

AISD Prekindergarten Partnership Program Summary Report, 2019–2020

Introduction

Austin Independent School District (AISD) was awarded a \$2,000,000 2-year School Transformation Fund implementation grant by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), authorized by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Title I, Part A, School Improvement grant. The grant supports a prekindergarten (pre-K) partnership between AISD, United Way for Greater Austin (UWATX), and participating child development centers (CDCs), to co-enroll 3- and 4-year-old eligible students, and thereby increase pre-K education access for Austin's families. The 2019–2020 school year was the first year of the grant. Prior to the implementation grant, AISD and UWATX partnered in a planning grant with TEA to develop this pre-K partnership, managed through an innovation management organization. This organization, contracting with AISD, provided the CDCs with administrative and instructional support, including recruitment and co-enrollment of eligible pre-K students, coaching and professional learning opportunities for CDC staff, and assistance with recruiting CDC teachers. The goals of the grant were to ensure CDCs attain and maintain state high-quality pre-K education standards, increase student enrollment in CDCs, provide CDC staff with professional learning opportunities for continuous improvement in instruction, and gauge students' learning and skills over time. The grant also sought to increase student enrollment in AISD pre-K centers, through their partnerships with participating CDCs.

Program Description

This report summarizes data received from 19 centers affiliated with UWATX offering pre-K for 3-year-olds (pre-K3; $n = 226$ students) and 18 centers offering pre-K for 4-year-olds (pre-K4; $n = 191$ students). Thirty-two pre-K3 classrooms and 25 pre-K4 classrooms were included in the partnership. Of pre-K3 students, 58% spoke English as their home language, 37% spoke Spanish, and the remaining 5% spoke another language. Of pre-K4 students, 56% spoke English, 38% spoke Spanish, and the remaining 6% spoke another language. Table 1 shows the ethnic and gender distribution of pre-K3 and pre-K4 students.

Table 1.

Demographic Distribution of Pre-K Partnership Child Development Centers

	Pre-K3		Pre-K4	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male	117	52%	102	53%
Female	109	48%	89	47%
Ethnicity or Race				
Hispanic/Latino	153	68%	111	58%
African American/Black	42	19%	48	25%
White	27	12%	20	11%
Asian	1	<1%	5	3%
Two or more races	3	1%	6	3%

Source. AISD 2020 student records

Note. One pre-K4 student was Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander.

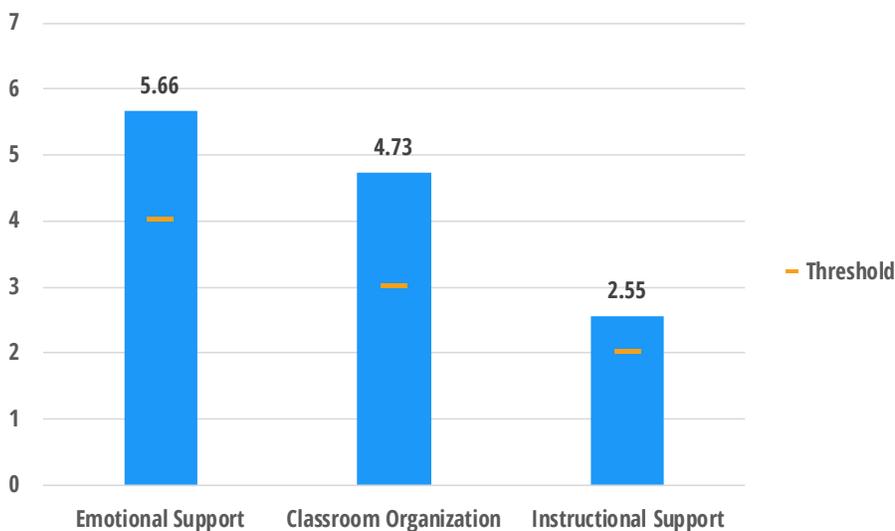
Data are summarized for beginning-of-year (BOY) and middle-of-year (MOY) assessments. End-of-year data were not available due to school closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This report covers the extent to which participating centers met TEA standards for high-quality instruction, teachers’ ratings of classroom observations for quality of instruction, professional development opportunities provided for teachers, and students’ academic performance.

