds."

Two of the interns said letter/sound correlation should not be taught during phonological awareness or phonemic awareness instruction. Participant B said, "This is phonics and is a harder skill, they have to be able to hear the sounds before they can make the connection between letters and sounds." Participant A said, "Phonics is not part of phonological awareness." Participant D chose sometimes and explained that "If it is appropriate for the lesson." One intern said yes that letter/sound correlation should be

taught during phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction. Participant C stated, “Letters and letter sounds are very important for the students to know before they go to Kindergarten.”

Three of the interns did not know if the Scholastic curriculum covered phonological awareness and phonemic awareness sufficiently. One intern answered yes that it was covered sufficiently in the curriculum. None of them responded no.

Two of the four interns responded that the majority of literacy instruction should be on phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction. One intern felt it should only comprise a small portion of instructional time and one chose that the amount varies. Participant B answered that the amount of time varied because, “it depends on the lesson.” Participant A and participant C chose that it should be the majority of literacy instruction time. Participant A replied, “These are important skills for students to have in order to learn how to read.” Participant C explained that “for the kids to be ready for kindergarten they need to know letters and sounds.” Participant D chose that phonological awareness and phonemic awareness should be taught for a small part of literacy instruction and said, “There are other things to teach during literacy instruction like writing, comprehension, and vocabulary.”

The intern responses differed on how well trained they felt they were in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. Two interns said they understood it but could not train others and two said they need more training. All four interns replied that they would like more training. Three interns preferred online training or modeling. Two wanted more opportunities for informal observations or walk-throughs with feedback, and one would like one day (face-to-face) training.

Out of the four interns, three were neutral in their comfort level in assessing students' phonological awareness and phonemic awareness abilities. They could use the assessment tool and had a basic understanding of the results but could not explain it to parents. One intern felt comfortable assessing and planning instruction but not able to explain it to parents.

Two interns used curriculum assessments to group students and regrouped students after curriculum assessments. One intern used the state assessment in addition to the curriculum assessments. One intern stated that she did not group students.

When responding to a question asking them about best practices in Early Childhood Literacy Instruction, the interns provided a wide list of activities. Participant A replied, “reading, writing, listening, and speaking” as best practices. Participant B listed, “using strategies like shared reading, word work, centers, and read alouds.” Participant C’s response included, “Book knowledge, print knowledge, letter and sound correlation.” Participant D responded, “Teaching skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.”

Similar to the responses of the teachers, all four interns said they would like more training in best practices in Early Childhood Literacy Instruction. Three interns preferred online training or modeling. Two of those interns also chose more opportunities for informal observations or walk-throughs with feedback.

Findings: Parent Survey

I distributed parent surveys during student registration and the first week of school. I received 15 responses (Please see Appendix I for complete results). When asked if their child had been to school before, 76.9% said yes. Only 23.1% of the parents

responded no. Based on the answers to where the students attended school, eight students attended Pre-K ESE in the district under study, and two attended local daycare centers.

There were three parents who stated their students had siblings who attended the district under study's summer prekindergarten program in previous years. When looking at where and when those siblings attended, there were only two siblings, and both attended Elementary School A. One attended four years prior, and one in 2013-2014.

When I asked about their children's academic strengths, twelve parents responded. Several parents responded that their child's strengths varied from puzzles and cutting to reading and writing. Three parents responded that their children could count. Two parents said their children knew their names. One student's strengths were songs and books. When asked about their children's academic weaknesses, four parents listed letters, three listed math, and two listed reading. One parent stated that their child did not listen while another parent said their child did not follow directions.

I asked the students' parents what they knew about phonological awareness. Of the 15 responses, two parents said they knew what phonological awareness instruction was. There were two parents who previously had children in the prekindergarten program. When asked about phonemic awareness, five parents said they knew what phonemic awareness instruction was.

I asked parents what they wanted their children to learn during the summer prekindergarten program. The majority of parents (four) replied that they wanted their children to be ready for kindergarten. Three parents wanted their children to learn to read, one stated they wanted their child to learn math, and the parent who responded that the child did not listen wanted the child to learn to be a good listener.

I asked parents if they would be willing to come in for training to help their child at home. There were six parents who responded that they would come in for training on how to help their children at home. Out of the six, two of them were parents from previous years. Four parents answered that their students would attend Elementary School A in kindergarten.

The next question I asked in the parent survey was where their child would attend kindergarten. There was a total of ten responses stating their children would attend kindergarten in one of the schools in the district under study. Two parents responded that their children would be attending a local charter school.

The next question I asked was whether their child had an Individual Education Plan (IEP). There were eight parents who answered that their child had an IEP, while two answered that their children did not have an IEP. There were three parents who did not know if their children had an IEP.

On the last item of the parent survey, I allowed parents to add any comments or explanations they would like to give. Only two parents added additional comments. One comment was a question about what the child would learn in Pre-K. The other comment was about how the participant's child liked to play.

Findings: Administrator Interview

I interviewed four administrators (Please see Appendix J for complete results). Only one of the four administrators, the Prekindergarten Director, had a degree in Early Childhood. The two site-based administrators had bachelor's degrees in Elementary Education and master's degrees in educational leadership. The Director of Head Start had a bachelor's degree in Family and Consumer Sciences. The Prekindergarten Director said,

"I actually left the [a university] to get my degree in Early Childhood Education because [that university] did not offer it. Yes, it was a long time ago." The Director of Head Start stated, "I have been in charge of the Head Start program for a long time. Even though my degree is not in Early Childhood, I feel my experience compensates for that." The principal and assistant principal stated their degrees and did not expand further.

Three of the four administrators did not feel that the district placed an emphasis on early childhood education. The principal stated, "I obviously have an emphasis on Early Childhood education since my school has six Head Start classes and two Pre-K ESE classes. I wish we could serve more of our own students before they entered kindergarten." The assistant principal said, "Early Childhood is rarely mentioned at my district meetings." The Prekindergarten Director explained, "Sometimes I feel like the district only looks at Head Start as their Early Childhood Education. They do not offer the school year prekindergarten program to anyone except for Head Start students. This eliminates many students from having the benefit of receiving any Early Childhood Education services with the district. I go to meetings, and I feel like I am the only one that sees the need for prekindergarten for students that do not qualify for Head Start. I have spoken to two principals who begged to have programs at their locations and the district told them they could not have them." The Director of Head Start did feel that the district placed an emphasis on early childhood education. She answered, "We serve 340 students during the school year. We could definitely serve more students as we always have a waiting list."

Out of the four administrators, three felt like there were highly qualified people in place for early childhood education. The Prekindergarten Director said,

The teachers I hired for the summer prekindergarten program are highly qualified. In addition to having the required degree, they receive the states prekindergarten trainings. I am also very hands on and provide modeling, coaching and embedded training. In addition to the monthly required observations, I make observations twice a week for the sole purpose of giving teachers the opportunity to reflect and grow. During the school year I make monthly observations as required by the state.

The principal answered, “One of my Pre-K ESE teachers is certified in Early Childhood, the other one has a temporary certificate in Early Childhood. All of my Head Start teachers have at least an AA in Early Childhood, and two of them have a bachelor's degree in early childhood.” The Director of Head Start explained,

I have a lot of teachers with college degrees. Head Start requires a certain percentage of teachers to have a bachelor's degree. I do have a few master's degrees. My teachers who do not have at least an AA are taking classes towards their degree; Head Start is paying for that so more of our teachers will have degrees.

The assistant principal was the only administrator that chose maybe because,

I am new to the school, so I am not sure who is teaching what. I think my principal would make sure that there are qualified people in place. This is something I will definitely look into in the fall. I do know the two summer prekindergarten teachers are qualified.

When asked how district leaders could improve the summer prekindergarten program, the responses varied. The principal said, “The district should expand the

program so more students can benefit. Also, they need to market the program, no one knows about it.” The Prekindergarten Director stated,

The district needs to do a better job of marketing the program as well as housing the program at multiple sites in the district. In my opinion, every school would fill at least one summer prekindergarten class if given the opportunity.

The Director of Head Start believed, “Having sites on the east side of Gainesville would allow more east side students to participate. Transportation is a problem and with only one west side location many students are excluded from the program.” The assistant principal replied, “I did not know anything about the program until I came to this school. So, I think they need to tell people about the program.”

When asked about the ways district leaders marketed the summer prekindergarten program, three administrators said flyers, two said “word of mouth,” and one answered that she did not know. The principal stated,

There needs to be a larger campaign so more students can come and get some preparation before school starts in August. The small class sizes allow for the teachers to have a lot of time to individualize instruction for the students.

The Director of Head Start said, “I know the prekindergarten department brings flyers for us to display. I am not sure how else it is marketed.” The Prekindergarten Director explained her role in the marketing of the program. She explained that she, “created and delivered flyers for all of the elementary schools and district offices as well as for the Pre-K ESE students.” Although the assistant principal expressed that she did not know how the program was marketed, she went on to say,

It seems like they should use any method available in order to get the word out. This is a fabulous free summer program. I know there are a lot of parents that would utilize this program if they knew more about it. It is great for working families because it is five days a week and longer than traditional school days.

All four administrators agreed that the summer prekindergarten program should be expanded to more locations. Three administrators went on to explain their responses. The principal stated, "I love having it here, I wish we had more units because we definitely have more students coming to kindergarten that could use the additional support." The assistant principal said, "This is a great program. I would think every elementary school would benefit from having this program at their location to prepare their incoming kindergarten students." The Prekindergarten Director reiterated, "Like I said, I think every school should have at least one unit, preferably two so teachers have someone to collaborate with during the summer." The Director of Head Start did not expand her answer.

In reference to the district leaders' expectations for the students who completed the summer prekindergarten program, three answers were very similar. The principal said, "I do not know what the district's expectations are." The assistant principal also stated, "I have no idea. I would assume that they would be kindergarten ready." The Prekindergarten Director had a similar response. She replied, "I do not know of any specific expectations. I know they have the program because it is required by the state." The Director of Head Start explained, "I think the district wants children to pass the kindergarten readiness assessment in the fall."

In discussing how the future success of the summer prekindergarten students were being monitored, two administrators said they did not know how the district would monitor the success of these students. One administrator answered that the state assessment and the readiness rates were how success would be monitored. The Prekindergarten Director explained, “It is my job to monitor the success of the individual students as well as the prekindergarten program. I will monitor the student success using the state assessment data after the assessment is given in the fall. Then, I will use the readiness rates given to the program by the state to determine the overall success of the program. To date, no one from the district has asked for any data regarding students’ success after Prekindergarten.”

All the administrators felt that there were staff in place who were able to teach Best Practices in Early Childhood Literacy Instruction. Their responses to explain this varied. The principal said, “I feel my teachers are current on their knowledge of Best Practices. This is something we focus on as a whole during the school year.” The assistant principal said, “I say yes, but that is based on assuming my principal made sure that this is the case. I know she has a focus on Best Practices in Literacy Instruction because it is part of our School Improvement plan.” The Director of Head Start explained, “My teachers get state prekindergarten training in all of these.” The Prekindergarten Director explained how the summer teachers were regarding Best Practices in Early Childhood Literacy Instruction by saying, “In the Summer Prekindergarten, the teachers are able to teach using Best Practices. This is part of the pre-planning professional development. I can also see them using the techniques in the classroom.”

When asked about the biggest concern for incoming kindergarteners, all the administrators mentioned a lack of academic skills. The principal said, “Children are coming to school with limited exposure to academics. This leads to them having behavior problems once they come to school. If they could come and learn how schools work and get some academic preparation before kindergarten, things would be better for everyone.” The assistant principal stated, “I think that being unprepared academically is a major part of why kindergarten students have behavior problems.” The Director of Head Start replied, “Children need to be academically ready for kindergarten or they will be behind from the start.” The Prekindergarten Director responded, “I know we have many students who enter kindergarten very far behind because they have had no formal academic instruction. Many students do attend daycare, but they are not giving them academic preparation.”

I asked each administrator how the summer prekindergarten program addressed the concern of incoming kindergarten student’s academic skills. The principal said, “As I mentioned, it would help them by at least giving them exposure to some academics so when they start, they have some recognition and maybe even a little confidence in knowing something.” The assistant principal replied, “Students could come in and get to know the school and how to act in school. Along with that, they have the opportunity to learn some vital skills necessary to be successful in kindergarten.” The Director of Head Start stated, “It gives them a chance to learn the necessary skills to be ready for kindergarten.” The Prekindergarten Director explained, “We are able to fill in that gap and provide them with some academic instruction that will help out them ahead when they walk into Kindergarten.”

I asked each administrator if she wanted to add any additional comments. The principal said she had one concern about the summer prekindergarten program and that was, “My only concern about the summer prekindergarten program is the length of the school day. It is a very long day for the students and teachers.” The assistant principal stated,

Since I am new to administration, I do not know a lot about the early childhood programs in the district. I will probably have more questions or comments as I learn more. Thank you for making me realize how important the summer prekindergarten program is!

The Director of Head Start added,

During the school year, many of our Head Start classes are also prekindergarten classes. We take the same assessments, and our goal is to prepare the children for kindergarten. Unfortunately, our students are out all summer, and they sometimes forget what they learned and do not perform as well on the state assessment in the fall as some of the summer prekindergarten students.

The Prekindergarten Director said, “I could talk all day about early childhood education and how our district could make improvements, but I do not want to keep you.”

Finding: Observations of Schoolyear Prekindergarten Program Instructors

I conducted 80 observations during the school year combined HeadStart and prekindergarten classrooms at the elementary school under study (Please see Appendix K for complete results). Observations were completed from August to May and varied from thirty minutes to an hour. All observations occurred during the literacy instructional block. I identified them as Class A, Class B, Class C, and Class D in my findings. Class

A and Class B had instructors with bachelor's degrees in early childhood education. Class C and Class D had instructors with associate in arts (AA) degrees. None of the instructors had obtained their state teaching certification.

Most observations began between 8:30 AM and 9:30 AM and ended between 9:00 AM and 10:00 AM. In all the observations, a teacher and a paraprofessional were present. Another adult, most often the site administrator, was present during approximately 34% of all observations.

The number of observations each month varied throughout the school year. Fewer observations were conducted in August, November, and December (15% combined) due to fewer school days in those months. The highest percentage of observations (20%) occurred in October. The remaining percentage of observations occurred throughout the rest of the school year months.

Observations occurred throughout the week, with 30% of the observations conducted on Fridays. Observations on Tuesdays and Thursdays accounted for 20% of the total. The remaining 30% of observations were evenly split between Mondays and Wednesdays.

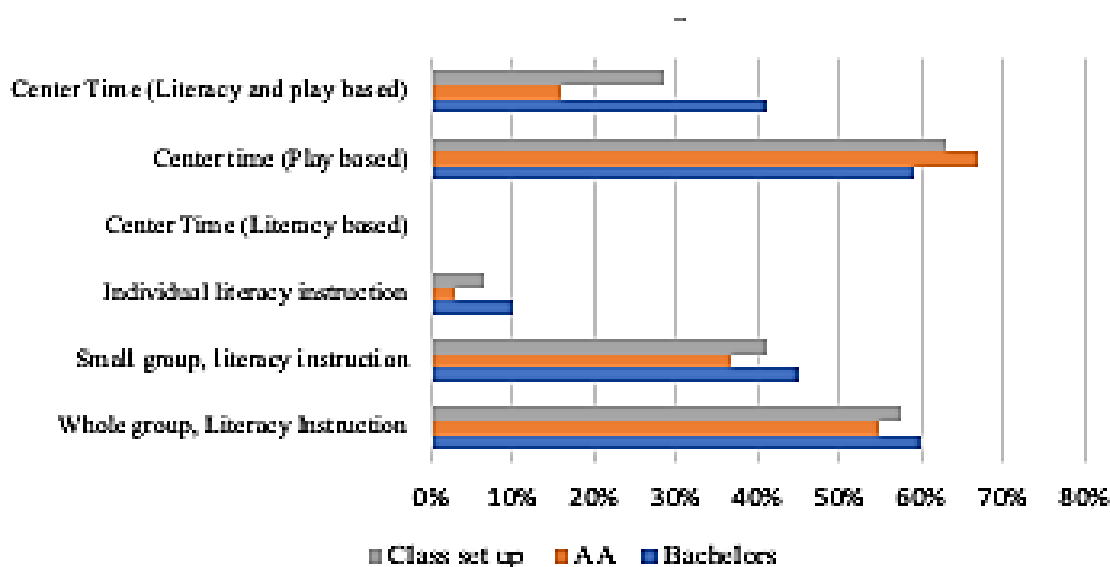
Class A was most frequently observed and accounted for 28% of all observations. Class B accounted for 27% of the observations. Observations of Class C constituted 24% of all observations, and Class D was the least observed, with 21% of all observations. During 54% of the observations, 10-15 students were present. In 31% of the observations, more than 15 students were present, and in 15%, less than ten students were present.

I conducted all observations during the literacy instruction block. Instructors divided the block between whole group instruction, small group instruction, individual instruction, and center time.

As is noted in Figure 1, there were slight discrepancies between the classes where teachers had a bachelor's degree (Class A and Class B) and classes where teachers had an associate in arts degree (Class C and Class D). The most notable discrepancy was the difference in center time. Class A and B had significantly more literacy play-based centers, whereas Class C and D had more non-literacy play-based centers. An additional discrepancy of note was the lack of individualized instruction in Classes C and D.

Figure 1

Class Set Up

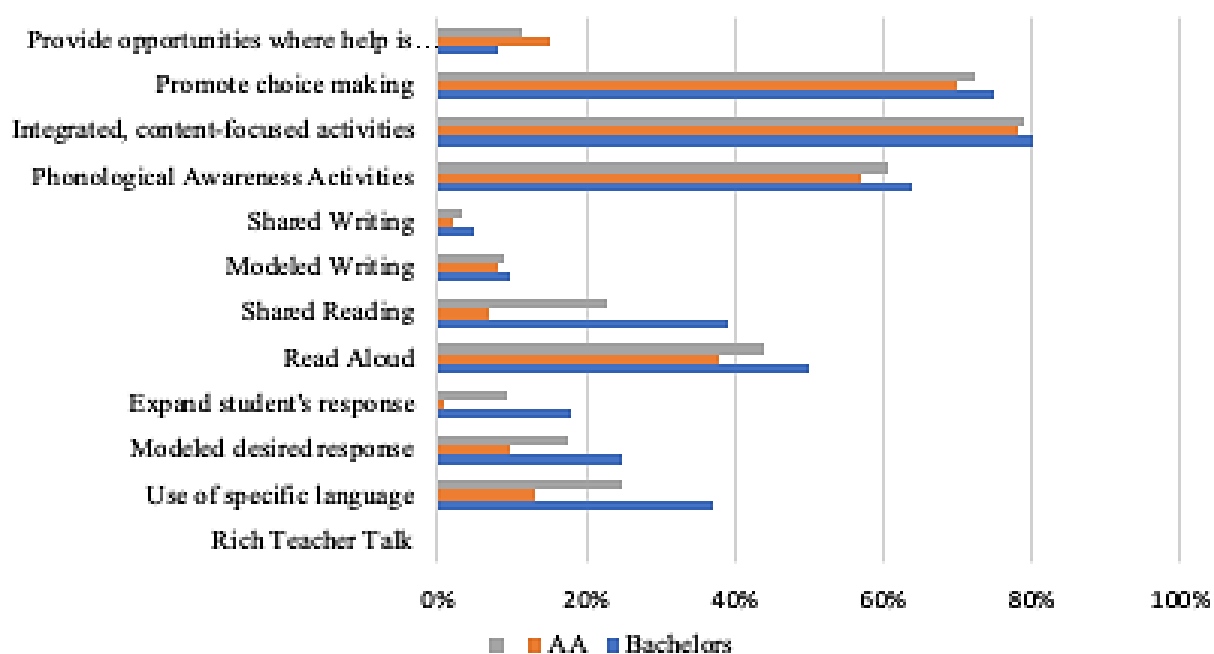


In Figure 2, I provided the percentage of times specific strategies were used and noted during an observation. Many categories had small discrepancies between Classes A and B and Classes C and D. Since all classrooms used the same curriculum, some of the daily instruction was similar. Classes C and D provided more opportunities for the

students when they needed help. I observed instructors in Classes A and B using effective literacy instructional strategies more frequently than instructors in Classes C and D. I noted that using specific language and modeling desired responses were used much more frequently in Classes A and B. The area of shared reading was where the instructors had the biggest discrepancy. I observed shared reading 39% of the time in Classes A and B compared to 7% in Classes C and D. One strategy, Rich teacher talk, did not occur during any observation. I noted in most observations the use of integrated, content-focused activities (79%), promoting choice-making (73%), and phonological awareness activities (61%).

Figure 2

Effective Literacy Instruction

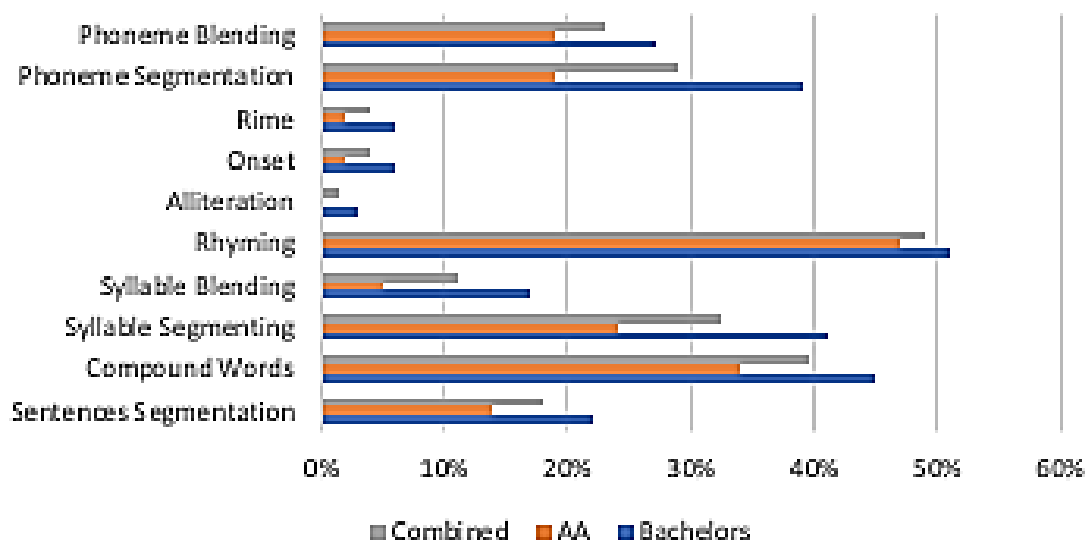


During the observations, I noted specific phonological awareness activities. These activities occurred in whole group instruction, small group instruction, individual instruction, or centers. Rhyming was the most noted activity at an average of 49% of the

observations. Alliteration was only observed in Classes A and B and in only 3% of the observations. I observed the use of compound words in Classes A and B 45% of the time and in Classes C and D 34% of the time. I noted syllable segmenting and phoneme segmentation more often in Classes A and B (41% and 39%) than in Classes C and D (24% and 19%). Instructors did not often use the phonological awareness activities of onset and rhyme. See Figure 3.

