Prekindergarten programs are implemented by Local Education Agencies based on state law and the guidelines of the Texas Education Agency. Schools districts must offer programs if they have 15 or more eligible 4-year olds. Districts may apply to TEA for grants to expand existing half day prekindergarten or kindergarten programs to full day or establish prekindergarten programs at additional campuses. The programs are designed to develop skills necessary for success in the regular public school curriculum, with a focus on pre-reading, language, and mathematics.

At a Glance

The majority of the 239 prekindergarten teachers were female (27 male teachers). Three major ethnic groups, Black, Hispanic and White accounted for most prekindergarten teachers; about 50% were Hispanic. There were 242 teacher aides, who were to act as co-teachers, taking an active role in classroom activities. All but four of the aides were female. Sixty-two percent were Hispanic, followed by 33% Black and 5% White.

Prekindergarten Program Description

The full day and half day prekindergartens included bilingual, ESL (English as a Second Language) and regular education classrooms. The Language Enrichment Activities Program (LEAP) was implemented as the foundation of the curriculum, with Building Language to Literacy (BLL) as the ESL component and Scholastic Early Childhood Program as the State adoption. LEAP meets the requirements of the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines. Full day and half day programs followed similar schedules in terms of daily activities and curriculum, with full day programs providing more time on task and a brief rest time. Curricular activities included meeting and greeting, LEAP, Math/Science/Social Studies, learning center work time, music/movement, journal writing, outdoor learning, reading/rest, small group activities, storytime/read aloud, songs, poems, review and dismissal. Classrooms were configured to incorporate learning centers. Schools exercised some flexibility in implementing the schedule, in accordance with site-based management. The Early Childhood Department provided teachers with a syllabus and a scope and sequence that supplied details, by week of required content, instructional tools, instructional methods, suggested teaching time and assessment methods.

Early Childhood Department Prekindergarten Program Support

The district’s Early Childhood Department devoted many resources to support prekindergarten...
program implementation. Training and assistance in LEAP implementation was ongoing throughout the year. The district continued active participation in DallasKids, the early childhood reading collaborative headed by the Foundation for Community Empowerment. In addition, the Early Childhood Department managed the Together We Succeed grant, funded by the Communities Foundation of Texas. This grant supported a partnership with Head Start of Greater Dallas to supplement LEAP implementation and kindergarten transition for students in the East Dallas Head Start Center and the four DISD schools which many of the Head Start students ultimately attend.

Coaching and Mentoring Program
The Early Childhood Department continued its association with SMU, with financial support from the Dallas Foundation, to facilitate LEAP implementation with a coaching and mentoring program. First year implementation was highly successful, providing many benefits for prekindergarten teachers and students. Mentors participated in monthly LEAP training provided through the Early Childhood Department and SMU, and monthly training and meetings with Early Childhood specialists. Mentors planned and provided periodic training for teachers. Mentor teacher’s classrooms were used as demonstration classrooms. Mentors modeled LEAP lessons and offered assistance to teachers. Coaches were part-time district employees, experts in early childhood classroom education, who were not currently teaching in their own classrooms. They observed prekindergarten teachers, modeled LEAP lessons, helped with training and provided assistance upon teacher request. Coaches met monthly with Early Childhood and LEAP personnel from SMU, serving as the primary liaison between Early Childhood specialists and mentor teachers.

Prekindergarten Outcomes
About 3,500 prekindergarten students were administered the English Woodcock Munoz Language Survey (WMLS) in the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004. On the fall administration, 98% of bilingual education prekindergarten students were at Levels 1, 2, or 3 of the WMLS. On the spring administration, 14% of bilingual students were at Levels 4 or 5. However, among ESL students, while 94% scored at Levels 1, 2, or 3 on the fall administration, 42% scored at Levels 4 or 5 on the spring administration.

Prekindergarten students were tested in the fall and spring with the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL-3). The table below shows Spring 2004 DIAL-3 mean NCE scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>N Tested</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motor</td>
<td>5,745</td>
<td>77.73</td>
<td>20.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>5,745</td>
<td>50.19</td>
<td>22.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>5,745</td>
<td>48.46</td>
<td>26.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,745</td>
<td>60.28</td>
<td>23.494</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The motor mean NCE score corresponds to a percentile rank score of 90%, indicating that district students scored higher than 90% of the norm group. The concepts mean NCE score corresponds to a percentile rank score of 50, and the language mean NCE corresponds to a percentile rank of 47. The national norm group for the DIAL-3 has less minority representation and higher parent education attainment than the DISD prekindergarten population. Given the at-risk nature of district prekindergarten students, scores close to the 50th percentile are commendable. The somewhat lower language score reinforces the need for a strong language-based curriculum, which the prekindergarten program now has in place with LEAP.

Results for spring kindergarten Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Logramos were analyzed based on prior year participation in prekindergarten: full day, half day, Brashear or no district prekindergarten. Differences between groups of prekindergarten students were statistically significant, but small. Students in district prekindergarten programs (full day, half day, Brashear) performed consistently better than students who were not in the district for prekindergarten. The overall district prekindergarten attendance rate was 95.9%.