Child Care Center Quality

Trained observers used the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) in some classrooms to rate the quality of pre-K instruction. Observers visited all classrooms between October 2019 and February 2020. End of year assessments were unavailable due to school closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. CLASS includes three subscales using a 7-point scale on which trained observers rate teacher-child interactions to gauge support for students’ learning and development. The sidebar provides more information on each of the subscales. Some teachers taught both pre-K3 and pre-K4 students; thus, CLASS results were combined across the two grade levels. The majority of classrooms tested met the minimum threshold established by the Office of Head Start (Figure 1). That is, 97% of pre-K classrooms exceeded the minimum threshold for Emotional Support ($n = 16$ centers) and Classroom Organization ($n = 16$ centers), and 76% of classrooms exceeded the minimum threshold for Instructional Support ($n = 15$ centers; not every classroom in each center passed the threshold). Missing CLASS data included one out of the 35 pre-K classrooms assessed. Appendix A, Table 1 displays the raw CLASS scores across all the pre-K centers assessed. Note that CLASS was not used as a quality measurement in all AISD pre-K classrooms; thus data could not be compared across the two sites.

Figure 1.

Raw CLASS scores across pre-K centers exceeded the minimum threshold established by the Office of Head Start.



Source. UWATX pre-K centers

Note. $n = 35$ pre-K classrooms. Missing CLASS data included one pre-K classroom. CLASS uses a 7-point rating scale. Some teachers taught both pre-K3 and pre-K4 students; thus CLASS results were combined across grades.

CLASS Emotional Support

Emotional Support is one subscale of the CLASS tool that was used to measure the quality of instruction in pre-K classrooms:

- degree to which teachers establish and promote a positive climate in their classroom through their everyday interactions
- teachers are responsive to children, acknowledge children’s feelings or emotions, help children resolve problems, redirect challenging behavior, and support positive peer relationships
- teachers and children support and respect one another
- teachers are aware of and respond to children’s academic and emotional needs and consistently provide comfort, reassurance and encouragement
- there is an emphasis on children’s interests, motivations and points of view

See the [Office of Head Start website](#) for more information on CLASS.

CLASS Classroom Organization and Instructional Support

Classroom Organization and Instructional Support are two subscales of the CLASS tool that was used to measure the quality of instruction in pre-K classrooms.

Classroom Organization:

- classroom routines and procedures related to organization and management of children's behavior, time, and attention in the classroom
- consistent schedules, well-designed learning centers, established routines, and sensitive and appropriate guidance strategies in classrooms
- collaborative staff; sense of stability and predictability in classrooms that supports exploring, thinking about, and learning new things

Instructional Support:

- ways in which teachers implement the curriculum to promote cognitive and language development effectively
- ways in which teachers support and extend children's thinking, problem solving, conversational skills, and vocabulary
- relevance provided by teachers of concepts and skills to children's everyday lives; teachers ask questions that encourage children to analyze and reason, provide the right amount of help, and offer feedback that acknowledges children's attempts

All partnership classrooms were required to meet the TEA's high-quality pre-K components for the full-day pre-K program. For more information on TEA program standards, see <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/early-childhood-education/high-quality-prekindergarten-faq>. Sample requirements for meeting TEA standards include curriculum covering 10 developmental domains (e.g., social and emotional development, language and communication, emergent literacy reading and writing), class sizes comprising no more than 11 students per teacher, and additional qualifications to the certifications required for pre-K teachers.

Each of the pre-K centers involved in the partnership was accredited by one or more of the following organizations: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Accreditation Commission (NAC), Texas Rising Star (TRS) 3-Stars, and Child Inc. Head Start. The accreditation programs had similar requirements regarding curriculum, class size, and teacher qualifications as the TEA requirements listed above. Appendix B, Table 1 lists the accreditation organization affiliated with each of the pre-K centers in the partnership.

Teacher Professional Development Training

Child Inc. offered 3 weeks of professional development training prior to the start of school in July and August, 2019. These sessions covered 11 topics, including pre-K partnership standards and accreditation, music and movement, and social emotional learning (see Appendix C, Table 1 for a full list of sessions offered). The UWATX Teacher Academy also offered 2 weeks of preservice training covering 13 topics of similar content (see Appendix C, Table 2 for a full list of sessions offered).