Figure 3

Phonological Awareness Activities



Findings: Observations of Summer Prekindergarten Program Teachers

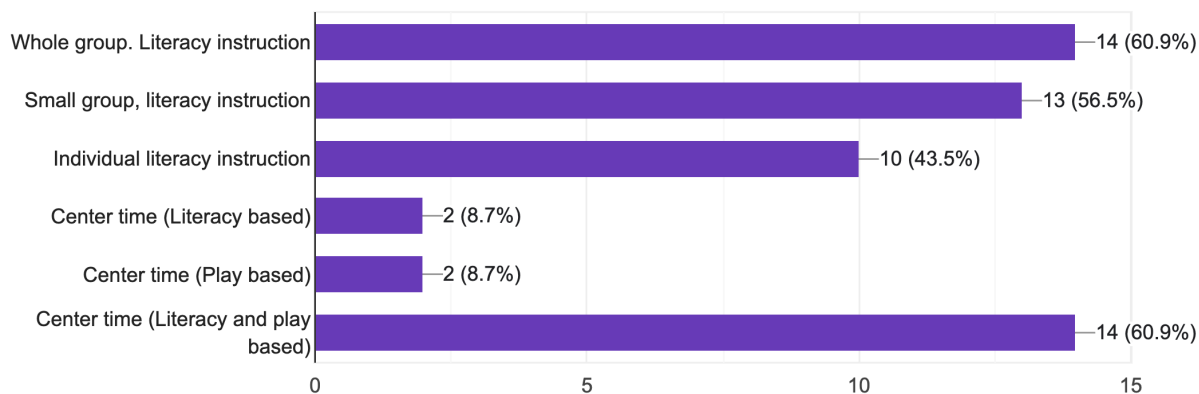
I conducted 23 observations of the summer prekindergarten class at the elementary school under study. Please see Appendix L for complete results. Observations were completed in June and July and varied from thirty minutes to an hour. All observations occurred during the literacy instructional block. There was only one summer prekindergarten class.

There were two certified teachers for the class. Both teachers had bachelor's degrees in early childhood education, and one had a master's degree in education. Four student interns rotated through the classroom during the week.

Most of the observations, 61%, began between 8:00 AM and 9:30 AM and ended between 9:00 AM and 10:00 AM. In all the observations, a teacher and a paraprofessional were present. Interns were present in 78% of the observations. There were no other adults present during any of the documented observations.

The month of June accounted for 52% of the observations, and July accounted for 48%. I did most observations on Mondays (22%), Tuesdays (22%), and Thursdays (22%). Wednesdays and Fridays each had 17% of the observations. In 87% of the observations, 10-15 students were present. In the remaining 13%, there were less than ten students present.

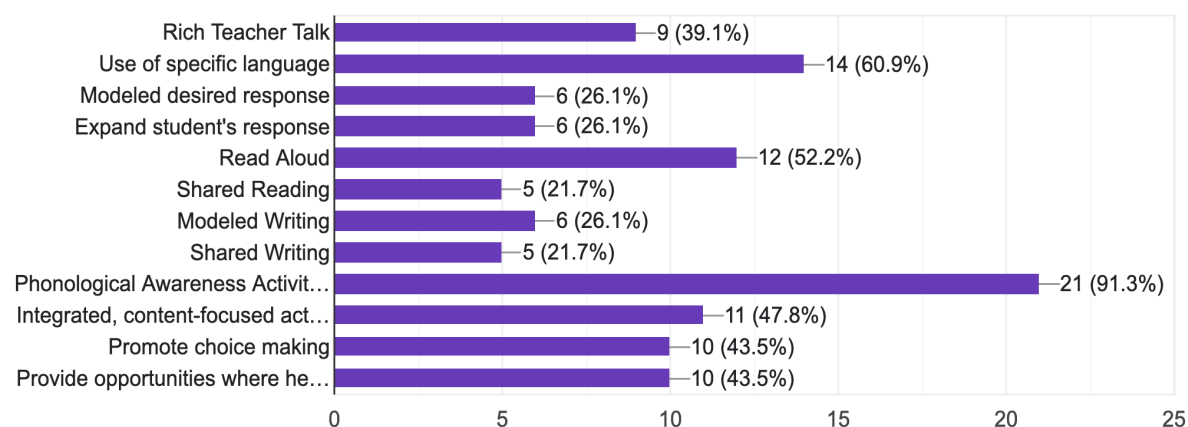
I conducted all observations during the literacy instruction block. Teachers divided this block between whole group instruction, small group instruction, individual instruction, and center time. There were only two instances each where center time was strictly play-based, or literacy based. I noted that during 61% of the observations where center time occurred, they were literacy/play based. In most observations, I saw whole and small-group instruction (61% and 57%, respectively). In 44% of observations, I noted that the teachers, the paraprofessional, and the interns led individual literacy instruction (See Figure 4).

Figure 4*Class Set Up*

Note. N = 23

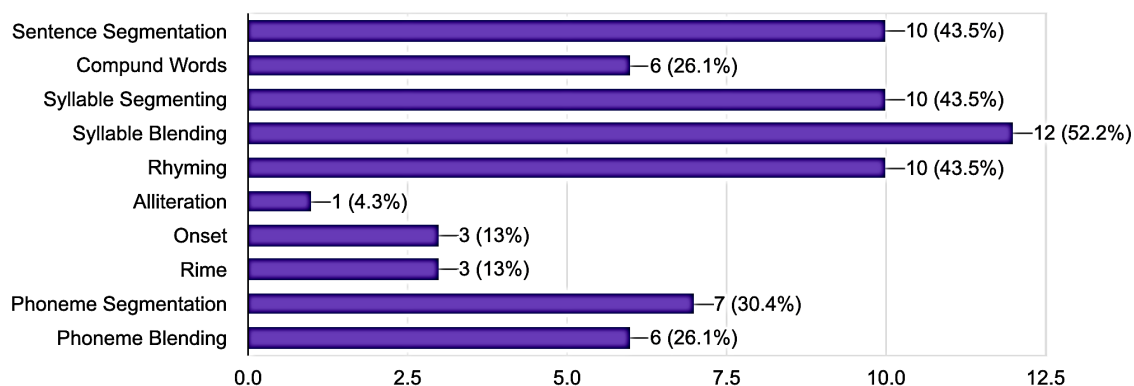
Effective Literacy Instruction

I noted the percentage of times an adult used effective literacy strategies during an observation (see Figure 5). Phonological awareness activities occurred in 92% of the observations. The use of specific language appeared in 61% of observations and read-aloud in 52%. Modeled desired response, expanding a student's response, and modeled writing occurred in 26% of observations. The activities I noted least were shared writing (22%) and shared reading (22%).

Figure 5*Effective Literacy Strategies Used During Observation*

Note. N = 23

During the observations, I looked for specific phonological awareness activities. These activities occurred in whole group instruction, small group instruction, individual instruction, or centers. Syllable blending was observed most frequently at 52%. I noted sentence segmentation, syllable segmenting, and rhyming in 44% of observations. I also noted that phoneme segmentation (30%) and phoneme blending (26%) usually occurred in the same observation. I documented onset and rhyme the least of all the phonological awareness activities (13% of observations) (See Figure 6).

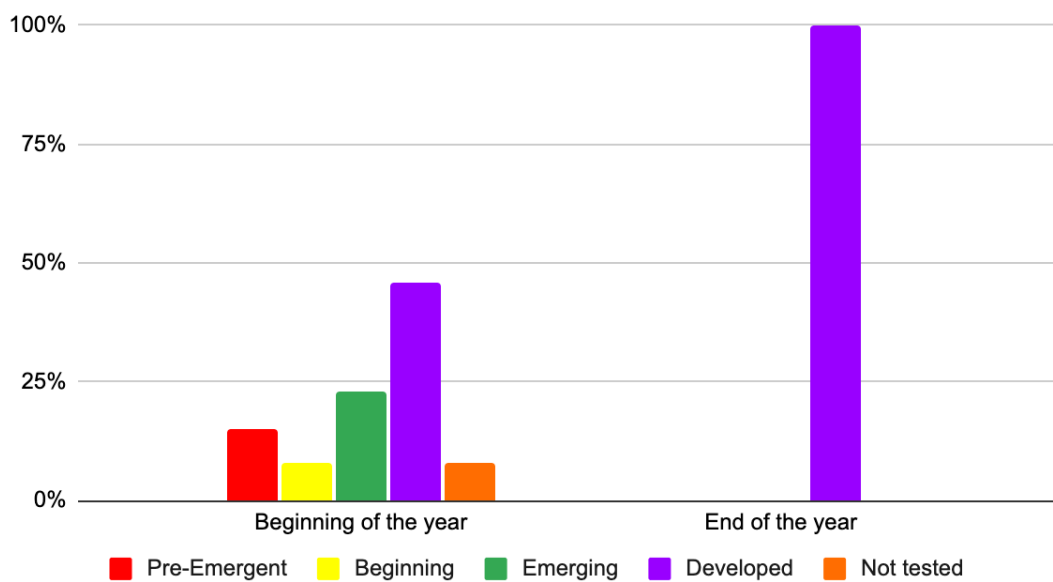
Figure 6*Phonological Awareness Activities*

Note. N = 23

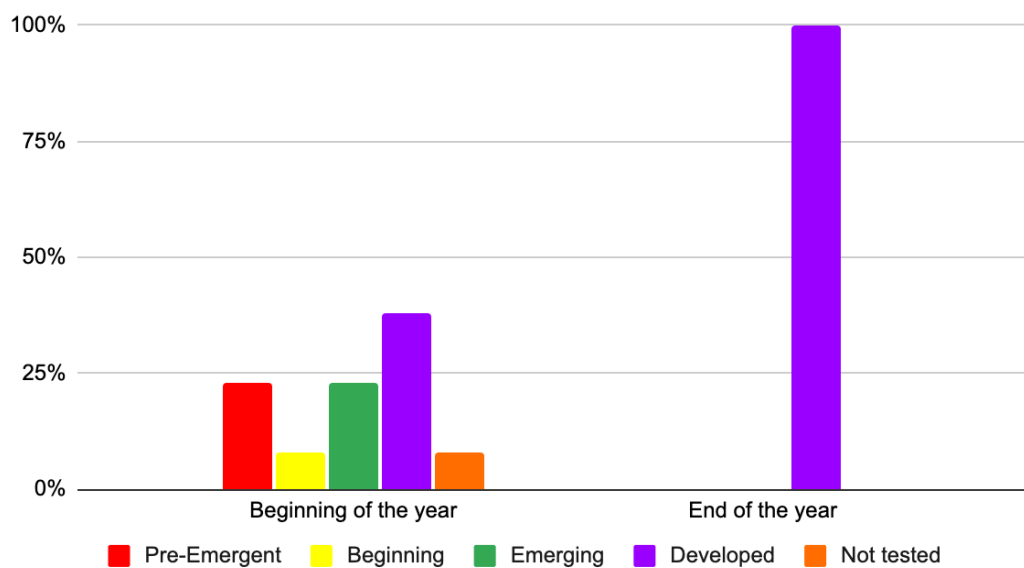
Extant Data: Scholastic Assessment Scores

All the summer prekindergarten students completed the curriculum-based assessments from the Scholastic curriculum, Big Day for Pre-K. Twelve students received the beginning assessment, and thirteen received the final assessment. One student was absent during the first assessment period. The assessment had four sections: rhyme identification, sound identification, phonological segmentation, and blending. All of the assessed sections encompassed the areas of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. Student assessment scores were rated as Pre-Emergent, Beginning, Emerging, and Developed.

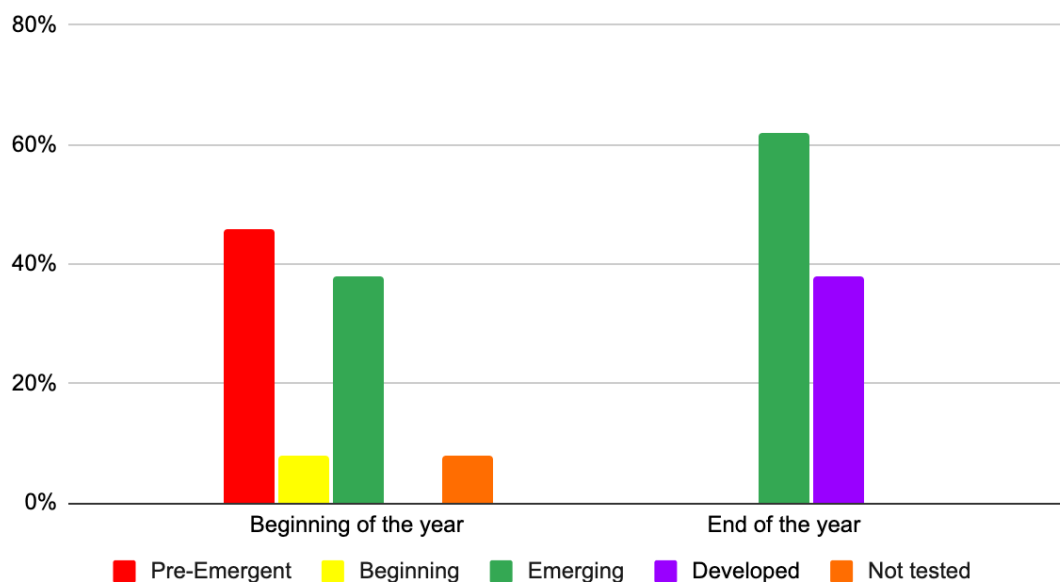
Rhyme identification was where students scored the highest at the beginning of the program. At the program's start, 46% of the students scored at the Developed level, with 23% at Emerging, 8% at Beginning, and 15% Pre-Emergent. At the end of the summer prekindergarten program, 100% of students scored at the highest level (See Figure 7).

Figure 7*Rhyme Identification*

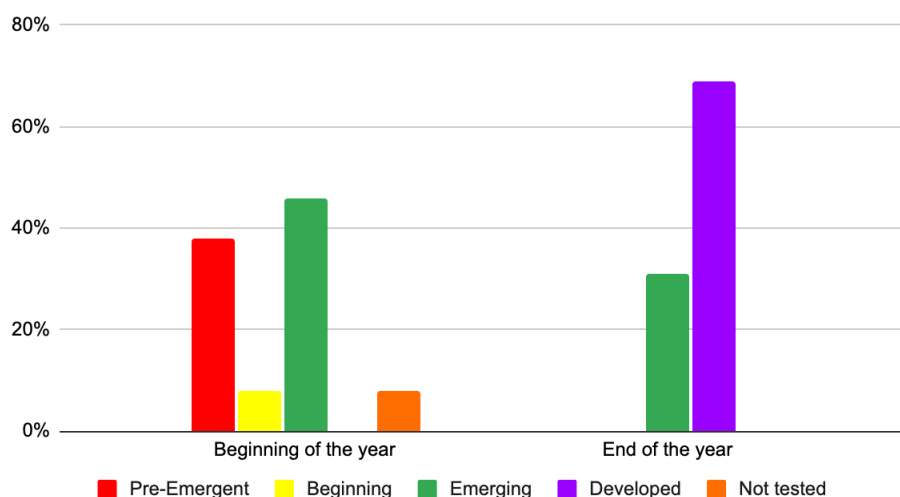
In the sound matching category, 38% of the students scored Developed, 23% Emerging, 8% Beginning, and 23% Pre-Emergent at the beginning of the program. At the end of the program, 100% of the students scored at the Developed level. This was a 62% increase (See Figure 8).

Figure 8*Sound Matching*

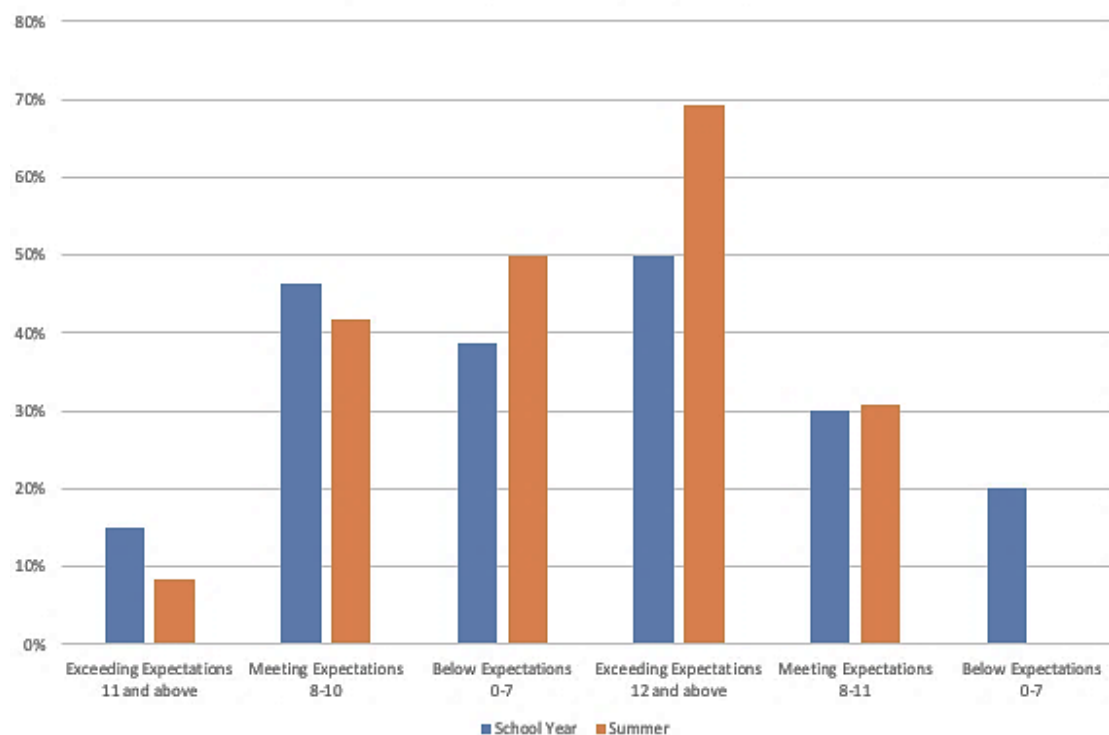
Students had the lowest scores at the beginning of the program in phonological segmentation. No students scored at the Developed level on the initial assessment. Only 38% scored in the Emerging category, 8% scored Beginning, and 46% scored pre-Emergent. Although only some students scored in the Developed area on the end-of-program assessment, 38% did increase their scores to the Developed level. The majority of students (62%) scored at the Emerging level. There were no students in the Pre-Emergent or Beginning level (See Figure 9).

Figure 9*Phonological Segmentation*

No students scored at the Developed level for Blending at the beginning of the program. On the first assessment, 46% of students scored Emerging, while 8% scored Beginning, and 38% scored pre-Emergent. At the end of the program, 69% of the students increased their scores to the Developed level, and 31% scored at the Emerging level. There were no students in the Pre-Emerging or Beginning level. See Figure 10.

Figure 10*Blending***Extant Data: State Assessment Scores**

At the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, the school year prekindergarten program had 61% of students score high enough to be “likely to be ready for kindergarten” based on the state rubric. By the end of the school year, the percentage increased by 19% to 80% of students likely to be ready for kindergarten. At the beginning of the summer prekindergarten program, 54% of students scored high enough to be considered kindergarten ready. By the end of the summer prekindergarten program, 100% of the students scored “likely to be ready for kindergarten.” The Summer prekindergarten program students had an increase of 46% of students ready for kindergarten, a higher increase than students in the school year program (See Figure 11).

