

The Chicago Program Evaluation Project: C-PEP

What is C-PEP? An independent evaluation of early childhood education conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. with funding support from McCormick Foundation

C-PEP goals: identify program strengths and weaknesses and guide improvements, focusing on three key research questions

- What are the characteristics and developmental levels, and school readiness skills of children attending Chicago's early childhood education programs in the fall of 2006?
- What are the characteristics of teachers and classrooms in Chicago's early childhood education programs?
- What developmental progress do children make during the preschool year? How are family background characteristics and classroom environments related to children's developmental progress during the year?

The children who participated

- Focus on four-year-olds, with 711 students given parental consent to participate.
- Classes selected at random, sorted by community to ensure diversity. Sample included 33 Full-Day, 31 Half-Day Head Start, and 31 Preschool for All classes.
- From those classrooms, program distribution was as follows: 33 percent from Preschool for All, 31 percent from Full-Day programs, and 36 percent from Half-Day Head Start (citywide, far more children are enrolled in Preschool for All than in Full- or Half-Day Head Start).

What C-PEP measures

Cognitive development: These areas that predict success in school and have standardized scores, allowing comparison with a national sample of children the same age.

- Vocabulary: English- and Spanish-language
- Early literacy
- Early mathematics

Social-emotional development: These areas associate with learning and are measurable.

- Attention/persistence: a child's ability to do things such as settle into an activity or concentrate.
- Social behavior: cooperation and interaction (e.g., empathy towards other children, leadership).
- Behavior problems: includes internalizing behaviors (social withdrawal) and externalizing behaviors (attention problems and overactive behavior).

Classroom quality and teacher behavior: These aspects are identified as important for young children's development

- Provisions and materials for learning
- Classroom organization
- Emotional supportiveness of teacher/student interactions
- Instructional support

Measurements used: Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

When the study was conducted

- Fall 2006 and Spring 2007: direct assessments of cognitive and social-emotional development.
- Fall 2006: teacher reports of their education, experience, professional development, instructional practices, curriculum, and types of child assessments used during the year.
- February 2007: independent classroom observations to assess quality, including materials for learning, emotional support, classroom management, and the quality of instruction.

Fall assessments conducted between mid-October and November 30, 2006. Spring assessments conducted between early April and mid-May. The average interval between the fall and spring assessments for all children was 5.4 months.