All teaching staff were on track to participate in at least 24 hours of professional development training at their respective CDCs throughout the school year. In addition, program staff reported that eight teachers completed between one and 12 supplemental professional development trainings provided by UWATX throughout the school year ($n = 8$ centers). Professional development training participation throughout the school year was not related to teachers' CLASS ratings of classroom quality. That is, all but one of the teachers who completed at least one professional development session passed the minimum threshold on all three CLASS subscales. Furthermore, those who did not complete any professional development sessions still had a high rate of passing the CLASS thresholds on all three subscales. Data on teacher professional development training were not available from all centers. The sessions offered throughout the school year focused on topics such as trauma-informed care and classroom strategies, principles of conscious discipline, and emergent literacy in early childhood (see Appendix C, Table 2).

In addition to these required and supplemental professional development opportunities, program staff reported that all teachers received regular visits from an instructional coach throughout the school year. Teachers at UWATX centers received coaching according to a tiered model. Tier 1 teachers had strong skills and were visited monthly ($n = 4$). Tier 2 teachers needed support and were visited bimonthly ($n = 4$). Tier 3 teachers were struggling or were new teachers and were visited weekly ($n = 5$). All coaching sessions included observation, debriefing, goal setting, and reflection. At Child Inc. Centers, all teachers were

visited weekly throughout the school year until mid-March, when any professional development opportunities and/or training sessions were only available online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In-person coaching sessions included observation, conversation, and debriefing after children left for the day. Program staff reported that many teachers received informal coaching either in person or on the phone, upon request.

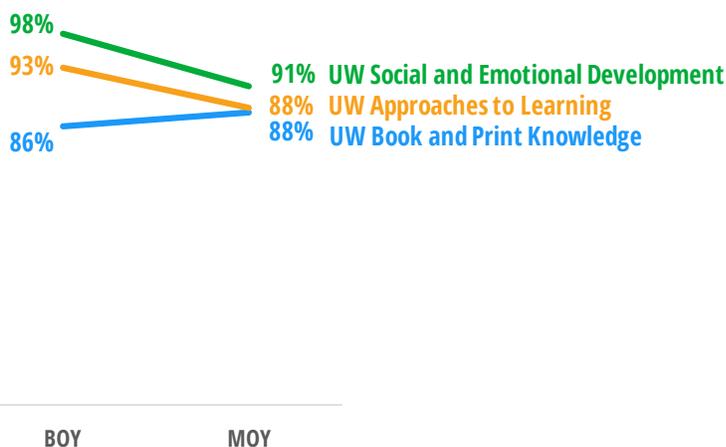
CIRCLE PM is available in both English and Spanish. The results presented in this report represent the best performance for a student in either language. Thus, if a student took the test in both English and Spanish, the higher performance of the two would be the data included in the analysis.

Academic Performance

Students completed the Children’s Learning Institute Engage CIRCLE Progress Monitoring tool (CIRCLE PM) at BOY and MOY. End-of-year performance data were unavailable due to school closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Trained staff administered three subscales of CIRCLE PM to children ($n = 183$) at participating UWATX pre-K4 centers. Additional students were tested but were not included in the analyses because they were not co-enrolled with AISD. The three subscales completed by UWATX students were Book and Print Knowledge, Social and Emotional Development, and Approaches to Learning. Figure 2 shows the percentage of UWATX students scoring on track declined for the Approaches to Learning and Social and Emotional Development subscales, across the semester. On the other hand, the percentage of UWATX students scoring on track for Book and Print Knowledge increased from BOY to MOY.

Figure 2.

BOY to MOY Percentages of UWATX Pre-K4 Students Scoring on Track on CIRCLE PM Subscales

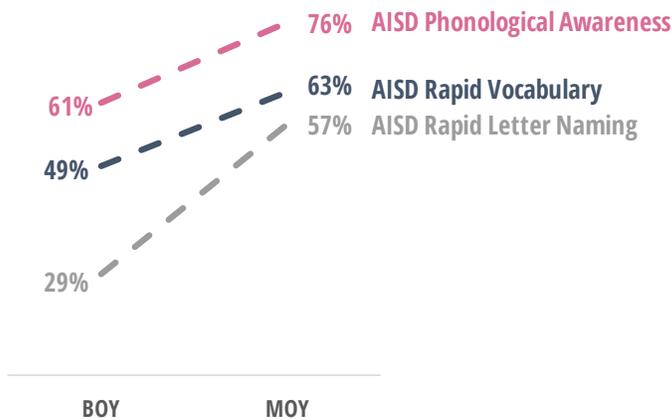


Source. UWATX pre-K4 centers.

Note. Appendix D, Table 1 lists the total number of UWATX students scoring on track on CIRCLE PM subscales.