Figure 11*State Assessment Percentages***Prekindergarten Readiness Rates**

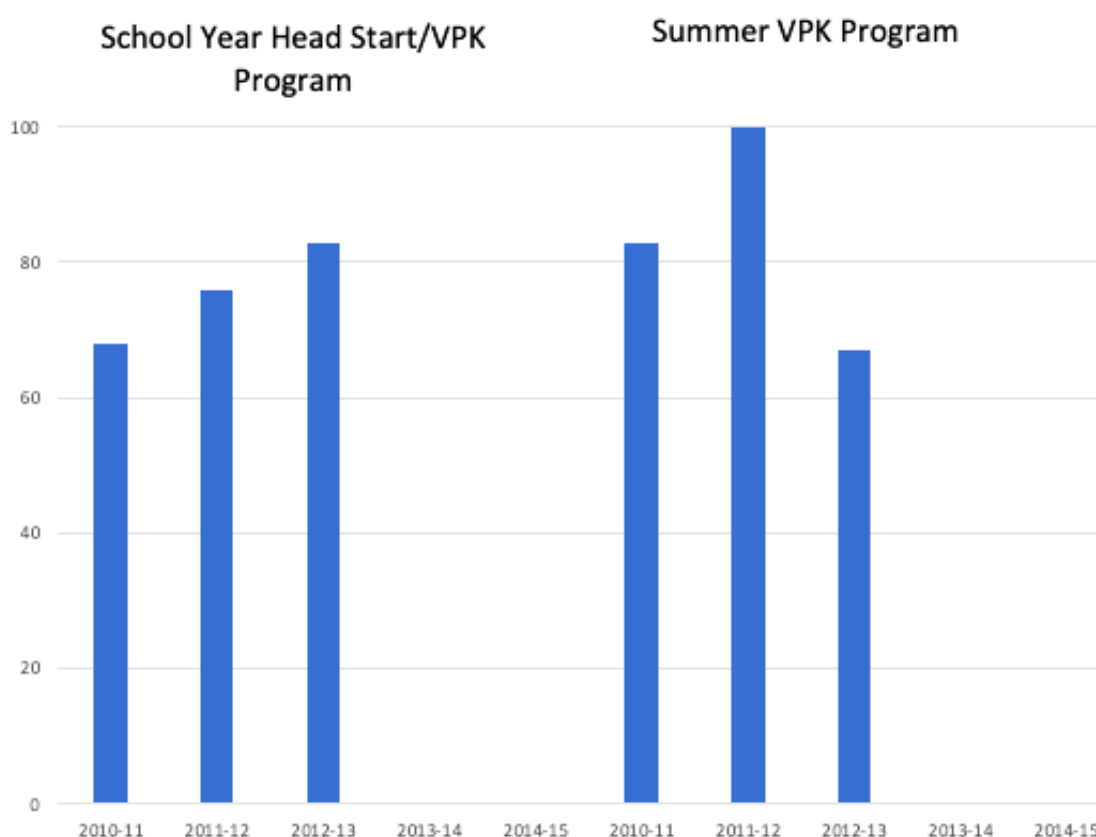
The Early Learning Department (ELD) of the state under study determined the Readiness Rates of kindergarten students using the fall state assessment scores of kindergarten students who attended prekindergarten at an approved location (see Figure 12). In Figure 12, the scores on the left are the prekindergarten Readiness Rates for the school year prekindergarten program at the school under study. The school year program was a hybrid program of Head Start and Prekindergarten.

This data indicated that the Readiness Rates of the school year prekindergarten program were increasing. Workman (2017) stated, "... elevating teacher credential requirements can improve average teaching quality and child outcomes" (p. 7). The increase in Readiness Rates could have resulted from Head Start regulations becoming

more rigorous and having more instructors with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

Figure 12

Prekindergarten Readiness Rates



Interpretation

The findings of my study showed that while the teachers and interns were quite knowledgeable in their understanding of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, the instruction of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness, and best practices in early childhood literacy instruction, the administrators were not. Both teachers had an excellent grasp of phonological and phonemic awareness instruction. The interns had a greater than 50% understanding in the same items. One of the district administrators was very knowledgeable, and the other one thought she understood, but her responses

indicated otherwise. The principal was knowledgeable and understood the importance and value of the summer prekindergarten program and other early childhood programs. The assistant principal said she did not know much about early childhood due to a lack of experience with early childhood education.

In terms of professional development or training, the most knowledgeable participants, the teachers and the interns, replied that they wanted more training in any area. Service delivery for professional development or training varied between the teachers and the interns. While the teachers selected professional development delivery that aligned with enhancing their practices, such as job-embedded training, coaching, and observations with self-reflection, the interns chose knowledge-building professional development (online or face-to-face) and modeling and observations with self-reflection. The teachers also indicated that they would like some modeling as well.

The findings of the administrator surveys and interviews indicated that there was a significant lack of understanding about phonological awareness and phonological awareness, instruction in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness, best practices in early childhood literacy instruction. The data also indicated the need for training on the administrator level. The parent surveys indicated that parent knowledge was limited in all areas.

From the observational data, I found teachers with a minimum of a bachelor's degree and teacher certification were more likely than instructors without degrees or certification to use specific phonological awareness activities in their daily instruction. In addition, the certified teachers used individualized instruction more frequently than the instructor. Instructors with an associate degree were more likely to use play-based centers

than teachers with degrees. However, those teachers were also most likely to provide opportunities where the students needed help. The summer prekindergarten teachers used more phonological awareness activities such as sentence, syllable, and phoneme segmentation and blending. I observed these activities in a continuum as is recommended by the National Early Learning Panel, for instruction (see Appendix M for the continuum). There were weaknesses in all classes in the areas of alliteration, onset, and rhyme. I could see this discrepancy can be seen in the instruction of phonological awareness when looking for similarities and differences in the data.

My first research question was: How effective is the summer prekindergarten program in the district under study in preparing students with the skills necessary literacy skills to be successful in kindergarten? According to the established goals of the state under study, the data showed that the program was successful. Regardless of the level the students were when they entered the summer prekindergarten program, the final state assessment showed that all students were either Meeting Expectations or Exceeding Expectations in regard to phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. The data from the curriculum-based assessments showed similar results indicating that all prekindergarten students in the summer program under study were entering kindergarten prepared to be successful.

My second research question was: What is working well in the summer prekindergarten program in the district under study? The teachers and interns were knowledgeable and used instructional practices that were considered best practices in early literacy instruction. Based on parent survey data, there were at least two students that had siblings that had attended the summer prekindergarten program in prior years.

This suggests that parents find value in the program. The data from the observations show that the certified teachers in the summer prekindergarten program were using effective literacy strategies that focused on phonological awareness.

My third research question was: What is not working well in the summer prekindergarten program in the district under study? The leadership provided by the district and site-based administrators in the district under study was not working well. Most administrators were not very knowledgeable about early childhood instruction. Only one administrator was knowledgeable in all aspects of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, instruction in these areas and best practices in early childhood literacy instruction. In addition, only one administrator understood how to correctly and comprehensively monitor the future success of the students. Based on the administrator responses, supported by the fact the district under study only had one location for the summer prekindergarten program, limited access to the summer program was something that was not working well. District leaders were preventing eligible children from attending a program that could impact their future academic success.

Limitations existed in several areas of this study. The main limitation was sample size. Due to the limited number of students and teachers in the summer prekindergarten program, the data may or may not be able to be replicated on a large scale. In addition, the State under study canceled the fall assessment due to technical issues. Without this assessment, there were no fall scores for the students and there was no Readiness Rate assigned to the summer prekindergarten program. This impacted the study in my ability to find the relationship between the summer prekindergarten program and the state assigned Readiness Rate for the year of my study.

Conclusion

In my evaluation, I found that the summer prekindergarten program successfully prepared students for kindergarten based on state and curriculum-based assessments. The certified teachers and interns in the program were knowledgeable of strategies needed to enable students to master phonemic and phonological awareness. However, site-based and district administrators needed to improve their knowledge. In the next chapter, I analyzed the existing state of prekindergarten in the district under study and presented an ideal state using Wagner et al.'s (2006) 4 C's.

Chapter Five: As-Is and To-Be Framework

In my study, I evaluated the summer prekindergarten program at one school. I found teachers and interns were knowledgeable and able to use best practice for early childhood literacy instruction to prepare students. While I found that the site and district-based administrators lacked knowledge in early childhood literacy instruction, it was not directly impacting the students in the program. However, this lack of knowledge may have caused them to undervalue the program, which may have been why there was only one summer prekindergarten unit for the entire district.

I found through my data comparing the summer and school year prekindergarten programs that regardless of teacher qualifications, students made gains in phonological awareness. Most of the students in the school year and summer prekindergarten programs were identified as being Kindergarten ready. Yet, summer prekindergarten program students received less instructional time than school-year program students. Summer prekindergarten students started at a lower academic level compared to school-year students but had greater gains and achievement levels at the end of the program. In this chapter, I analyzed the existing situations for prekindergarten in the district under study and present an ideal situation using Wagner et al.'s (2006) 4 C's.

As-Is Framework

Wagner et al. (2016) “offer an approach to thinking systematically about the challenges and goals of change in schools and districts” (p. 98). Wagner et al. advocated that systemic thinking should include analyzing how the different parts of the system work together to achieve results. They identified four components that leaders should analyze to determine the “AS IS state, the current reality” (p. 115). The four components

that must be analyzed are contexts, culture, conditions, and competencies. For a copy of the As-Is chart, please see Appendix N.

Contexts

Wagner et al. (2006) defined context as "the "skill demands" that all students must meet to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens, and the particular aspirations, needs, and concerns of the families and community that the school or district serves" (p.104). The district under study was a small district with 22 elementary schools but only one summer prekindergarten unit. Historically, the district had a high percentage of children unprepared for kindergarten upon entrance, and even though a summer prekindergarten program existed, only a few students enrolled. Many students who participated in the summer prekindergarten program were Pre-K ESE students because they attended a Pre-K ESE program during the regular school year.

Few administrators recognized the importance of early childhood education. The district leaders primarily focused on standardized test grades, which left little room for focusing on the early childhood education programs. Administrators associated with the prekindergarten program lacked a depth of knowledge in early childhood literacy components and instructional practices.

The community knew very little about the availability of the prekindergarten program. Parents and community members had no part in the decision-making process for early childhood education. Due to this lack of knowledge, parents and community members could not advocate for the program. District leaders provided little to no marketing of the summer program. The greatest push for the program was from teachers

of Pre-K ESE students who encouraged parents to enroll their children in the summer prekindergarten program.

Culture

Wagner et al. (2006) identified culture as the “shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school” (p. 102). Leaders of the district under study did not show any interest in prioritizing early childhood education, as they did not see its value. The director of early childhood education did not have a degree in early childhood education or any teaching experience at that level. This highlighted the lack of importance the superintendent and school board placed on early childhood.

District leaders viewed the summer prekindergarten program as childcare, and there were no expectations for academic achievement. This reiterated the perceived lack of value for early childhood education and the prekindergarten program. The lack of value translated into a lack of investment in the program. District administrators did not know to track the prekindergarten students’ trajectory, so they could not determine if the long-term results were positive. When I asked administrators about observing the summer prekindergarten program while in session, the administrators expressed little interest, allowing other activities to take precedence.

The employment of noncertified instructors for the school year prekindergarten program reinforced the lack of value for the program. According to the state statute, instructors in the school year program did not have to be certified teachers. When a certified teacher did not fill a position, it was labeled noninstructional. Employees

working in a noninstructional position receive a significantly lower salary than a certified teacher working in an instructional position. In the district under study, leaders chose to save dollars in their budget by not hiring certified teachers for prekindergarten positions. The cost concern of placing certified teachers in the school year prekindergarten classrooms indicated a lack of emphasis on the importance of the prekindergarten program.

Conditions

Wagner et al. (2006) defined “conditions as the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources” (p. 100). The Summer prekindergarten program served students for 300 hours in the months of June and July. The schedule for the school day was long due to state requirements, which was challenging for both teachers and students. The student day started at 7:30 am and ended at 4:30 pm five days a week for 33 days, with only one day off for the Fourth of July holiday. Because the district under study followed a four-day workweek during the summer, on Fridays, prekindergarten teachers taught at a site without any support. The only other personnel on campus on Fridays were lunchroom personnel who distributed free breakfast and lunch to the children in the community. These conditions made it challenging for students to receive the necessary support and resources to succeed. It also led to increased stress for both teachers and students.

Competencies

Competencies are “the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influence student learning” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 99). The teachers and administrators are the adults who must possess the skills and the knowledge to influence student learning. According to

Wagner et al., “competencies are most effectively built when professional development is focused, job-embedded, continuous, constructed and collaborative” (p. 99). Educators need ongoing professional development to increase and enhance their competencies.

The lack of basic knowledge and proficiency in teaching phonological and phonemic awareness among noncertified prekindergarten teachers was a concern in the district under study. In my teacher observations, noncertified prekindergarten instructors provided few activities in phonological awareness and used an incorrect sequence of instruction. The lack of competence in understanding the importance of phonological and phonemic awareness prevented noncertified prekindergarten instructors from providing their students with the necessary support and resources.

There was a lack of job embedded professional development which is a concern for all teachers. In the district under study, in general, professional development was provided only to certified teachers. Non-instructional staff were not allowed to participate. Because the school year prekindergarten instructors are considered non-instructional, they do not have the same professional development opportunities as the certified summer prekindergarten teachers. Even certified prekindergarten teachers had limited opportunities for professional development. In addition to not providing professional development to all prekindergarten teachers, the professional development offered was not individualized or job embedded.

There was also a lack of collaborative professional development in the district under study. Teachers in my study voiced their concern with the limited opportunities for collaboration for teachers due to having only one prekindergarten class during the summer. This had a significant impact on the quality of education that students receive.

Teachers could not share resources or ideas as much as they would have liked, hindering their ability to provide the best education possible.

Envisioning the Success To-Be

Wagner et al. (2006) advised leaders of change to use the As-Is reality to visualize the To-Be ideal future picture of success. In the previous section, I explained the As Is reality for prekindergarten in the district under study. In this section, I described the ideal future (To Be) context, culture, conditions, and competencies for prekindergarten in the district under study. To see a copy of the To-Be chart, please see Appendix O.

Future Contexts

The state under study will provide funding for all rising kindergarteners to participate in prekindergarten programs. District leaders will use the funding to establish multiple summer prekindergarten classes. Additionally, they will establish multiple prekindergarten school year classes in every school. Giving an additional year of education to the district's students will increase the number of children entering kindergarten ready to be successful. This will allow more students to meet grade-level expectations in future grades.

District leaders will use various methods to reach out to all community members to market the prekindergarten programs, with an emphasis on marketing the summer prekindergarten program. The Summer prekindergarten program will be highly sought-after by parents. The program's reputation for providing an excellent education and student academic results will drive parents to request the program.

District leaders will value high-quality early childhood education and high-quality programs. Leaders will prioritize early childhood education at a level equal to

standardized tested grades. All administrators will understand the importance of early childhood education. The administrators who supervise early childhood programs will have degrees in early childhood and practical experience to ensure that the teachers of the youngest students are getting the resources and support they need for the children to be successful. There will be high academic expectations for all prekindergarten programs.

Future Culture

The district's commitment to excellence will extend beyond standardized tested grades and include the summer prekindergarten program and the school year program. There will be high academic expectations for the prekindergarten programs. The prekindergarten program will receive equal attention and care, and the district will work diligently to ensure that every student receives the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed. The district will value the importance of the prekindergarten program as a steppingstone to promote future success in elementary school and beyond.

District leaders will seek out administrators who have backgrounds in early childhood education to lead the department. This will show that the district places value in the prekindergarten programs. District leaders will be engaged in the prekindergarten classrooms through observations or walk-throughs to ensure that they are abreast of what is happening within the classrooms.

All teachers in the district, including the prekindergarten teachers, will be treated with respect and receive the resources and support necessary to ensure children's success. The community will be included in decisions about early childhood education, and the program will thrive. Parents will have confidence in the district's ability to provide a

high-quality education, and students will emerge from their education with a strong foundation for success in life.

The community will be active stakeholders in early childhood education and assist in making decisions. The district will market the success of the prekindergarten program, and the community will take pride in knowing that all rising kindergarteners have the opportunity to take part in a program designed to ensure the children's kindergarten readiness.

Future Conditions

Every elementary school site will have available classroom space for a school year prekindergarten program. The Summer prekindergarten program will be offered at multiple sites during the summer to allow more students to participate. District leaders will add as many sites as necessary to ensure equal access to all the community's families. Multiple sites will also allow for teacher collaboration which will help support the prekindergarten teachers and enable them to grow as teachers. Resources will be shared between units at any given site to give students access to what they need to succeed.

The Summer prekindergarten program is required to provide 300 hours of instruction. Due to the school year ending and starting dates, summer days are limited. In order to decrease the length of the school day, the district will take advantage of every weekday with only one day off for the Fourth of July holiday. Since the state does not specify days and times, simply the 300-hour requirement, district leaders will offer instructional hours on Saturdays.

Long-term monitoring will take place to ensure the effectiveness of the prekindergarten program. This monitoring will help leaders make decisions about curriculum or changes that may need to occur to enhance the program's long-term success. The district under study will use state assessment data, curriculum-based assessment data, and classroom observations to maintain high student and teacher expectations.

District leaders will market the school year and summer Pre-K programs so that all parents will be aware of the programs. In addition, there will be public meetings to allow community input about the early childhood programs available in the district and how best to meet the needs of the community's children.

Future Competencies

All prekindergarten instructors will be certified teachers proficient in their knowledge about phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and Best Early Childhood Literacy practices. District leaders will provide job-embedded professional development and mentoring or coaching available to ensure all prekindergarten teachers have the resources and support necessary to ensure high-quality teachers for all prekindergarten students.

District leaders will ensure the provision of professional development will be afforded to all prekindergarten teachers. A small, but growing, body of empirical evidence suggests that professional development is more likely to be effective and enhance teaching and learning when it has the following elements:

1. “Professional development approaches are focused on professional practices and consist of content-specific rather than general instruction.

2. Professional development is aligned with instructional goals, learning standards, and the curriculum materials that practitioners use in practice.
3. Learning opportunities are intense, sustained over time, and include guidance and feedback on how to apply specific practices through methods such as coaching, consultation, or facilitated collaboration (e.g., communities of practice, teacher study groups),” (National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2008, p.4)

District leaders will individualize professional development based on the needs of the teacher. It might include job-embedded professional development or coaching and mentoring based on what is best for the teacher and the teacher’s needs.

Conclusion

Change is possible. In this chapter, I explained the state of prekindergarten in the district under study and describe my ideal future state of prekindergarten. In the next chapter, I provided a change leadership plan to bridge change between the As-Is and To-Be.

Chapter Six: Strategies and Actions, Implications, Policy Recommendations

Change is difficult. Organizational change takes many steps to ensure its success. In this chapter, I present a change leadership plan, analyze the implications of the plan and make policy recommendations. “In the last decade, our understanding of how young children learn and the critical importance of development from infancy through the early years has exploded” (Group, n.d.). Too many children are entering kindergarten without the necessary skills to be successful. This is setting children up for a future of struggles and even eventual failure if the student cannot keep pace with the expectations of kindergarten.

Long-term, the impact of having students prepared for kindergarten will increase passing rates in the district under study. Ultimately, as the children progress through high school, there will be more college or career-ready young adults. For the community at large, the impact is enormous. Children deserve the best education public schools can offer, and the most realistic way to do this is to provide a strong foundation for all of our children.

I want district leaders to see early childhood education as an important factor in students' educational experiences. Appropriate funding will occur, and there will be district and school-level staff knowledgeable in early childhood education and willing to continue improving the experiences our children receive at a young age. Once district leaders emphasize early childhood education, the community will be able to see the importance of starting their children off at a younger age, and businesses and businesspersons, and other community agencies will see the value of supporting early

childhood education, whether it be financially or regarding mentors for the students and their families.

Strategies and Actions

Using John Kotter's (2012) 8 steps, I have created a change leadership plan. Kotter's 8 steps include: establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition, forming a strategic vision and initiatives, communicating the vision, empowering broad-based action by removing barriers, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and producing more change and anchoring new approaches in the culture. The "Strategies and Actions Chart" can be found in Appendix P.

Step One: Establish a Sense of Urgency

According to Kotter (2012), "Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining needed cooperation" (Chapter 3, para 3). It is imperative that I convince leaders in the district under study to take action to address the issues facing the district's prekindergarten programs. To establish a sense of urgency, I will meet with the school district superintendent, the director of early childhood education, and school board members. I will share my research on academic achievement in terms of kindergarten readiness that clearly showed that participation in the prekindergarten program had a significant positive impact on a child's academic success. I will point out that the disparity that exists between certified prekindergarten teachers and noncertified prekindergarten instructors in terms of knowledge and effective instructional practices is limiting the program's effectiveness and negatively impacting participating students.

In addition, I will highlight how the lack of participation in the prekindergarten program is limiting the number of children who benefit from a high-quality early

education. This is a critical issue educators must address urgently, as the early years of a child's life are crucial for their overall development and future success. I will also share a draft of an implementation plan that would increase the number of participating students, the quality of the instruction, and impact the percentage of kindergarten-ready students entering kindergarten.

Step Two: Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition

Kotter (2012) advocated for a select group of people working together to bring about change because no one person can do it alone. He stated, “A strong guiding coalition is always needed – one with the right composition, level of trust, and shared objective” (Chapter 4, pg. 57). Building a strong guiding coalition is essential to implementing a successful plan to address the challenges facing the prekindergarten program in the district under study. I will include the following individuals in the guiding coalition:

- The Superintendent: As the leader of the district, the superintendent will play a key role in guiding and supporting the implementation of the plan.
- District Leaders: Leaders, such as the director of early childhood education and other key administrators, will provide guidance and support throughout the process.
- Principals: School principals will serve as important liaisons between the district and individual schools, providing feedback and support to ensure the success of the plan at the school level.

- Teachers: Prekindergarten teachers will be an integral part of the guiding coalition, providing insight into the challenges they face and offering feedback on how to improve instruction and support for prekindergarten students.
- School Board Members: School board members will play an important role in advocating for the plan and ensuring that it receives the resources and support it needs to be successful.
- University Professor Emeritus from the Early Childhood Education Department: The university professor emeritus will bring valuable expertise and suggestions to the coalition, offering advice on best practices and evidence-based strategies for improving prekindergarten instruction and outcomes.

Together, these individuals will form a powerful coalition dedicated to improving the district's prekindergarten program and ensuring that all children in the district have access to high-quality early education. By working together, sharing expertise and ideas, and advocating for the needs of prekindergarten students and teachers, this coalition will help guarantee that the district's prekindergarten programs are effective, equitable, and successful for years to come.

Step Three: Develop a Vision and Strategy

Kotter (2012) explained that a vision paints a picture of the future and tells people why they should work to make that future occur. Kotter listed the characteristics of a strategic vision: communicable, desirable, creates a verbal picture, flexible, feasible, imaginable and simple (2018, p. 16). I will work with the guiding coalition to develop a vision and strategies to bring about change in the district's prekindergarten program.

The vision and strategy will have the following components:

- express the importance of early childhood education in the district under study
- highlight the contributions of the prekindergarten program to the district as a whole
- reflect Best Early Childhood Literacy Practices, specifically in regard to phonological awareness and phonemic awareness
- change the requirements of all prekindergarten teaching positions to include the words certified teacher
- provide a timeline for creating more summer units and to allow for more school year units based on space availability
- provide a timeline to establish job embedded professional development, coaching and mentoring

Overall, the vision for the district's prekindergarten programs will be one of equity, access, and excellence. By adopting evidence-based practices, changing requirements for prekindergarten teaching positions, and expanding access to high-quality prekindergarten opportunities, district leaders will be able to provide prekindergarten students with the resources and skills necessary to be kindergarten ready.