Students enrolled in AISD pre-K ($N = 3,712$) also completed the CIRCLE PM at BOY and MOY. The three subscales completed by AISD students were Phonological Awareness, Rapid Vocabulary, and Rapid Letter Naming. The percentages of AISD pre-K4 students scoring on track are displayed in Figure 3. Students increased in performance on all three subscales across the semester. Note that a prior version of this report included Social and Emotional Development scores for AISD pre-K4 students. However, these data were removed from this report due to missing subscales and thus an incomplete composite score on this subtest. (UW scores on Social and Emotional Development included all required subtests and thus remain in this report.)

Figure 3.

BOY to MOY Percentages of Non-Tuition AISD Pre-K4 Students Scoring on Track on CIRCLE PM Subscales

Source. AISD CLI Engage Circle PM data.

Note. Appendix D, Table 2 lists the total number of AISD students scoring on track on CIRCLE PM subscales.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the first year of the pre-K School Transformation Fund implementation grant, participating UWATX classrooms provided high-quality instruction to pre-K students, as observed by the majority of centers exceeding thresholds established by Head Start on CLASS. The centers were also accredited by various organizations that met standards set by TEA for high-quality pre-K instruction. Teachers completed various professional development sessions, but additional records of teacher professional development training will be collected in the second year of the grant.

From the beginning to the middle of the school year, participating students' academic performance declined for two out of three subtests of the CIRCLE PM tool, so staff should closely monitor and provide instruction and support to students in these skill areas (Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning) in the second year of the grant. It should also be noted that UWATX students significantly improved on Book and Print Knowledge from the beginning to middle of the school year. Subtest comparisons between UWATX and AISD could not be conducted because different subtests of the CIRCLE PM were administered to each group. Future considerations could include administering additional subtests (Phonological Awareness, Rapid Vocabulary, and Rapid Letter Naming) to UWATX students to allow for more parallel comparisons with AISD students.

In AISD pre-K, students' academic performance on the three subtests (phonological awareness, rapid vocabulary and rapid letter naming) improved from the beginning to the middle of the school year. By the middle of the school year, more than half of all students were on track for each subtest. This trajectory suggests that if end of year data were collected, most students may have reached the on track levels.

Follow up on AISD kindergarten enrollment of pre-K4 students will be done later in Fall 2020.

An important consideration regarding this year’s program summary is that the COVID-19 pandemic prevented administrators from gathering end-of-year data on classroom quality, teachers’ professional development training, and students’ academic performance. The impact of the pandemic on future analyses and reports for the second year of the grant is unknown but is being monitored.

Appendix A

Table 1.

CLASS Raw Scores Across Pre-K Centers

Subscale	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum score	Maximum score
Emotional Support	5.66	0.92	2.63	6.75
Classroom Organization	4.73	0.96	2.33	6.17
Instructional Support	2.55	0.99	1.17	5.50

Source. UWATX pre-K centers

Note. $n = 35$ pre-K classrooms. Missing CLASS data included one pre-K classroom. Scale anchors ranged from 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest score a center could receive.

Appendix B

Table 1.

UWATX Pre-K Center Accreditations

Pre-K center	Accreditation
American Youth Works Child Inc.	Head Start
Bright Beginnings	TRS 4-Star
Brodie Lane CDC Child Inc.	Head Start, NAEYC
Cedar Bend Child Inc.	Head Start, NAEYC
Dove Springs Early Education Center Child Inc.	Head Start
Ebenezer CDC	TRS 3-Star
Forbes CDC Child Inc.	Head Start, NAEYC
Fountain Plaza Child Inc.	Head Start
Generations CDC	TRS 4-Star, NAC
Grant CDC Child Inc.	Head Start, NAEYC
KinderCare Learning Center - Emerald Wood	TRS 4-Star, NAC
Open Door East School	TRS 4-Star, NAEYC
Open Door Preschool at M Station	TRS 4-Star, NAEYC
Palomita CDC Child Inc.	Head Start, NAEYC
Reggio Emilia Multilingual Preschool Academy	TRS 4-Star
Rosewood Zaragosa CDC Child Inc.	Head Start
South Austin CDC Child Inc.	Head Start
Sweet Briar CDC Sandra Street	TRS 4-Star
Sweet Briar CDC Woodway Village	TRS 4-Star
Wonder Years Infant Center and Preschool	TRS 4-Star

Source. UWATX pre-K centers

Note. CDC = Child Development Center, NAEYC = National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAC = National Accreditation Commission, TRS = Texas Rising Star.