Step Four Communicate the Change Vision

According to Kotter (2012), a vision is only powerful when most of the people in the organization understand it. Effective communication strategies are important to make sure that the vision is shared widely and that everyone is on board with the changes that need to occur. It is crucial to involve all stakeholders in the process and gather feedback and suggestions from them. In addition to providing information to all

stakeholders in the district, leaders and the guiding coalition will have the following meetings:

- Meetings with budget department personnel to secure the funding necessary to support the changes
- Meeting with the teacher’s union representatives to ensure that the necessary contract changes are made to support the new requirements for prekindergarten teachers
- Meetings with all v teachers, staff, site-based administrators, and professional development departments to ensure that everyone has the same information and understands the vision and goals
- School board workshops will go over the action plan and get their support
- Parent meetings and community meetings, as well as newspaper articles and public service announcements to engage wide support.

Using these communication actions, the district under study will be able to share the vision widely and consistently. It is important that everyone understands the importance of this change the district will make to early childhood education. In addition, the district can show what changes are being made to improve early childhood education.

Step Five: Empower Others to Act on The Vision, Remove Barriers

Kotter (2012) explained that “the purpose ...is to empower a broad base of people to take action by removing as many barriers to the implementation of the change vision as possible” (p. 86). Empowering others to act on the strategic vision requires the guiding coalition to remove the barriers that currently exist within the v programs. Leaders will take the following steps to remove these barriers:

- Limited Teacher Knowledge: Leaders will provide job-embedded professional development opportunities that are focused on effective instructional strategies for teaching phonological awareness and phonemic awareness skills. This will help v teachers to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach these critical early literacy skills to their students.
- Lack of Certified Prekindergarten Teachers: Leaders will change the requirements for all prekindergarten teaching positions to include the need for a certified teacher. This will ensure that all prekindergarten teachers have the necessary training and certification to provide high-quality instruction to our students.
- Lack of Appropriate Professional Development: Leaders will provide job-embedded professional development, coaching, and mentoring opportunities for prekindergarten teachers. This will allow teachers to receive ongoing support and guidance as they work to improve their instructional practices.
- Lack of Ability to Collaborate: Leaders will establish opportunities for prekindergarten teachers to collaborate with their peers, both within their schools and across the district. This will provide teachers with the opportunity to share best practices, receive feedback, and collaborate on instructional strategies.
- Teacher Retention: Leaders will work to improve teacher retention by providing ongoing support and professional development opportunities, as well as creating a positive and supportive work environment that values the contributions of our prekindergarten teachers.

By removing these barriers, leaders will empower prekindergarten teachers to act on the strategic vision and provide high-quality early education opportunities to all children in the district. The guiding coalition will create a culture of continuous improvement and support, where teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills, they need to help their students succeed.

Step Six: Generate Short-Term Wins

Short term wins help the guiding coalition to track progress and the organization move toward the goal (Kotter, 2012). Kotter characterized short term wins as: 1) visible to many people; 2) obvious that it is a win to everyone and 3) directly related to the change.

Short term wins for this change plan include:

- All prekindergarten teachers are certification teachers, with existing non-certified prekindergarten teachers working to obtain the necessary certification.
- The number of prekindergarten summer and school year units increase.
- Marketing for the prekindergarten program is heavy and community wide.
- Job-embedded professional development opportunities for prekindergarten teachers that focus on effective instructional practices for teaching phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are offered.
- There is ongoing coaching and mentoring to support teachers in implementing best practices in their classrooms.
- Student academic achievement in the prekindergarten program is monitored and used to inform instructional practices and identify areas for improvement.

By generating these short-term wins, the guiding coalition will demonstrate the impact of the initiatives and build momentum toward long-term goals. All stakeholders will have a

sense of urgency and excitement around the prekindergarten program and the importance of early childhood education in the district.

Step Seven: Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change

In order to consolidate gains and produce still more change, leaders have to keep the focus on the change initiative and push for more results. Kotter (2012) stated “Without sufficient leadership, change stalls, and excelling in a rapidly changing world becomes problematic” (p. 117). District and school-based leaders will use the following activities to achieve Kotter’s step 7:

- Conduct regular check-ins with prekindergarten teachers to ensure that they have the support and resources they need to effectively teach phonological and phonemic awareness.
- Put systems in place so that prekindergarten teachers collaborate with one another to share best practices and learn from each other.
- Develop a system for tracking the progress of former prekindergarten students beyond their Kindergarten year to measure the long-term impact of the program.
- Build relationships with university professors and individuals in other educational institutions to stay up to date on the latest research and best practices in early childhood education.
- Hold regular community events to highlight the success of the prekindergarten program and build support for its continued expansion and improvement.

By consolidating improvements, the leaders in the district under study will be able to produce more change. Data and monitoring will allow for adjustments when necessary. Every little improvement will help the educators in the district to reach their end goal.

Step Eight: Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

Anchoring the new approaches in the culture will involve ongoing efforts to sustain the changes and embed them into the culture and practices of the district under study. According to Kotter (2012), anchoring change in a culture is the last step in the change process; it happens after people see good results and requires a lot of talk. To anchor the new prekindergarten approaches in the culture, district leaders will:

- Work with the state board of education to ensure that requiring all prekindergarten teachers to be certified will become a permanent requirement for all prekindergarten teaching positions in the district
- Build relationships with the local university to provide support and resources for prekindergarten teachers and to promote best practices in early childhood education
- Work with the local college and universities to assist non-certified prekindergarten teachers in gaining a degree necessary for certification.
- Create professional development for prekindergarten teachers that will become a regular part of the district's professional development program. District leader will establish ongoing coaching and mentoring programs for prekindergarten teachers to support them in implementing effective instructional practices

- Work to create a supportive and positive work environment for prekindergarten teachers and provide opportunities for professional growth and advancement so that teacher chose to remain with the district in a prekindergarten teaching position
- Build community partnerships with community organizations and businesses to promote the importance of early childhood education and to provide resources and support for prekindergarten programs in the district.

By anchoring the new approaches into the district's culture, leaders will ensure that they become a permanent part of the district's culture and practices. Leaders will continue to monitor and evaluate our programs and make adjustments as needed to ensure that the best possible education is available for the youngest learners.

Policy Statement

In order for children to grow up and be successful members of society, they need the best education possible. Research shows that early education is a key to being successful in school (Nold et al., 2021). This critical importance has been born out of research that supports the impact of early childhood education on educational success. “The experiences of children in their early years have disproportionately large impacts relative to experiences during their school years and beyond” (Ehrlich & Fu, 2015, para. 2). If educators are going to provide the best education possible, it is necessary to give children, especially at-risk children, the best start to their education. Part of providing an excellent early education means insisting that highly qualified teachers teach our youngest students.

“The NEA believes that ensuring every student has access to high-quality and diverse educations will have a fundamental impact on our nation’s public-school students, their families and communities” (NEA, 2022, p. 14). Retaining and hiring high quality early childhood education teachers means they must be treated as equal to their colleagues teaching in K-12. Although financing and budgets are issues in all districts, retaining highly qualified teachers in all programs is important.

My policy statement is multifaceted and will address teacher preparation, specifically early childhood teacher preparation, compensation, and professional development. First, I recommend a policy change for the district under study so that the job description and criteria for the position of prekindergarten teacher are the same for both the school year and summer programs. The new requirement will mean all teachers for the prekindergarten program will be certified teachers. Ideally, these certified teachers will have early childhood degrees or certifications. This will ensure that prekindergarten teachers have the proper knowledge and skills necessary to teach these prekindergarten students effectively.

Secondly, my policy will affect prekindergarten teacher compensation. With the change to the job criteria, the prekindergarten teachers will need to be compensated the same as the rest of the K-12 teachers in the district. This will include salary and benefits.

Lastly, my policy will require that all prekindergarten teachers have access to the same quality of professional development resources that are available to the K-12 teachers in the district. The district personnel will provide appropriate professional development, coaching, and mentoring for the prekindergarten teachers. This would

include professional development in the areas of phonological awareness, literacy practices for early childhood, and teaching strategies for early childhood education.

I am recommending this policy change because the existing policy is outdated and does not align with the district's mission statement, "We are committed to the success of every student." The policy change I am advocating will impact the district budget but will provide a higher return on investment for the school district, the community, and the students. By preparing more students to enter kindergarten, future academic success will be increased. This new policy will be effective in meeting the needs of prekindergarten students by having certified teachers in the classrooms who are knowledgeable and proficient in the delivery of instruction in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness skills. The use of certified teachers for the prekindergarten school year program will allow all prekindergarten teachers to have access to professional development and the salary that the K-12 teachers receive, thus providing effective instruction and retaining teachers in the prekindergarten program.

Considerations for Decision Makers

As with any new policy, there will be several considerations for decision makers. The decision makers will need to look at the data and make informed decisions about the potential impact this policy change will have on the long-term success of students in the district. As with all new policies, there will be areas that need to be taken into consideration when making changes. These areas include economic impact, political implications, legal implications and moral and ethical considerations.

Economic Analysis

Funding is an issue in education, and in 2020, the state under study was ranked in the bottom five states in the nation for school funding (citation withheld to protect confidentiality). Choices must be made, and priorities must be set. At the time of my study, prekindergarten is funded by the state. The funding is limited to 540 hours per child during the school year and 300 hours per child during the summer. The funding provided by the state does not always provide enough funding to hire certified teachers, maintain a facility, and buy curriculum equipment and materials.

Funding issues for early childhood programs limit educators can do, and this is no different in the district under study. Early childhood teachers throughout the state and nation were paid varying rates at the time of my study. In the district under study, school year prekindergarten instructors are considered Educational Support Personnel, non-instructional employees who are paid at an hourly rate. The summer prekindergarten teachers are certified and are paid based on their hourly rate, since the number of hours per week is higher than they work during the school year.

Other district leaders in the state under study hired certified teachers for their school year prekindergarten programs. Many of these programs are embedded within the schools and prekindergarten students are simply part of the student body. According to the State School District Return on Investment (ROI) (citation withheld to maintain confidentiality), one of the counties has a 100% ROI. Return on investment will mean fewer children will need remediation, and more children will be prepared to enter the workforce. In comparison, the district under study had a significantly lower ROI of 78%.

This difference in ROI supports the impact of certified teachers on prekindergarten students.

There are several alternate funding sources already used by other districts in the state under study that the leaders in the district under study could employ. Title I funds, School Readiness funds, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) funds or any combination of these funds could be used as supplemental funding sources. However, ESE funds can only be used if ESE students are included in the class and Title 1 funds are only available to Title 1 schools. Because there is only state funding for three hours per day, the prekindergarten program could operate as a student half-day program. If prekindergarten were a half-day program, schools could have two sessions per day. Two sessions per day would allow more students to participate. Lastly, district leaders could offer just the three-hour program at no cost to the parents but require “parent pay” or the second half of the day. The fee could be on a sliding scale, similar to what is used for free and reduced lunches. By using alternate funding sources, paying certified teachers would be an easier task.

Political Analysis

Early childhood education awareness has increased over time. During his 2013 state of the Union Address President Barak Obama spoke of the need for increased early childhood education opportunities for the children in the United States. He made it clear that he wanted high-quality programs. His idea of early childhood programs was for all children from birth to age 5 to be provided with access to preschool programs. President Obama said,

If we make high-quality preschool available to every child, not only will we give our kids a safe place to learn and grow while their parents go to work; we will give them the start that they need to succeed in school and earn higher wages and form more stable families of their own. In fact, today, I am setting a new goal: By the end of this decade, let's enroll 6 million children in high-quality preschool. That is an achievable goal that we know will make our workforce stronger.

(Mongeau, 2020)

A former state governor for the district under study went to great lengths to enhance early childhood education in the state. He added to the prekindergarten budget, as well as increased accountability and transparency. The Office of Early Learning Executive Director said, "The Governor has demonstrated his commitment to early learning through his budget and this legislation. High quality early learning opportunities are important for our children and families in our state" (citation withheld to maintain confidentiality). The former governor made it clear that all 4-year-olds in the state, regardless of parent income, were eligible to receive a free prekindergarten experience.

The school board members in the district under study had differing opinions on the value that the prekindergarten program brings to the district. In a publicly televised workshop on Early Childhood Education, the members were very concerned about the budget. One member could only see the cost of the program and not the long-term academic impact that the program brings to the community. Another school board member felt that early childhood education was important but only for a certain segment of the population. That member believed prekindergarten access should only be increased in one area of the district, where more low income and minority students live.

After my study completed in the district under study, the Head Start program was taken over by another entity. This changed the entire prekindergarten program in the district under study. There are no longer family income requirements for children to attend the program. Unfortunately, the change also made it so only children who live in areas that are zoned for a specific school are allowed to attend the prekindergarten program. According to the 2021 Annual Report School Concurrency for the district under study, the anticipated available capacity of the program is expected to increase (citation withheld for confidentiality). This could influence school board members to agree that additional prekindergarten units be added.

Funding for the prekindergarten program in the state under study can be used by private schools, charter schools, daycare centers, and public schools. One consequence of the public school district providing prekindergarten programs is the opportunity to have the children in their schools for an additional year. Since the state Early Learning Department (ELD) is responsible for evaluating all prekindergarten program sites, it would be possible for some private schools, charter schools, or daycare centers to have a friend in the system.

Legal Analysis

The right to a free education is guaranteed to all children by the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. According to the constitution of the state under study,

Every four-year old child in [State] shall be provided by the State a high-quality Pre-Kindergarten learning opportunity in the form of an early childhood development and education program which shall be voluntary, high quality, free,

and delivered according to professionally accepted standards (citation withheld to maintain confidentiality).

This amendment gives all four-year-old children the right to receive a prekindergarten education.

The district leaders' choice to limit the number of units and locations of both the summer program and the school year program means that not all eligible children will have the opportunity to take advantage of this program. In 2019, it was reported that in the state under study, "the overall score, which includes children who did not attend prekindergarten, showed that 47% of students were not ready for kindergarten" (citation withheld to protect confidentiality). That means almost half of the state's kindergarten students were not prepared. With this many students that are not prepared it seems that the district under study should do whatever possible to increase the number of students that can be served in prekindergarten during the school year and summer programs.

In the state statute for the state under study, the words 'high quality' appears twice. The data from my research study showed the differences in knowledge and instructional practices that existed between certified prekindergarten teachers and non-certified prekindergarten instructors. According to the guidelines of the state under study, school year prekindergarten instructors do not have to hold a teaching certificate or even a bachelor's degree. Legally, the district under study is within their rights to employ non-certified instructors for the school year prekindergarten program. It is in the district's power to hire certified teachers for the school year prekindergarten program, as the state does not exclude certified teachers from teaching the school year program.

In addition, district leaders should employ certified teachers for all their prekindergarten classrooms to ensure that the students are benefiting from teachers who are knowledgeable and proficient in teaching these students. This would increase the number of children that could benefit from an additional year of high-quality education. Research supports early childhood education as having the most impact on the future of our children. “The experiences of children in their early years have disproportionately large impacts relative to experiences during their school years and beyond, (Ehrlich & Fu, 2015). With this in mind, it is imperative that educators and lawmakers continue to strive to provide quality early childhood programs to our young children. Once investments are made, the expectation of parents will be that the highest quality teachers have been hired to provide the educational services. Programs do not teach children, teachers do.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

Educators are morally obligated to provide the highest quality education to all students, even the youngest ones. Universal prekindergarten was initiated in the state under study in 2008. Receiving a free public education is a constitutional right guaranteed by the state’s constitution for all children living here. The education of children is a fundamental value of the people. It is, therefore, a paramount duty of state leaders to make adequate provision for the education of all children residing within its borders. The goal of public schools is to prepare students to become contributing members of society. To provide an education that is not of equal caliber from kindergarten through high school programs would be ethically wrong.

Teacher qualifications for the prekindergarten program in the district under study vary depending on the program. For instance, during the regular school year, instructors are considered qualified if they have some basic Department of Children and Families (DCF) credentials. However, during the summer, the first priority is for certified teachers and those with experience in early childhood education. District leaders attributed the difference in teacher qualification requirements to the more compact time period students receive instruction in the summer (300 hours versus 540).

All prekindergarten students deserve certified teachers. Early education supports the whole child. It impacts future academic success as well as future social behaviors (Ehrlich & Fu, 2015; Shapiro, 2021). High-quality education can only be enhanced through the use of qualified teachers. This is not to diminish the skills of very capable instructors who do not have a teaching certificate. However, when district or school leaders hire certified teachers, there is a greater chance that the teacher understands current pedagogy and child development. Additionally, certified teachers receive more benefits and are paid at a much higher rate than non-certified teachers.

Educators are tasked with doing what is right for children. It is morally and ethically right to hire teachers who have the highest potential to positively impact students' academic and social success. It should not be based upon the number of instruction hours the teacher provides.

Conclusion

The purpose of my program evaluation was to determine the impact of the summer prekindergarten program on student kindergarten readiness. To determine the impact, I used mixed methods research design. I surveyed summer prekindergarten

teachers and interns. I surveyed and interviewed site-based and district-based administrators. I conducted observations of the summer prekindergarten teachers and compared the summer prekindergarten teacher observation data to observation data of the school year prekindergarten instructors. I also compared extant student assessment data between the two programs.

I found in my evaluation that the summer prekindergarten program provided students with the academic background needed to be successful in kindergarten. The teachers and interns were knowledgeable in their understanding of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, the instruction of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness, and best practices in early childhood literacy instruction. The teachers and interns wanted more professional development to improve their skills.

Of the administrators (site and district based) who participated in my study, most did not demonstrate knowledge of early childhood literacy instruction. However, all the administrators answered affirmatively when asked if they were well trained on one of the major components of early childhood literacy, phonological and phonemic awareness. Most of the administrators felt professional development activities were not needed for the teachers.

I compared observational data of summer prekindergarten teachers to the yearlong prekindergarten instructors. I found the summer prekindergarten teachers with bachelor's or master's degrees and teacher certification were more likely to use specific phonological awareness activities in their daily instruction. In addition, those same teachers used individualized instruction more frequently. School year instructors were more likely to use play-based centers than the summer prekindergarten teachers. The

Summer prekindergarten teachers used more phonological awareness activities such as sentence, syllable, and phoneme segmentation and blending. These activities were also observed in a continuum as is recommended for instruction.

The final component of my evaluation was a comparison of extant student assessment data. The data showed that both the summer and school year programs were successful in preparing students for kindergarten. However, the summer prekindergarten students demonstrated higher gains as a result of instruction when compared to school year prekindergarten students. This was despite the summer program having 240 hours less than the school year program.

My organizational change plan includes changing the qualifications necessary for all prekindergarten teachers, providing all prekindergarten teachers with the same salary and benefits of K-12 teachers in the district, and providing appropriate professional development, coaching, and mentoring for the prekindergarten teachers. My change also includes increasing the number of prekindergarten units in the district to have greater access so that more students will benefit from a high-quality prekindergarten education, as required by state law.

Ultimately, providing early childhood students with certified teachers will benefit K-12 teachers by providing students who have the skills necessary to be prepared for kindergarten. Students who are ready for kindergarten will be more capable of being successful during their elementary, middle, and high school careers. Erlich and Fu (2015) stated, “It may seem surprising, but the experiences of children in their early years have disproportionately large impacts relative to experiences during their school years and beyond. If children lag in those early years, chances are that they will never catch up”

(para. 2). If leaders in the district under study can increase the number of students who participate in the prekindergarten programs, then they will be helping students begin their elementary school career on track.

The community will benefit from having more successful students. Successful students become successful adults capable of contributing to their communities (McCoy et al. 2017) found “that classroom-based early childhood education programs for children under five can lead to significant and substantial decreases in special education placement and grade retention and increases in high school graduation” (p. 475). The more students we have prepared to be contributing members of the community, the better the community can thrive.

The prekindergarten teachers will benefit from being able to continue to teach where their passion lies, which is with early childhood students. In addition, if district leaders follow my recommendations for retaining teachers, then more teachers throughout the school system will stay. “Treating teachers with respect, supporting their professional development, and creating communities of learners in both the student and the teacher populations characterized schools that were successful in promoting high levels of literacy in their students” (Jalongo & Heider, 2006, p. 380). Combined, all these things would allow the early childhood teachers in the district under study a chance to remain with the young students, which is where they choose to be and where they can make the biggest impact.

Society will be impacted as educators are able to increase the number of citizens who are ready to be contributing members of society. “Participation in an established early childhood intervention for low-income children was associated with better

educational and social outcomes up to age 20” (Reynolds, 2001). Better educational and social outcomes for children will result in adults who are more capable of contributing to their communities. “Business, education, and political leaders have underscored the goal of ensuring that young children enter school ‘ready to learn,’ so that they can succeed in school and as the next generation of workers and citizens” (Roessel & Isaacs, 2016). Long-term effects will remain in the community making a stronger community for everyone.

Long term monitoring of prekindergarten students will allow district leaders to gauge the effectiveness of the prekindergarten program. It will also allow leaders to make changes to enhance the program as a whole. Education is constantly changing and by continuously researching new strategies and techniques, decision makers can make necessary changes to adapt to an ever-changing world.

My research highlights the need for educational leaders to continue to learn about early childhood education and its impact on future learning. The educational system looks different today than it did fifty years ago and will look different in twenty years. More research needs to be focused on helping our youngest learners so that educators may be able to provide them with the tools they will need to become contributing members of society. In the words of Whitney Houston, “I believe that children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way” (Houston, 1986, stanza 1).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Administrator Survey

Appendix B: Teacher and Intern Survey

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Program

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Appendix M: Phonological Awareness Continuum

Appendix N: As Is Chart

Appendix O: To Be Chart

Appendix P: Strategies and Actions Chart

Appendix A
Administrator Survey

1. How often should phonological awareness be taught in prekindergarten?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Multiple times a day
2. How often should phonemic awareness be taught in prekindergarten?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Multiple times a day
3. Which items are appropriate for phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?
 - a. Magnetic letters
 - b. Picture cards
 - c. Storybooks
 - d. Unifix cubes
 - e. Worksheets
 - f. Small objects
 - g. CDs
4. Which should be taught first in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction?
 - a. Sentence segmentation
 - b. Syllables/Word segmentation
 - c. Letter sounds
5. Why should the one you chose to be taught first?

6. Is letter/sound correlation taught during phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. I do not know
7. Explain your answer to the previous question.
8. Is phonological awareness and phonemic awareness covered sufficiently in the Scholastic prekindergarten curriculum?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I do not know
9. How much time in prekindergarten should phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction take?
 - a. A small part of literacy instruction time
 - b. The majority of literacy instruction time
 - c. It depends
10. Explain your answer to the previous question.
11. Do you feel well trained in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness?
 - a. Yes, I could train others.
 - b. Yes, I understand it but could not train others.
 - c. No, I need more training.
12. Do you feel your prekindergarten staff is well trained in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness?
 - a. Yes, all of them
 - b. Yes, some of them
 - c. No, none of them
 - d. I do not know

13. Does the state sufficiently train your prekindergarten staff in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness?
- Yes
 - No
 - I do not know.
14. Do you have a plan to train your staff?
- Yes
 - No
 - It is not needed.
15. If you are planning training, what types of training will you do?
- Online
 - One day (face-to-face)
 - On the job
 - Coaching
 - Will use multiple training strategies
 - Not needed at this time
16. How will you track student performance?
- Observation
 - Curriculum provided assessments
 - State provided assessments
 - Teacher input
17. How will you track student performance in kindergarten?
- Observation
 - Curriculum provided assessments
 - State provided assessments
 - Teacher input

18. How frequently will you observe the classroom?
- a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Monthly
 - d. One time
 - e. I will not be able to observe during the summer program.
19. How will you know your summer prekindergarten program was successful in preparing students for kindergarten?

Appendix B

Teacher and Intern Survey

1. What is your highest degree?
2. What is your degree in?
3. Are you a certified teacher?
4. If yes, what are your areas of certification?
5. How long have you been teaching?
6. How long have you been teaching in this district?
7. Have you taught summer prekindergarten before?
8. How often should phonological awareness be taught in prekindergarten?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Multiple times a day
9. How often should phonemic awareness be taught in prekindergarten?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Multiple times a day
10. Which items are appropriate for phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?
 - a. Magnetic letters
 - b. Picture cards
 - c. Storybooks
 - d. Unifix cubes
 - e. Worksheets
 - f. Small objects
 - g. CDs

11. Which should be taught first in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction?
 - a. Sentence segmentation
 - b. Syllables/Word segmentation
 - c. Letter sounds
12. Why should the one you chose to be taught first?
13. Is letter/sound correlation taught during phonological awareness and phonemic awareness instruction?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
14. Explain your answer to the previous question.
15. Is phonological awareness and phonemic awareness covered sufficiently in the Scholastic prekindergarten curriculum?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I do not know
16. How much time in prekindergarten should phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction take?
 - a. A small part of literacy instruction time
 - b. The majority of literacy instruction time
 - c. Amount varies
17. Explain your answer to the previous question.
18. Do you feel well trained in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
19. Would you like more training in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

20. Which of the following types of training, if any, would significantly contribute to increasing your teaching in the area of phonological awareness/phonemic awareness Instruction? (Check all that apply.)
- a. Online
 - b. One day training (face-to-face)
 - c. Job embedded training
 - d. Modeling
 - e. Coaching
 - f. More opportunities for informal observation and reflection
 - g. I do not need training at this time
21. How comfortable are you in assessing your students' phonological awareness/phonemic awareness abilities?
- a. Very comfortable, can assess, plan instruction and explain to parents.
 - b. Comfortable, can assess, and plan instruction but am unsure. how to explain to parents.
 - c. Neutral, can use the assessment tool and have a basic understanding about the results.
 - d. Uncomfortable, can use the assessment tool, but do not know what to do with the results.
 - e. Very uncomfortable, not comfortable using the assessment tool.
22. How do you group students?
- a. Curriculum provided assessment
 - b. State provided assessment
 - c. Anecdotal records
 - d. I do not group students
23. How frequently do you regroup students?
- a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. After assessments are given
 - d. I do not regroup students
24. What do you consider Best Practices in Early Childhood Literacy?

25. Would you like more training in Best Practices for Early Childhood Literacy?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
26. Which of the following types of training, if any, would significantly contribute to increasing your teaching in the area of Best Practices for Early Childhood Literacy? (Check all that apply.)
- a. Online
 - b. One day training (face-to-face)
 - c. Job embedded training
 - d. Modeling
 - e. Coaching
 - f. More opportunities for informal observation and reflection
 - g. I do not need training at this time

Appendix C
Parent Survey

1. Has your child been to school before?
2. If yes, where?
3. Have you had a child attend summer prekindergarten previously?
4. If yes, when and where?
5. What is your child's two academic strengths?
6. What is your child's two academic weaknesses?
7. Do you know what Phonological Awareness instruction is?
8. Do you know what Phonemic Awareness instruction is?
9. What do you want your child to learn in summer prekindergarten?
10. Are you willing to come in for training in how to help your child at home?
 - a. Yes b. No
11. Where will your child attend kindergarten?
12. Does your child have an IEP?
 - a. Yes b. No c. I do not know
13. Please feel free to add any comments or additional explanations you would like to give.
14. Would you be willing to be contacted later with follow-up questions?
 - a. Yes b. No

Appendix D

Administrator Semi- Structured Interview Questions

1. Do you have a degree in Early Childhood Education?
2. What is your degree in?
3. Do you feel the district places an emphasis on Early Childhood Education?
4. Do you have highly qualified people in place for Early Childhood Education?
5. How can the district improve the summer prekindergarten program?
6. How do you market your summer prekindergarten program?
7. Do you think the summer program should expand to more than one location?
8. What expectations does the district have for students who complete the summer prekindergarten students?
9. How do you monitor the future success of your summer prekindergarten students?
10. Do you have staff in place that are able to teach using Best Practices in Early Childhood Literacy Instruction, specifically, Phonological/Phonemic Awareness instruction?
11. What is the biggest concern of incoming kindergarteners?
12. How does the summer prekindergarten program address that concern?
13. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?
14. Would you be willing to be contacted later for follow-up questions?

Appendix E

Classroom Observation Tool

Name of Site/Class	Observer Name	
Adults Present Teacher Paraprofessional Intern Other	Date: Number of Children:	Start/End Time:

Observation Items	Note specific items to address/reflect on at monthly meeting
Class set up	<p><i>These interactions were noted during observation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Group. Literacy Instruction • Small Group, Literacy Instruction • Individual Literacy Instruction • Center Time (Literacy, Play, Literacy/Play based) • Additional Information:
Effective literacy strategies noted during observation.	<p><i>Literacy Strategies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich Teacher Talk • Use Specific Language • Model Desired Response • Expand student's Response • Read Aloud • Shared Reading • Modeled Writing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Writing • Phonological Awareness Activities (See below) • Integrated, Content-focused activities • Promote Choice Making • Provide Opportunities where help is Needed <p><i>Note Specific Examples:</i></p>
Phonological Awareness	<p><i>These Phonological Activities were noted during observation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence Segmentation • Compound Words • Syllable Segmenting • Syllable Blending • Rhyming • Alliteration • Onset • Rhyme • Phoneme Segmentation • Phoneme Blending <p><i>Note Specific Examples:</i></p>

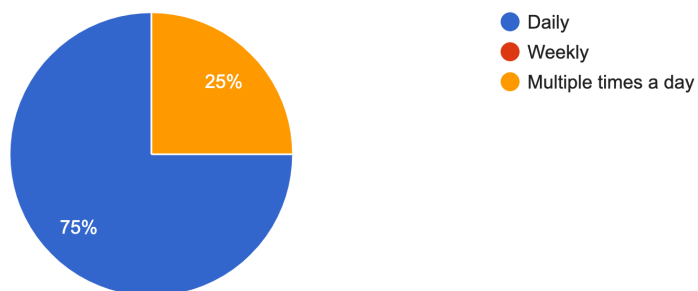
Appendix F

Administrator Survey Results

Question 1

How often should phonological awareness be taught in [redacted]

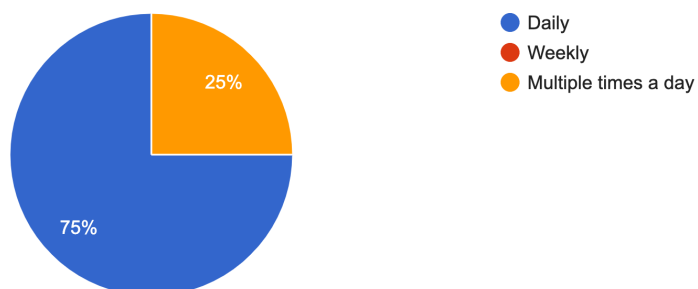
4 responses



Question 2

How often should phonemic awareness be taught in [redacted]?

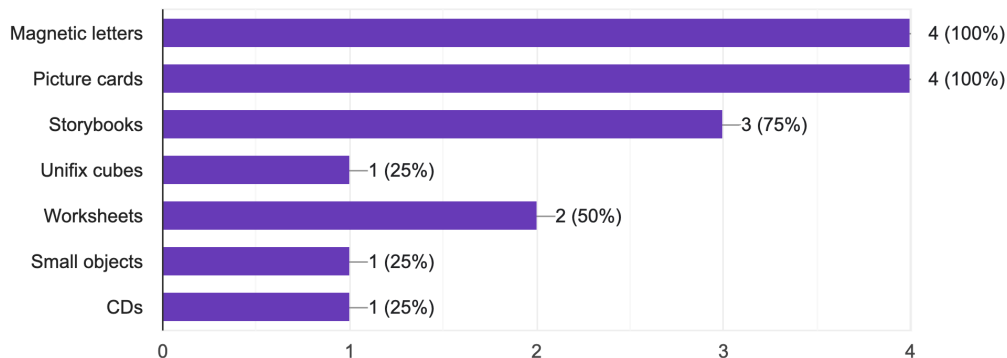
4 responses



Question 3

Which items are appropriate for Phonological/Phonemic Awareness instruction?

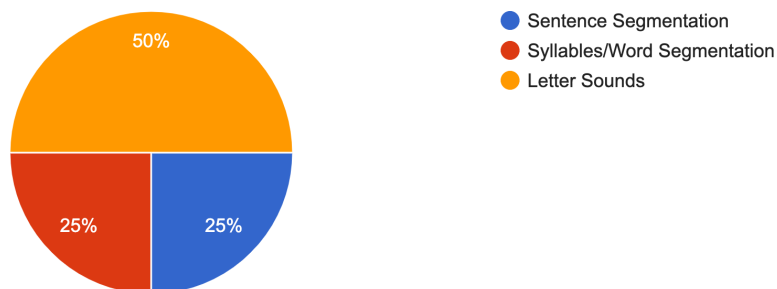
4 responses



Question 4

Which should be taught first in phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?

4 responses



Question 5

Why should the one you chose to be taught first?

Participant A: Smallest part (Letter sounds)

Participant B: Letter sounds are necessary to teach children to put sounds together to form words. (Letter sounds)

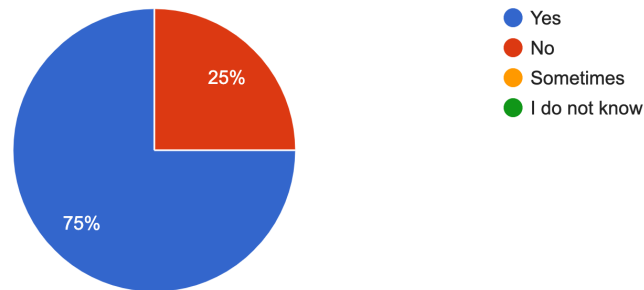
Participant C: This is the starting place for children to be able to segment. You go from big parts to small parts. (Sentence segmentation)

Participant D: It is easy for children to hear syllables. (Syllables/word segmentation)

Question 6

Is letter/sound correlation taught during phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?

4 responses

**Question 7**

Explain your answer (to question 6)

Participant A: Letter/sound correlation has to be learned before you move to sounding out words. (Yes)

Participant B: This is what phonics is all about (Yes)

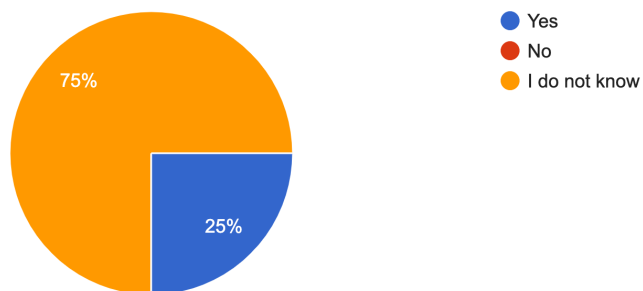
Participant C: Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness is all about sounds and the manipulation of sounds, once you add letters, it becomes phonics. (No)

Participant D: Letters sounds are the foundation. (Yes)

Question 8

Is phonological awareness/phonemic awareness covered sufficiently in the Scholastic [REDACTED] curriculum?

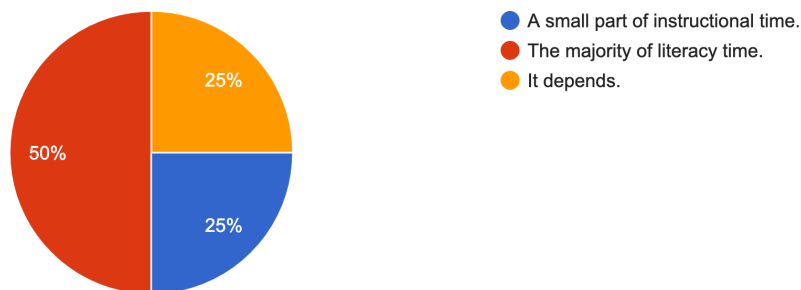
4 responses



Question 9

How much time, in [REDACTED] should phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction take?

4 responses



Question 10

Explain your answer (to question 9)

Participant A: These skills are needed in order for children to read. (The majority of the time)

Participant B: It is important that the students learn all of their letters and sounds before they go to kindergarten. (The majority of the time)

Participant C: The length of time will depend on the individual students. While it can be covered in whole group instruction, different students will need different amounts of

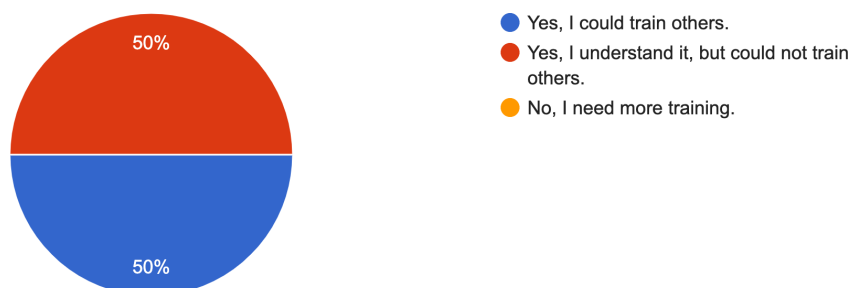
additional instruction in small group settings. As students become more proficient, the length of time necessary will decrease. (It depends)

Participant D: Writing, comprehension, vocabulary, and phonics are important to cover also. (A small part of literacy time)

Question 11

Do you feel well trained in phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?

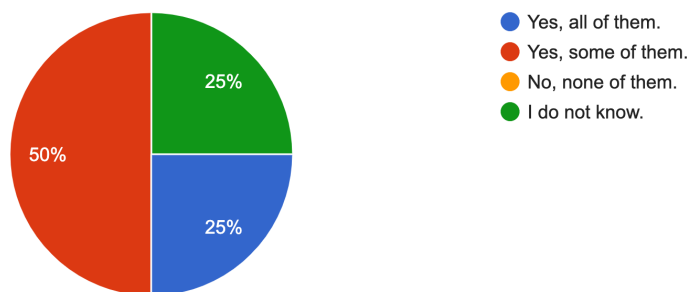
4 responses



Question 12

Do you feel your [redacted] staff is well trained in phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?

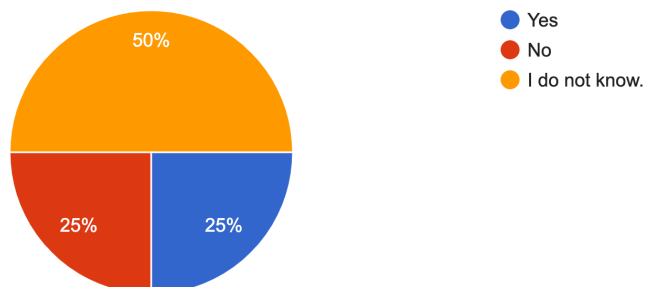
4 responses



Question 13

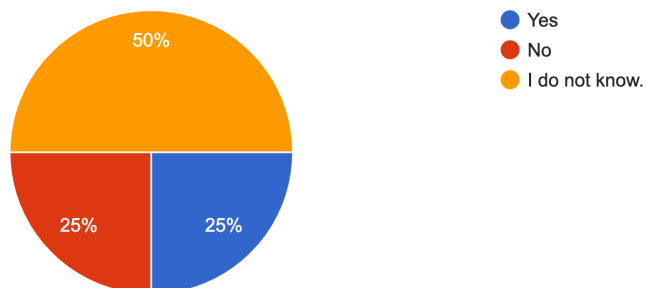
Does the state sufficiently train your [redacted] staff in phonological awareness/phonemic awareness?

4 responses

**Question 14**

Does the state sufficiently train your [redacted] staff in phonological awareness/phonemic awareness?

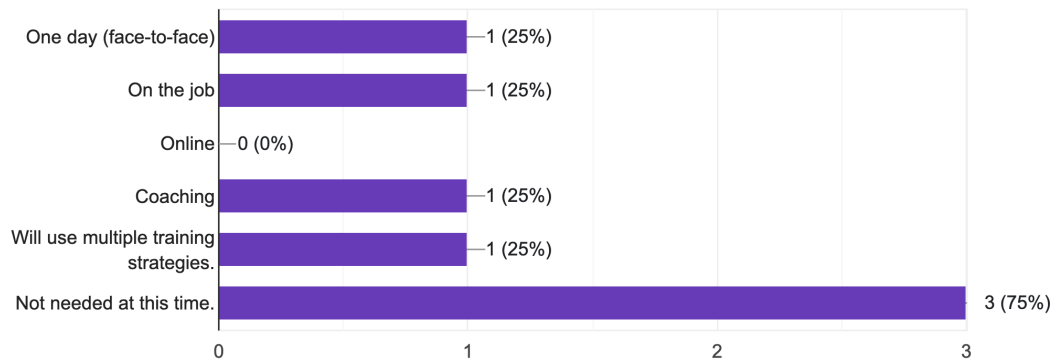
4 responses



Question 15

If you are planning training, what types of training will you do?

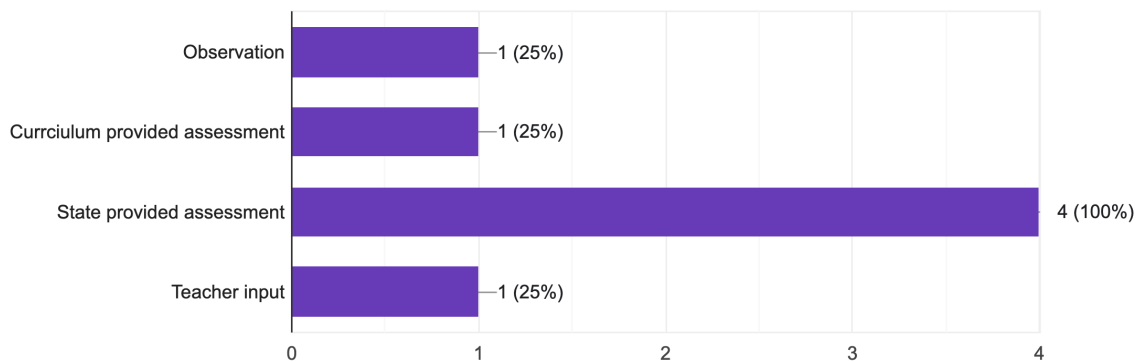
4 responses



Question 16

How will you track student performance?

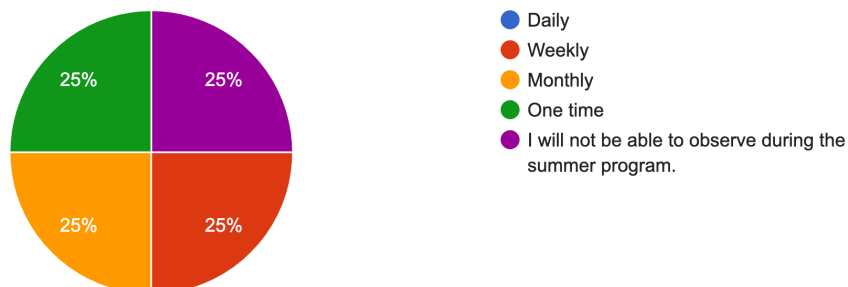
4 responses



Question 17

How frequently will you observe the classroom?

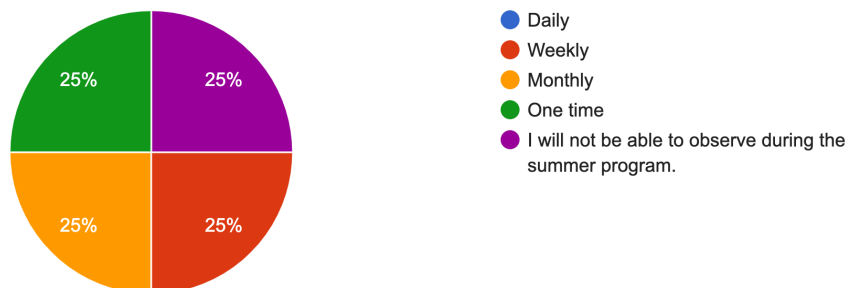
4 responses



Question 18

How frequently will you observe the classroom?

4 responses



Question 19

How will you know if your summer prekindergarten program was successful in preparing students for kindergarten?

Participant A: State readiness scores

Participant B: 'State assessment' results in the fall, Readiness Rate

Participant C: Using data from the prekindergarten assessments, the Scholastic assessments, and the fall 'State assessment' and prekindergarten Readiness rates

Participant D: State assessment scores

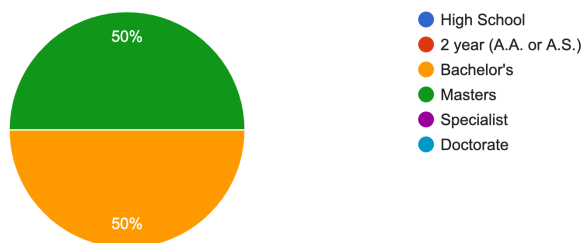
Appendix G

Teacher Survey Results

Question 1

What is your highest degree?

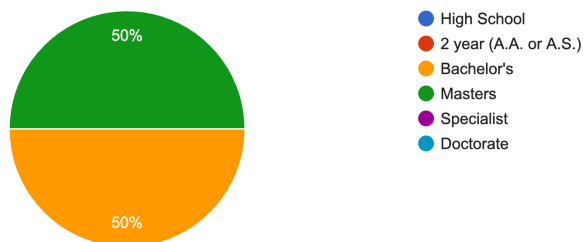
2 responses



Question 2

What is your highest degree?

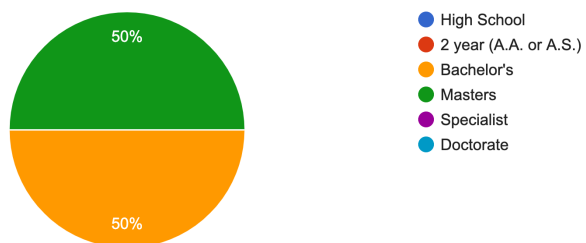
2 responses



Question 3

What is your highest degree?

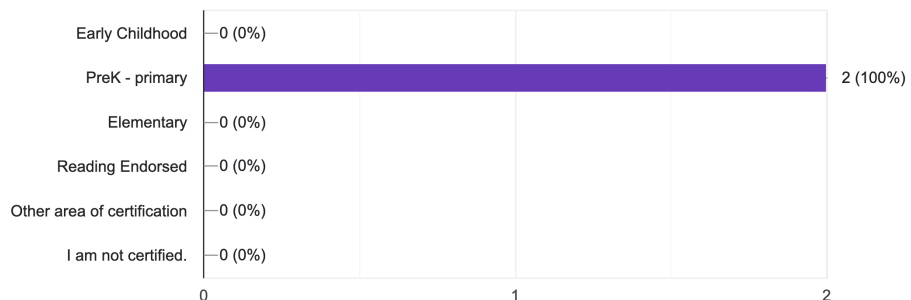
2 responses



Question 4

What are you certified in? (Choose all that apply.)

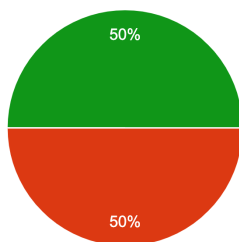
2 responses



Question 5

How long have you been teaching?

2 responses

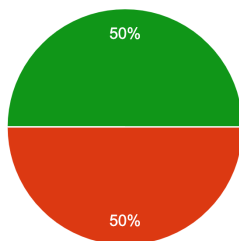


- One year
- Two - five years
- Six - ten years
- Ten - twenty years
- More than twenty years
- I have not taught at least a year.

Question 6

How long have you been teaching in this district?

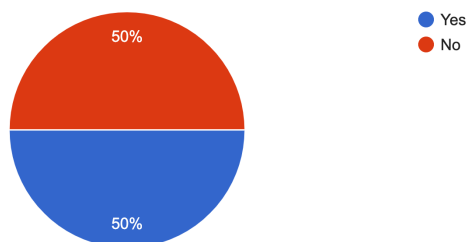
2 responses



- One year
- Two - five years
- Six - ten years
- Ten - twenty years
- More than twenty years
- I have not taught in this district.

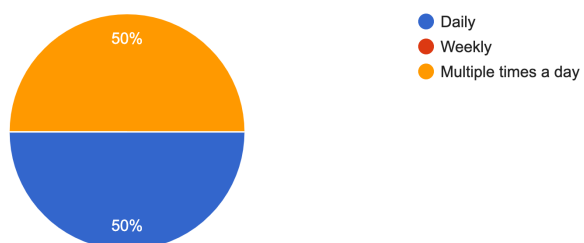
Question 7

Have you taught the Summer [redacted] before?
2 responses



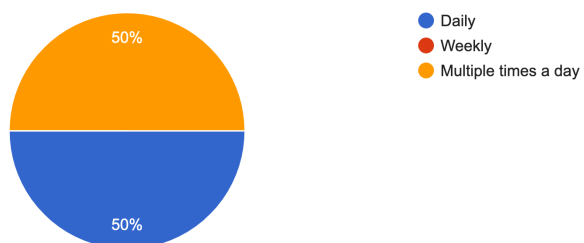
Question 8

How often should phonological awareness be taught in [redacted]?
2 responses



Question 9

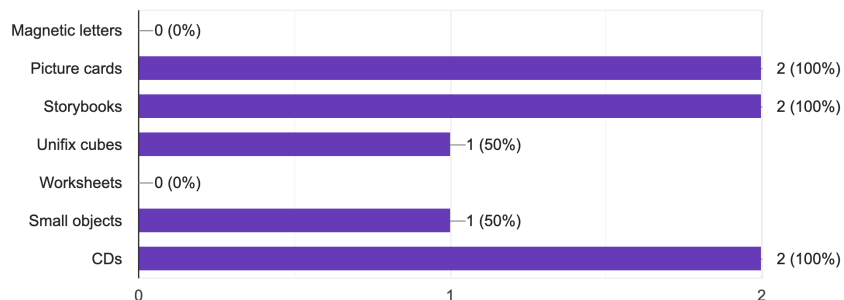
How often should phonemic awareness be taught in [redacted]?
2 responses



Question 10

Which items are appropriate for phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?

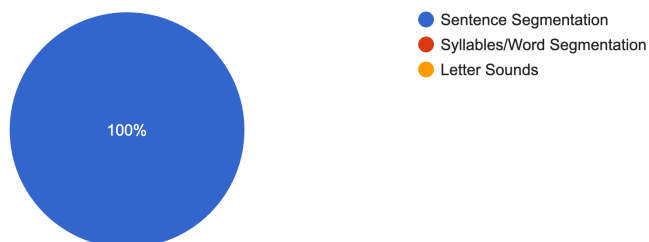
2 responses



Question 11

Which should be taught first in phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?

2 responses



Question 12

Which one should be taught first (phonological awareness or phonemic awareness)?

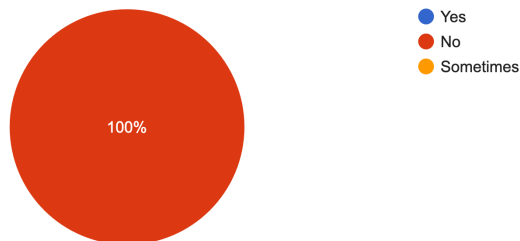
Participant A: In phonological/phonemic awareness you start with the larger segments and then move into the smaller segments.

Participant B: If they can't segment sentences then they can't segment words into sounds. You are supposed to teach by starting with bigger pieces and moving to smaller pieces.

Question 13

Is letter/sound correlation taught during phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?

2 responses



Question 14

Explain your answer to the previous question.

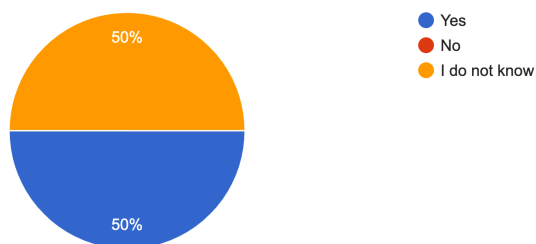
Participant A: When you put letters and sounds together, that is called phonics and it is a harder skill and is usually taught after the kids understand the phonological/phonemic awareness skills.

Participant B: That is considered phonics.

Question 15

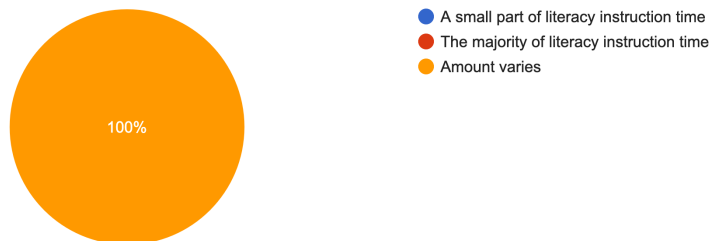
Is phonological awareness/phonemic awareness covered sufficiently in the Scholastic curriculum?

2 responses



Question 16

How much time, in [redacted] should phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction take?
2 responses



Question 17

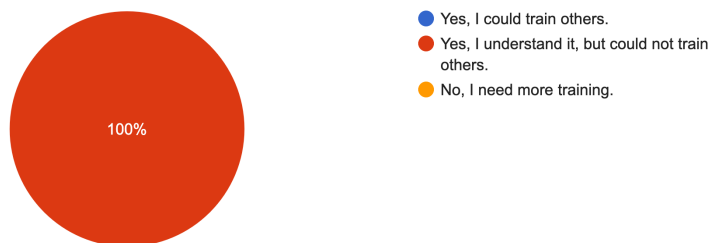
Explain your answer to the previous question.

Participant A: This depends on the students and how quickly they pick up on the skills. These skills should be touched on multiple times during the day.

Participant B: This will vary based on student needs and the day.

Question 18

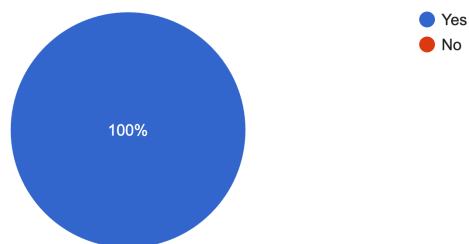
Do you feel well trained in phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction?
2 responses



Question 19

Would you like more training in phonological awareness/phonemic awareness?

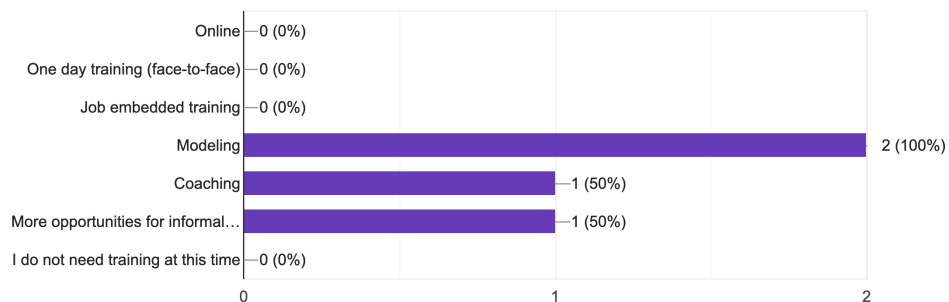
2 responses



Question 20

Which of the following types of training, if any, would significantly contribute to increasing your teaching in the area of phonological awareness/phonemic awareness instruction? (Check all that apply.)

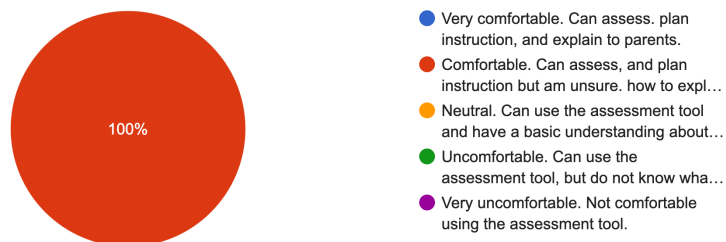
2 responses



Question 21

How comfortable are you in assessing your students' phonological awareness/phonemic awareness abilities?

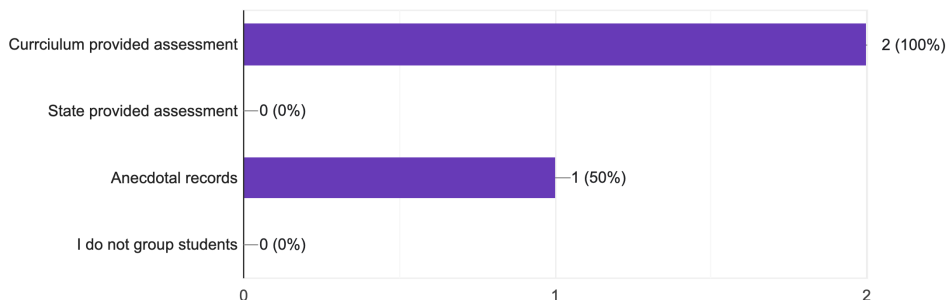
2 responses



Question 22

How do you group students?

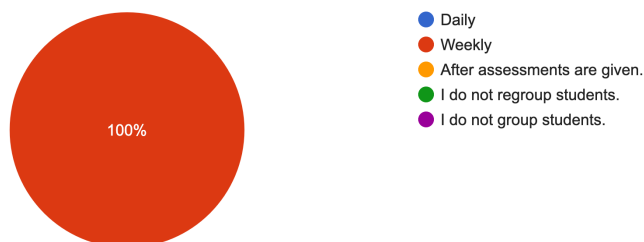
2 responses



Question 23

How frequently do you regroup your students?

2 responses



Question 24

What do you consider Best Practices in Early Childhood Literacy?

Participant A: Reading books, talking, singing, using poems or chants, shared writing, journal writing, exploring with books and letters

Participant B: Reading to students, interacting with books, modeling reading and writing, think alouds, exploration with letters and sounds

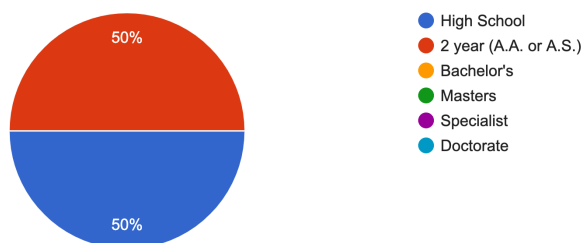
Appendix H

Intern Survey Results

Question 1

What is your highest degree?

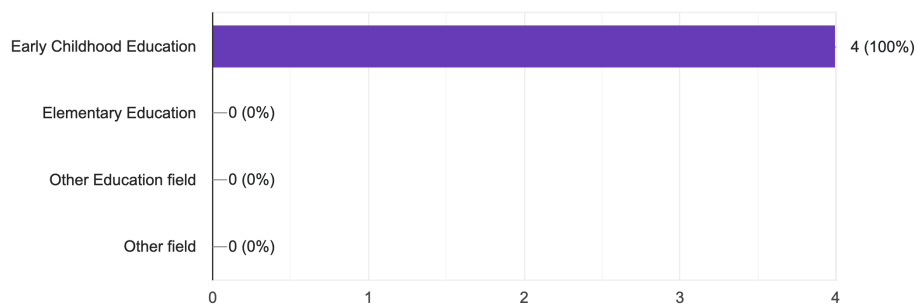
4 responses



Question 2

What is your degree in? (If you are an intern, what is the degree you are seeking?)

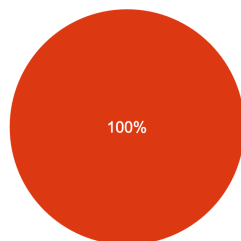
4 responses



Question 3

Are you a certified teacher?

4 responses

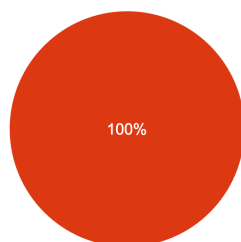


- Yes
- No

Question 4

Are you a certified teacher?

4 responses

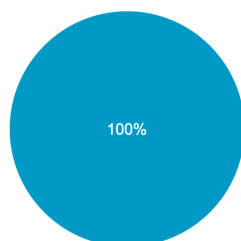


- Yes
- No

Question 5

How long have you been teaching?

4 responses

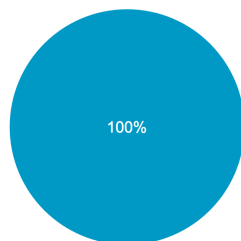


- One year
- Two - five years
- Six - ten years
- Ten - twenty years
- More than twenty years
- I have not taught at least a year.

Question 6

How long have you been teaching in this district?

4 responses

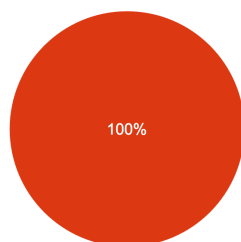


- One year
- Two - five years
- Six - ten years
- Ten - twenty years
- More than twenty years
- I have not taught in this district.

Question 7

Have you taught the Summer [redacted] before?

4 responses

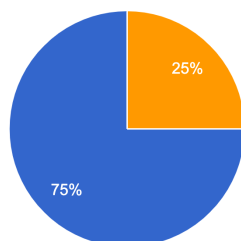


- Yes
- No

Question 8

How often should Phonological Awareness be taught in [redacted]?

4 responses

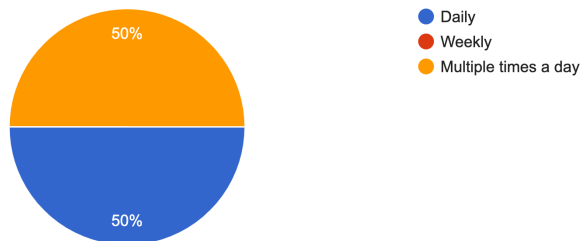


- Daily
- Weekly
- Multiple times a day

Question 9

How often should Phonemic Awareness be taught in [redacted]?

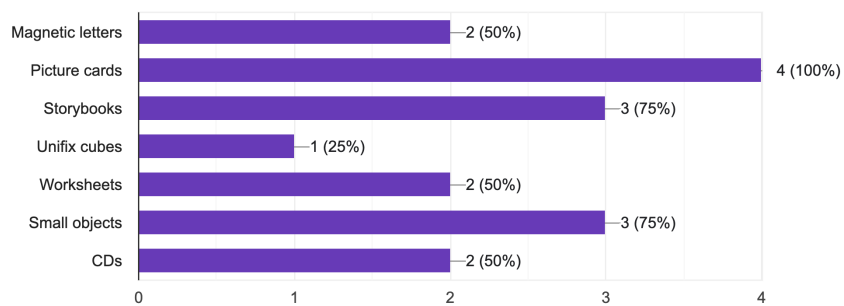
4 responses



Question 10

Which items are appropriate for Phonological/Phonemic Awareness instruction?

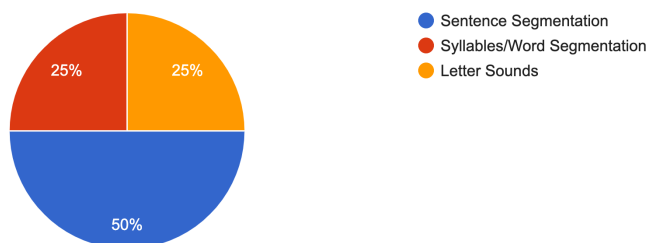
4 responses



Question 11

Which should be taught first in Phonological/Phonemic Awareness Instruction?

4 responses



Question 12

Why should the one you chose to be taught first?

Participant A: That is how my supervising teacher told me to do it. (Sentence Segmentation)

Participant B: Kids cannot understand word parts if they do not understand sounds. (Letter Sounds)

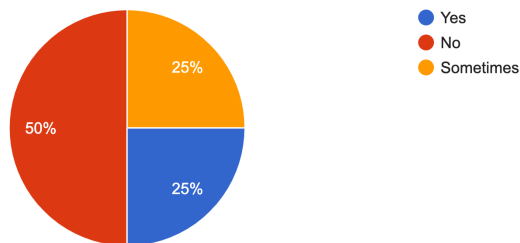
Participant C: This comes before students are taught letter/sound correlation (Syllables/Word Segmentation)

Participant D: In phonological and phonemic awareness you start with the big things, so the children are able to hear the parts then go to smaller parts. (Sentence Segmentation)

Question 13

Is letter/sound correlation taught during Phonological/Phonemic Awareness instruction?

4 responses



Question 14

Explain your answer to the previous question.

Participant A: If it is appropriate for the lesson. (Sometimes)

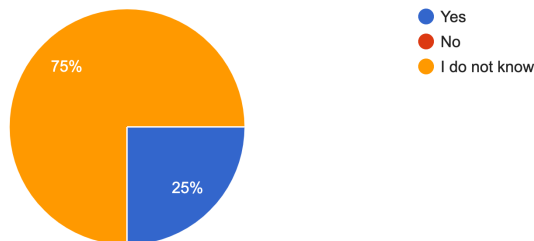
Participant B: Letters and letter sounds are very important for the students to know before they go to kindergarten. (Yes)

Participant C: Phonics is not part of phonological awareness (No)

Participant D: This is phonics and is a harder skill, they have to be able to hear the sounds before they can make the connection between letters and sounds. (No)

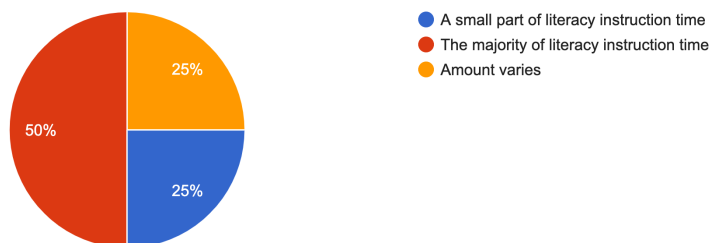
Question 15

Is Phonological/Phonemic Awareness covered sufficiently in the Scholastic [redacted] curriculum?
4 responses



Question 16

How much time, in [redacted] should Phonological/Phonemic Awareness instruction take?
4 responses



Question 17

Explain your answer to the previous question.

Participant A: There are other things to teach during literacy instruction like writing, comprehension, and vocabulary. (A small part of literacy instruction time)

Participant B: For the kids to be ready for kindergarten they need to know letters and sounds. (The majority of literacy instruction time)

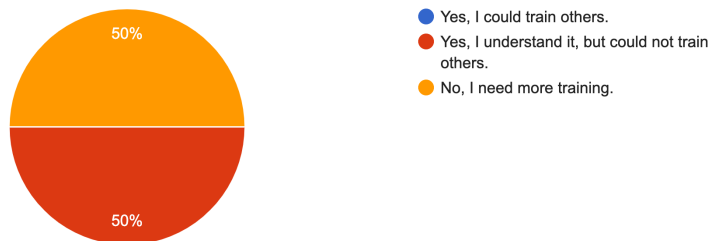
Participant C: These are important skills for students to have in order to learn how to read. (The majority of literacy instruction time)

Participant D: Depending on the lesson you are teaching. (Amount varies)

Question 18

Do you feel well trained in Phonological/Phonemic Awareness instruction?

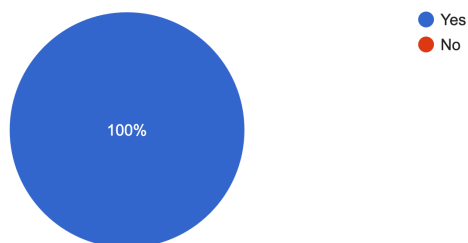
4 responses



Question 19

Would you like more training in Phonological/Phonemic Awareness?

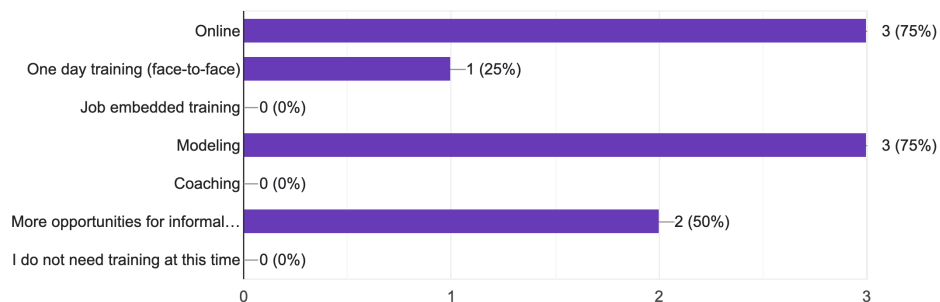
4 responses



Question 20

Which of the following types of training, if any, would significantly contribute to increasing your teaching in the area of Phonological/Phonemic Instruction? (Check all that apply.)

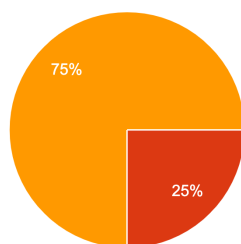
4 responses



Question 21

How comfortable are you in assessing your students' Phonological/Phonemic Awareness abilities?

4 responses

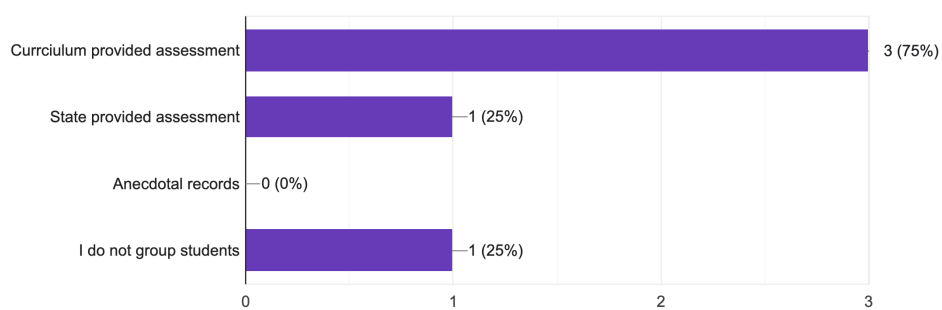


- Very comfortable. Can assess, plan instruction, and explain to parents.
- Comfortable. Can assess, and plan instruction but am unsure. how to expl...
- Neutral. Can use the assessment tool and have a basic understanding about...
- Uncomfortable. Can use the assessment tool, but do not know wha...
- Very uncomfortable. Not comfortable using the assessment tool.

Question 22

How do you group students?

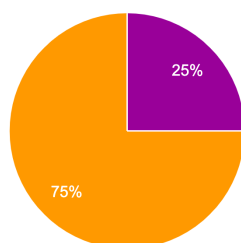
4 responses



Question 23

How frequently do you regroup your students?

4 responses



- Daily
- Weekly
- After assessments are given.
- I do not regroup students.
- I do not group students.

Question 24

What do you consider Best Practices in Early Literacy Instruction?

Participant A: Teaching skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Participant B: Book knowledge, print knowledge, letter and sound correlation

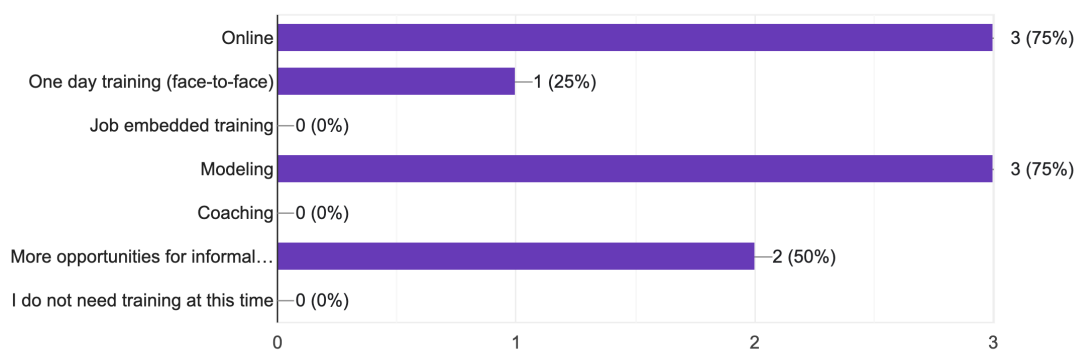
Participant C: Reading, writing, listening, speaking

Participant D: Using strategies like shared reading, word work, centers, and read alouds.

Question 26

Which of the following types of training, if any, would significantly contribute to increasing your teaching in the area of Best Practices for Early Childhood Literacy? (Check all that apply.)

4 responses



Appendix I

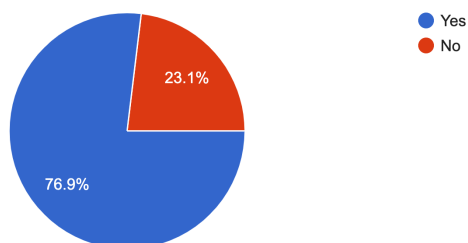
Parent Survey Results

Twenty surveys were handed out to parents, fifteen were returned.

Question 1

Has your child been to school before?

13 responses



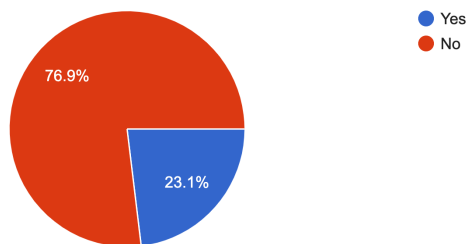
Question 2

Data withheld due to confidentiality.

Question 3

Have you had a child attend Summer [redacted] previously?

13 responses



Question 4

If yes, where and when?

Participant D: (At the school under study), four years ago

Participant K: (At the school under study), last year

Question 5

What is your child's two academic strengths?

Participant A: cutting, talking

Participant B: Write name, math

Participant C: Reading, writing

Participant D: Songs and likes books

Participant E: No response

Participant F: No response

Participant G: Reading, math

Participant H: Knows his name, counts

Participant I: Knows his name, likes Legos

Participant J: She can count to 10 and say her ABCs.

Participant K: Math, letters

Participant L: Counting, ABCs

Participant M: No response

Participant N: Colors, shapes

Participant O: Puzzles, songs

Question 6

What is your child's two academic weaknesses?

Participant A: Letters, reading

Participant B: He doesn't listen, he doesn't know his letters or numbers.

Participant C: Letters, math

Participant D: Listening and following directions

Participant E: No response

Participant F: He can't read.

Participant G: Math

Participant H: Reading, writing

Participant I: Reading

Participant J: She doesn't know letters or how to write her name.

Participant K: Reading, listening

Participant L: None

Participant M: No response

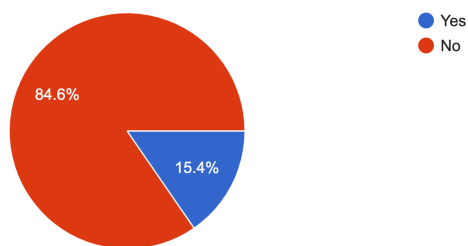
Participant N: Letters, writing

Participant O: Letters, numbers

Question 7

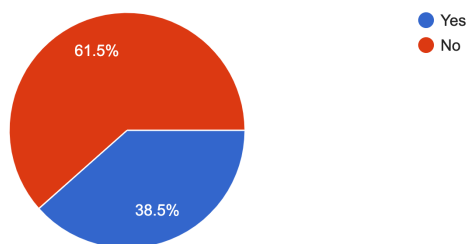
Do you know what Phonological Awareness instruction is?

13 responses



Do you know what Phonemic Awareness instruction is?

13 responses



Question 9

What do you want your child to learn in Summer Prekindergarten?

Participant A: Read

Participant B: Letters

Participant C: Be ready for kindergarten

Participant D: Letters, numbers

Participant E: No response

Participant F: Ready for kindergarten

Participant G: Math

Participant H: Reading, writing

Participant I: To read

Participant J: What she needs to start kindergarten

Participant K: Be a good listener

Participant L: Letters

Participant M: No response

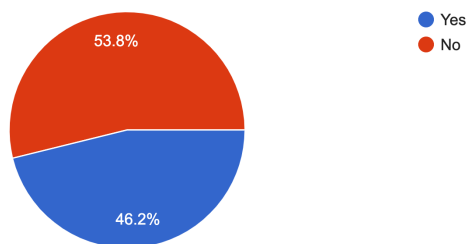
Participant N: Be ready for kindergarten

Participant O: Letters, numbers

Question 10

Are you willing to come in for training in how to help your child at home?

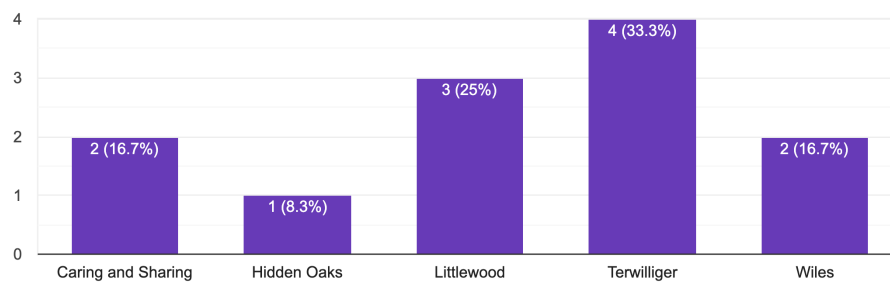
13 responses



Question 11

Where will your child attend kindergarten?

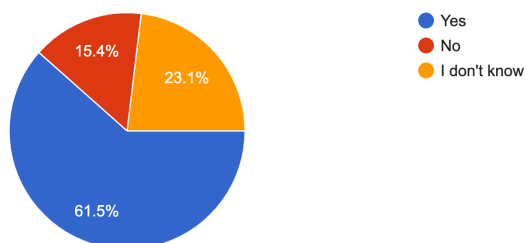
12 responses



Question 12

Does your child have an IEP?

13 responses



Question 13

Please feel free to add any comments or additional concerns you would like to make.

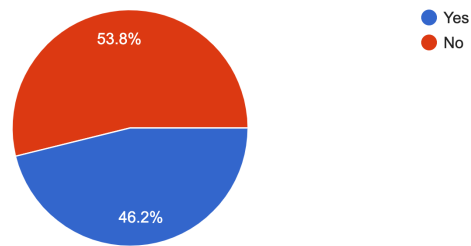
Participant E: Will letters be learned before school starts?

Participant K: He likes to play.

Question 14

Would you be willing to be contacted later with follow-up questions?

13 responses



Appendix J

Administrator Interview

Principal (site-based)

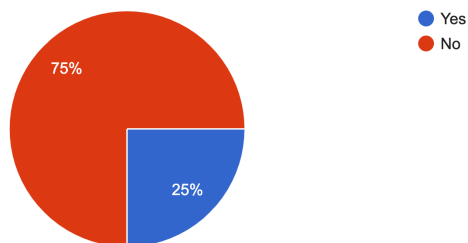
Assistant Principal (site-based)

Director of Head Start (district-based)

Prekindergarten Director (district-based)

Question 1

Do you have a degree in Early Childhood?
4 responses



Principal - No

Assistant Principal - No

Director of Head Start - No

prekindergarten Director - Yes

Comments

What is your degree in?

Principal - Elementary Education (B.A.), Educational Leadership (M.Ed.) “I have a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master's degree in educational leadership.”

Assistant Principal – Elementary Education (B.A.), Educational Leadership (M.Ed.) “I taught math in the intermediate grades.”

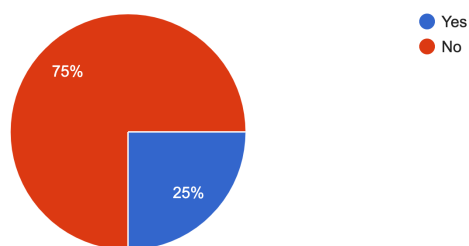
Director of Head Start – Family and Consumer Sciences (B.A.) “I have been in charge of the Head Start program for a long time. Even though my degree is not in Early Childhood, I feel my experience compensates for that.”

Prekindergarten Director – Early Childhood (B.S.), Educational Leadership (M.Ed.) “I actually left the University of Florida to get my degree in Early Childhood Education because UF did not offer it. Yes, it was a long time ago.”

Question 3

Do you feel the district places an emphasis on Early Childhood Education?

4 responses



Comments

Principal - " I obviously have an emphasis on Early Childhood education since my school has six Head Start classes and two Pre-K ESE classes. I wish we could serve more of our own students before they entered kindergarten.”

Assistant Principal - " Early Childhood is rarely mentioned at my district meetings.”

Director of Head Start - " We serve 340 students during the school year. We could definitely serve more students as we always have a waiting list.”

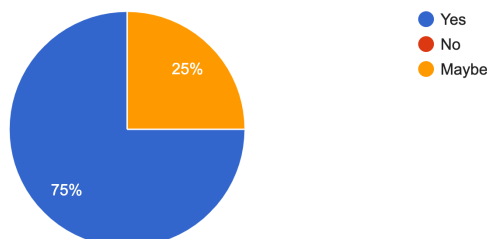
Prekindergarten Director - “Sometimes I feel like the district only looks at Head Start as their Early Childhood Education. They do not offer the school year prekindergarten program to anyone except for Head Start students. This eliminates many students from having the benefit of receiving any Early Childhood Education services with the district. I go to meetings, and I feel like I am the only one that sees the need for prekindergarten for

students that do not qualify for Head Start. I have spoken to two principals that begged to have programs at their locations and the district told them they could not have them.”

Question 4

Do you have highly qualified people in place for Early Childhood Education?

4 responses



Principal - “One of my Pre-K ESE teachers is certified in Early Childhood, the other one has a temporary certificate in Early Childhood. All my Head Start teachers have at least an AA in Early Childhood, and two of them have a bachelor's degree in early childhood.”

Assistant Principal - " I am new to the school, so I am not sure who is teaching what. I think my principal would make sure that there are qualified people in place. This is something I will definitely look into in the fall. I do know the two summer prekindergarten teachers are qualified.”

Director of Head Start - " I have a lot of teachers with college degrees. Head Start requires a certain percentage of teachers to have a bachelor's degree. I do have a few master’s degrees. My teachers that do not have at least an AA are taking classes towards their degree, head Start is paying for that so more of our teachers will have degrees.”

Prekindergarten Director - “The teachers I hired for the summer prekindergarten program are highly qualified. In addition to having the required degree, they receive the states prekindergarten trainings. I am also very hands on and provide modeling, coaching and embedded training. In addition to the monthly required observations, I make observations twice a week for the sole purpose of giving teachers the opportunity to reflect and grow. During the school year I do monthly observations as required by the state.”

Question 5

Principal - " The district should expand the program so more students can benefit. Also, they need to market the program, no one knows about it.”

Assistant Principal - "I did not know anything about the program until I came to this school. So, I think they need to tell people about the program."

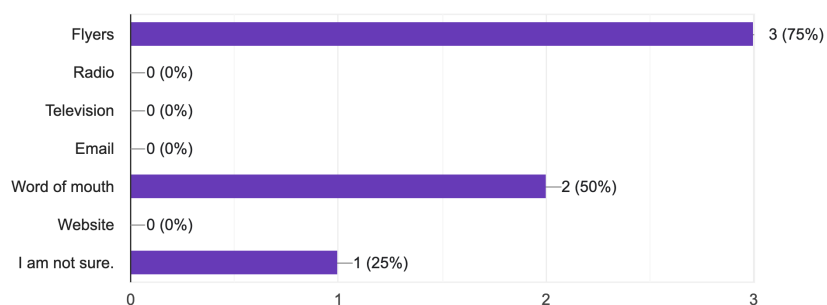
Director of Head Start - "Having sites on the east side of Gainesville would allow more east side students to participate. Transportation is a problem and with only one west side location many students are excluded from the program."

prekindergarten N Director - " The district needs to do a better job of marketing the program as well as housing the program at multiple sites in the district. In my opinion, every school would fill at least one summer prekindergarten class if given the opportunity."

Question 6

How does the district market the Summer VPK program?

4 responses



Principal - "There needs to be a larger campaign so more students can come and get some preparation before school starts in August. The small class sizes allow for the teachers to have a lot of time to individualize instruction for the students."

Assistant Principal - "I know the prekindergarten department brings flyers for us to display. I am not sure how else it is marketed."

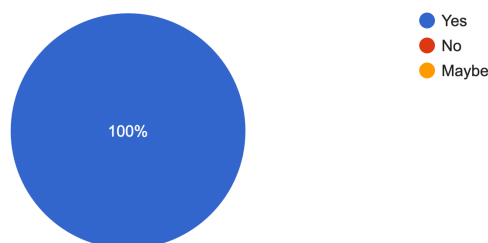
Director of Head Start - "It seems like they should use all of those methods in order to get the word out. This is a fabulous free summer program. I know there are a lot of parents that would utilize this program if they knew more about it. It is great for working families because it is five days a week and, longer than traditional school days."

Prekindergarten Director - "I created flyers for schools to promote the summer prekindergarten program. In addition, I reached out to the Pre-K ESE department to encourage their students to join the program."

Question 7

Do you think the Summer VPK program should expand to more than one location?

4 responses



Principal - "I love having it here, I wish we had more units because we definitely have more students coming to kindergarten that could use the additional support."

Assistant Principal - "This is a great program. I would think every elementary school would benefit from having this program at their location to prepare their incoming kindergarten students."

Director of Head Start – No further explanation

Prekindergarten Director – "Like I said, I think every school should have at least one unit."

Question 8

What expectations does the district have for the students that complete the summer prekindergarten program?

Principal - "I do not know what the district's expectations are."

Assistant Principal - "I have no idea. I would assume that they would be kindergarten ready."

Director of Head Start - "The district wants children to pass the kindergarten readiness assessment in the fall."

Prekindergarten Director - "I do not know of any specific expectations. I know they have the program because it is required by the state."

Question 9

How do you/the district monitor the future success of you Summer VPK students?

4 responses



Question 10

How do you/the district monitor the future success of your summer prekindergarten students?

Principal – "I think the district can use the state assessments that are given in the fall. I will also use classroom data."

Assistant Principal – "I do not know, but I am going to find out"

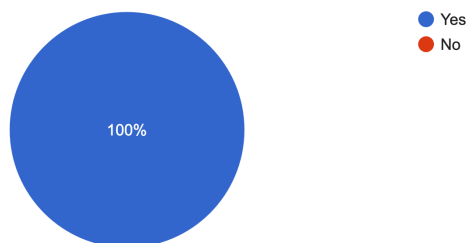
Director of Head Start – "I do not know; the program is provided with a Readiness Rate from the state in the fall."

Prekindergarten Director – "The individual students can be monitored using their fall state assessment. Using the state Readiness Rate that is given in the fall, the program can be grade."

Question 11

Do you have staff in place that are able to teach using Best Practices in Early Childhood Literacy Instruction, specifically Phonological Awareness, and Phonemic Awareness?

4 responses



Comments

Principal - “I feel my teachers are current on their knowledge of Best Practices. This is something we focus on as a whole during the school year.”

Assistant Principal - “I say yes, but that is based on assuming my principal made sure that this is the case. I know she has a focus on Best Practices in Literacy Instruction because it is part of our School Improvement plan.”

Director of Head Start - “My teachers get state prekindergarten training in all of these.”

Prekindergarten Director – “In the Summer prekindergarten, the teachers are able to teach using Best Practices. This is part of the pre-planning professional development. I can also see them using the techniques in the classroom.”

Question 12

What is the biggest concern of incoming kindergarten students?

Principal - “Children are coming to school with limited exposure to academics. This leads to them having behavior problems once they come to school. If they could come and learn how the school works and get some academic preparation before kindergarten, things would be better for everyone.”

Assistant Principal – “I think that being unprepared academically is a major part of why kindergarten students have behavior problems.”

Director of Head Start - “Children need to be academically ready for kindergarten or they will be behind from the start.”

prekindergarten Director - "I know we have many students that enter kindergarten very far behind because they have had no formal academic instruction. Many students do attend daycare, but they are not giving them academic preparation.

Question 13

Principal - "As I mentioned, it would help them by at least giving them exposure to some academics so when they start, they have some recognition and maybe even a little confidence in knowing something."

Assistant Principal – "Students could come in and get to know the school and how to act in school. Along with that, they have the opportunity to learn some vital skills necessary to be successful in kindergarten."

Director of Head Start - "It gives them a chance to learn the necessary skills to be ready for Kindergarten."

Prekindergarten Director - "We are able to fill in that gap and provide them with some academic instruction that will help them out before they walk into kindergarten.

Question 14

Principal - "My only concern about the summer prekindergarten program is the length of the school day. It is a very long day for the students and teachers."

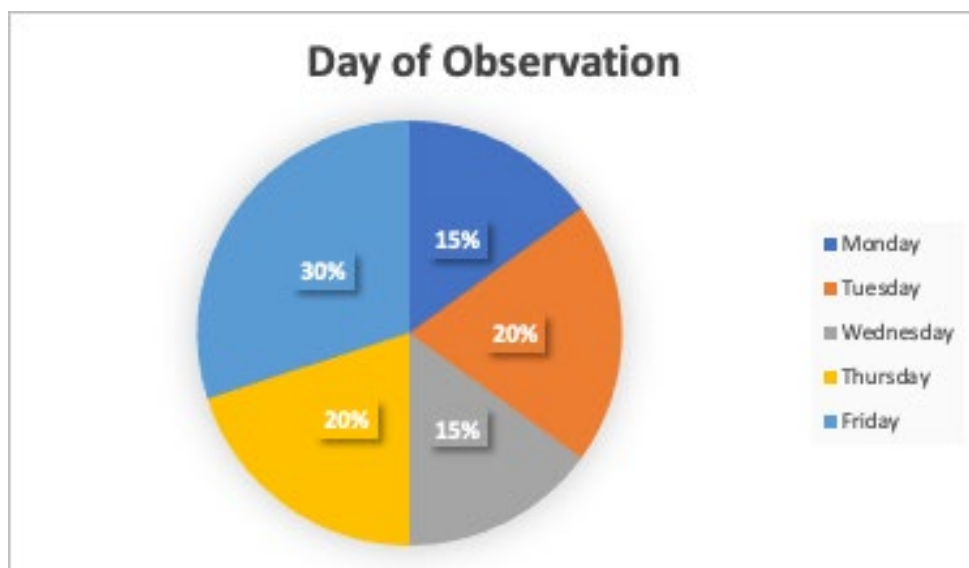
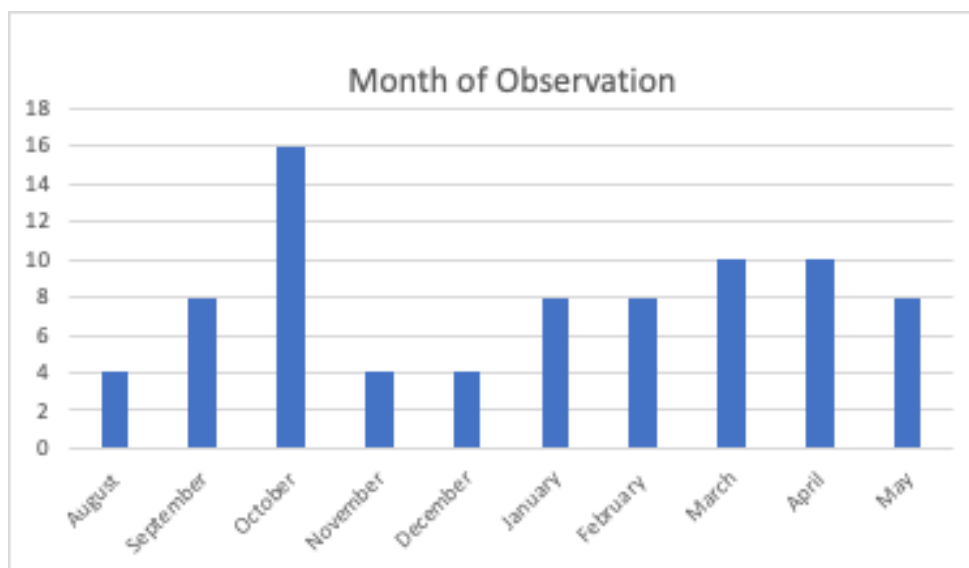
Assistant Principal – "Thank you for making me realize how important the Summer prekindergarten program is!"

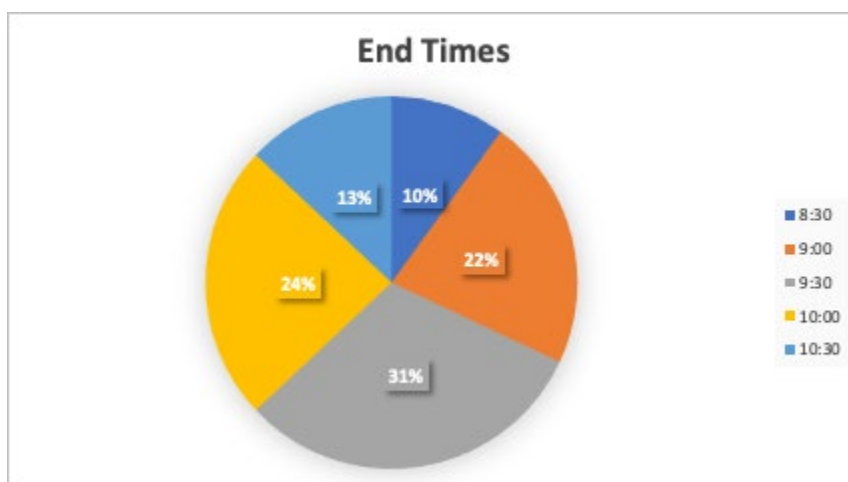
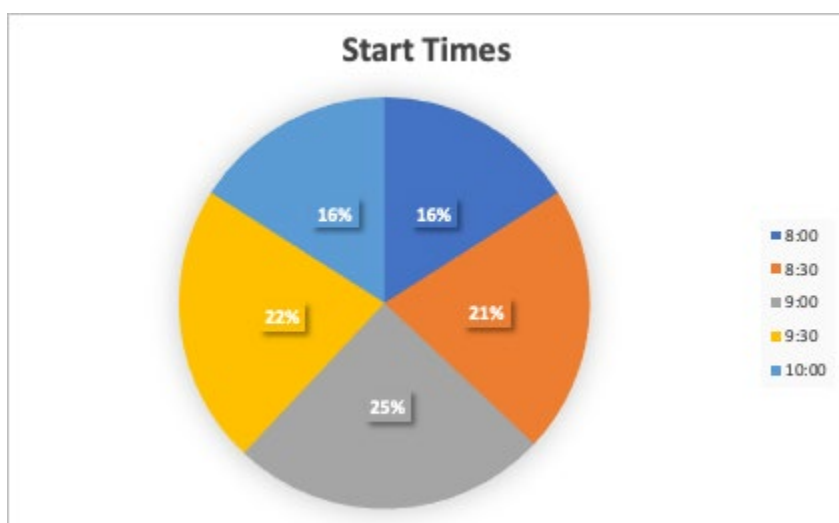
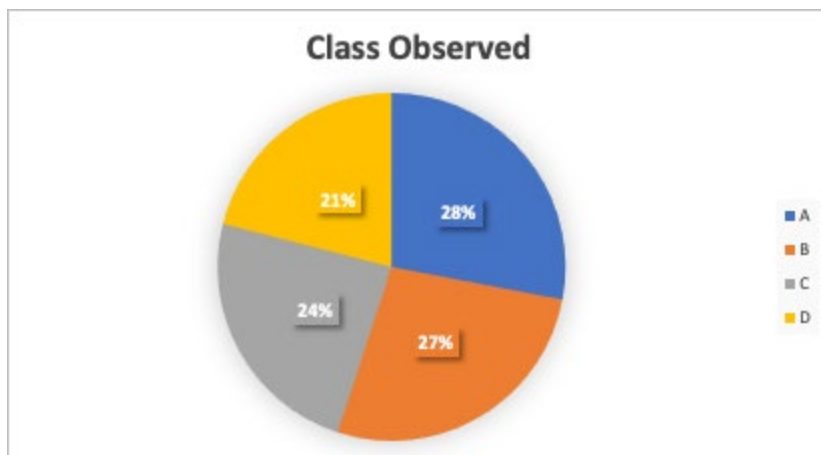
Director of Head Start - "During the school year, many of our Head Start classes are also prekindergarten classes. We take the same assessments, and our goal is to prepare the children for kindergarten. Unfortunately, our students are out all summer, and they sometimes forget what they learned and do not perform as well on the state assessment in the fall as some of the summer prekindergarten students."

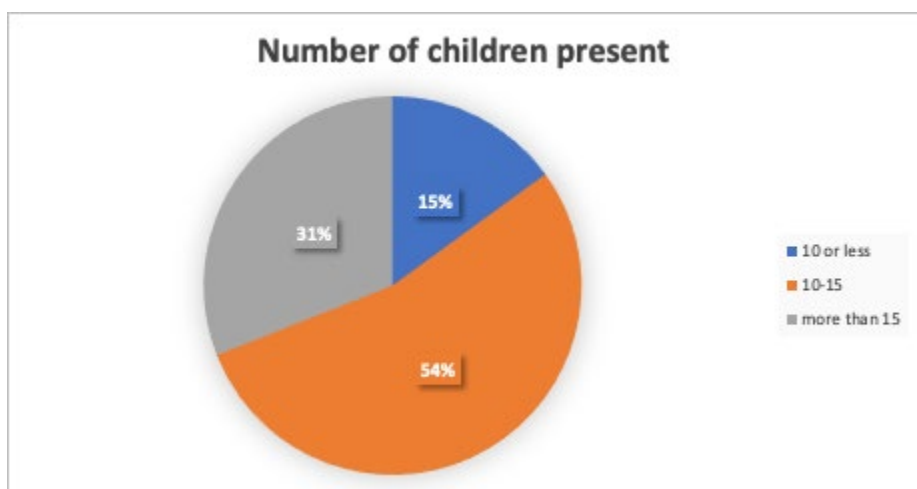
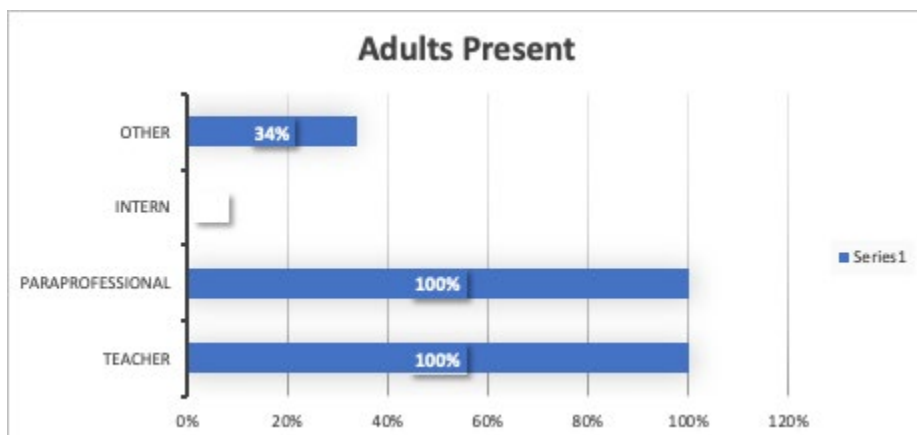
Prekindergarten Director - "I hope that you are able to find data to support the district expanding not only the summer prekindergarten program, but also the way we serve students for prekindergarten during the school year. We have a lot of students that would benefit from prekindergarten, we need to try to reach as many students as possible so that we can increase their chances of staying on track later in their academic careers."

Appendix K

Observation Data School Year Prekindergarten Program





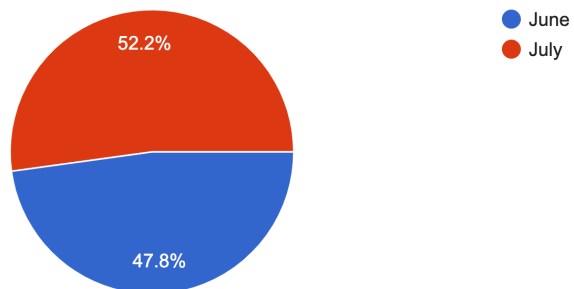


Appendix L

Observation Data Summer Prekindergarten

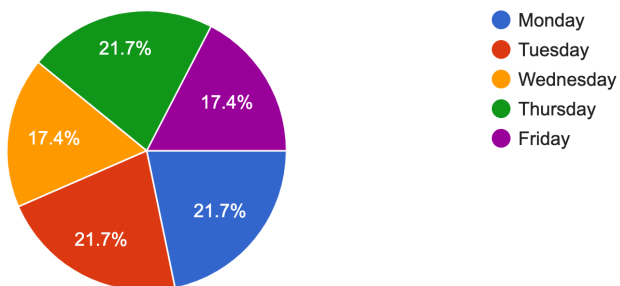
Month

23 responses



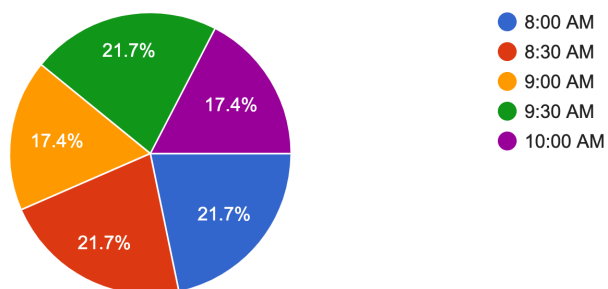
Date

23 responses

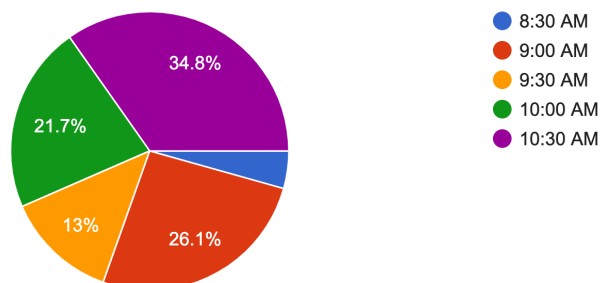


Start time

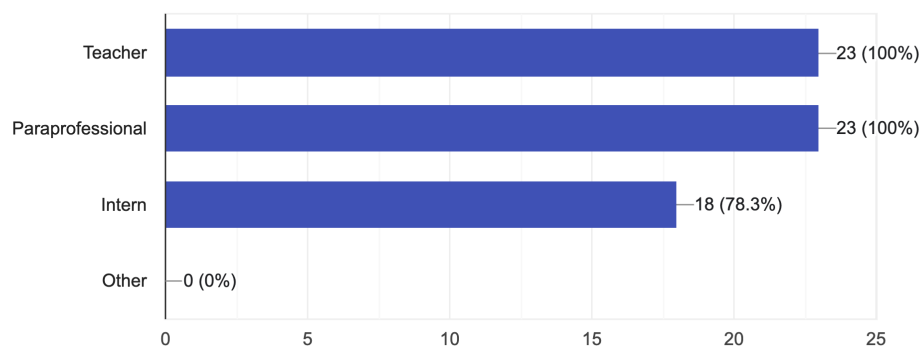
23 responses

**End time**

23 responses

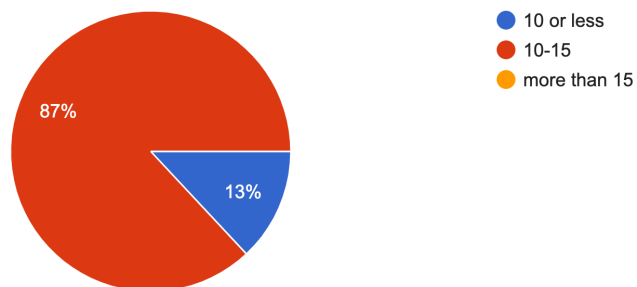
**Adults present**

23 responses



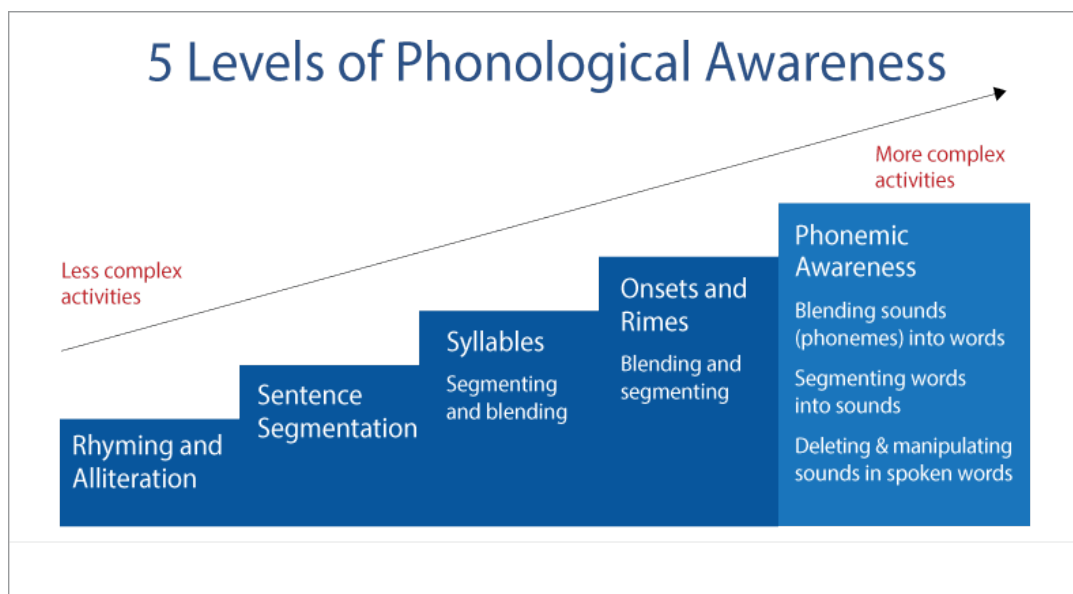
Number of children

23 responses



Appendix M

Phonological Awareness Continuum



Note. Source: Phonological and Phonemic Awareness. Reading Rockets. (2023, January 17). <https://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/reading-basics/phonemic>

Appendix N

As Is Chart

Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small school district with only one summer prekindergarten unit • High percentage of children not prepared for kindergarten • Few students enrolled in summer prekindergarten • District focused on standardized tested grades
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No perceived value of early childhood education • Summer prekindergarten viewed as childcare with no expectation of academic achievement
Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One class – limited opportunities for collaboration for teachers • Schedule – long day due to state requirements
Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noncertified prekindergarten teachers lack basic knowledge about phonological awareness and phonemic awareness • Noncertified prekindergarten teachers lack proficiency in teaching phonological awareness and phonemic awareness • Noncertified prekindergarten teachers do not receive embedded professional development

Appendix O

To Be Chart

Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small school district with multiple summer prekindergarten units • High percentage of children prepared for kindergarten • A large number of students enrolled in summer prekindergarten • District focused on all grades
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All educators value early childhood education • High academic expectations for all Summer and Full Year Summer prekindergarten programs
Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple classes offered at each school site– many opportunities for collaboration • Schedule – long day due to state requirements, however other options could be looked at including Saturday classes
Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All prekindergarten teachers have knowledge about Phonological Awareness and Phonemic Awareness • All prekindergarten teachers are proficient in teaching Phonological Awareness and Phonemic Awareness • All prekindergarten teachers receive embedded professional development

Appendix P
Strategies and Actions Chart

Strategies	Actions
Establish a sense of urgency	<p>Meet with district school superintendent, director of early childhood education, and school board members to share:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research on academic achievement in terms of kindergarten readiness from the district’s prekindergarten programs • the disparity that exists between certified prekindergarten teachers and noncertified prekindergarten teachers regarding knowledge and effective instructional practices, specifically in phonological awareness and phonemic awareness • how the lack of participation is limiting the number of children that can benefit from the prekindergarten program • the implementation plan that could increase the number of participating students, the quality of the instruction, and the number of kindergarten students that could be kindergarten ready upon enrollment in kindergarten with the help of the prekindergarten program
Form a powerful guiding coalition	<p>Members of the guiding coalition will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • superintendent • district leaders • principals • teachers • school board members • university Professor Emeritus from the Early Childhood education department
Develop a Vision and Strategy	<p>The vision will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • express the importance of early childhood education in the district under study

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highlights the contributions of the prekindergarten program to the district as a whole • reflect Best Early Childhood Literacy Practices, specifically in regard to phonological awareness and phonemic awareness • change the requirements of all prekindergarten teaching positions to include the word certified teacher • provide a timeline for creating more summer units and to allow for more school year units based on space availability • provide a timeline to establish job embedded professional development, coaching/mentoring
Communicate the Change Vision	<p>Communication will include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing information to the entire district to solicit support, feedback and suggestions • meetings with the union to discuss necessary contract change • meetings with the budget department so that the necessary funding is made available to support the changes • meetings with all PREKINDERGARTEN teachers, staff, site-based administrators and professional development department to guarantee the same information is being disseminated to the affected parties • school board workshops to go over the action plan • parent meetings to make sure that they understand the new emphasis on early childhood education <p>community meetings, newspaper articles, public service announcements to share the vision and goals</p>
Empower others to act on the vision, remove barriers	<p>Barriers removed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited teacher knowledge of effective instructional strategies for teaching phonological awareness and phonemic awareness skills • the lack of certified school year prekindergarten teachers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of appropriate job embedded professional development, coaching/mentoring for prekindergarten teachers • lack of ability for the prekindergarten teachers to collaborate with peers • teacher retention
Generate Short Term Wins	<p>Short term wins include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all prekindergarten teachers certified • more prekindergarten summer units • more prekindergarten school year units • increase prekindergarten participation • teachers using instructional practices for teaching phonological awareness and phonemic awareness • increase students' academic achievement
Consolidate gains and produce more change	<p>Acceleration will be achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct regular check-ins with prekindergarten teachers to ensure that they have the support and resources they need to effectively teach phonological and phonemic awareness. • Systems in place so that prekindergarten teachers collaborate with one another to share best practices and learn from each other. • System developed for tracking the progress of former prekindergarten students beyond their kindergarten year to measure the long-term impact of the program. • Build relationships with university professors and individuals in other educational institutions to stay up to date on the latest research and best practices in early childhood education.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold regular community events to highlight the success of the prekindergarten program and build support for its continued expansion and improvement.
Anchoring new approaches in the culture	<p>Instituting change will happen by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• requiring all prekindergarten teachers to be certified• providing appropriate professional development for prekindergarten teachers• retaining teachers who choose to and are passionate about teaching our youngest students• building relationships with the university to help support the change• building community partnerships