Appendix C

Table 1.

UWATX Teacher Professional Development Sessions

Date	Session topic(s)
<i>Two weeks of preservice training</i>	
7/31/2019	Pre-K partnerships overview
8/5/2019	Value of high-quality early learning environments
8/6/2019	DFPS standards, conscious discipline, child development and appropriate practices, child abuse and neglect
8/7/2019	STEAM integration in early learning environments
	Emergent literacy in early childhood and enriching young children's lives with literature
8/8/2019	Principles of play-based learning, responsive teacher child interactions; assessing learning using CLI Engage, integrating standards
8/12/2019	Pyramid model for social emotional competence in young children, social and emotional learning and skills, difficult conversations with caregivers
8/13/2019	Trauma-informed care and classroom strategies, secondary trauma and burnout prevention, supporting social emotional competence
8/14/2019	Principles of conscious discipline, classroom management, elements of lesson planning, preparing for guest teacher, FERPA
8/16/2019	Supporting dual language learners
<i>Professional development session (8 hours)</i>	
11/22/2019	Project-based learning I (creating a mini-project/classroom management/challenges and celebrations)
<i>Conscious discipline training (2 days)</i>	
12/18/2019	Conscious discipline overview
12/19/2019	Implementation for administrators and Baby Doll Circle time
<i>Conscious discipline training (2 days)</i>	
2/17/2019	Project-based learning II (domains of CLASS/inquiry based learning/sharing mini-projects/developing project-based learning unit/documentation of learning/practice strategies for helping student self-regulation)

Source. UWATX program staff

Note. DFPS = Department of Family and Protective Services, STEAM = Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics, CLI = Children's Learning Institute, FERPA = Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, CLASS = Classroom Assessment Scoring System.

Table 2.

Child Inc. Teacher Professional Development Sessions.

Date	Session topic(s)
<i>Three weeks of preservice training</i>	
7/29/2019	Head Start trainings, Child Inc. presentations
7/30/2019	Head Start trainings, Child Inc. presentations
7/31/2019	Pre-K partnerships overview
8/1/2019	A quality Head Start educational program
	Second Step
8/2/2019	Ready Rosie software program
8/5/2019	AISD pre-K3 teacher/teacher assistant training

Date	Session topic(s)
8/6/2019	STEAM training
8/7/2019	STEAM integration in early learning environments
	Emergent literacy in early childhood and enriching young children's lives with literature
	AISD pre-K3 teacher/teacher assistant training
8/8/2019	Musical instruments
8/9/2019	UWATX partnership expectations/curriculum/CLI Engage assessment
8/12/2019	A quality Head Start educational program
<i>Coaching session (3 hours)</i>	
10/14/2019	CLASS: Organizing the classroom/classroom instruction
12/19/2019	Implementation for administrators and Baby Doll Circle time
<i>Weekly professional development training sessions online (3 hours per teacher each week)</i>	
3/23-3/27/2020	Technology check-in
	Overview of Head Start performance standards
3/30-4/3/2020	CLASS/My Teachstone platform
	Teaching Strategies Gold reliability testing
4/6-4/10/2020	CLASS/My Teachstone platform
	Teaching Strategies Gold reliability testing
	NAEYC standards
4/13-4/17/2020	CLASS/My Teachstone platform
	Teaching Strategies Gold reliability testing
	NAEYC standards
4/20-4/24/2020	CLASS/My Teachstone platform
	NAEYC standards
4/27-5/1/2020	CLASS/My Teachstone platform
	NAEYC standards
	Conscious discipline

Source. UWATX program staff

Note. STEAM = Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics, CLI = Children's Learning Institute, CLASS = Classroom Assessment Scoring System, NAEYC = National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Appendix D

Table 1.

Total Number of Pre-K4 Students Scoring on Track on CIRCLE PM Subscales, BOY to MOY 2019–2020

Subtest	BOY		MOY	
	<i>n</i> for UWATX	<i>n</i> for AISD	<i>n</i> for UWATX	<i>n</i> for AISD
Book and Print Knowledge	152	-	158	-
Social and Emotional Development	179	-	167	-
Approaches to Learning	171	-	159	-
Rapid Letter Naming	-	3,333	-	2,068
Rapid Vocabulary	-	3,336	-	2,295
Phonological Awareness	-	3,320	-	2,782

Source. UWATX and AISD student CLI Engage records

Note. *n* = total number of students scoring on track. BOY = beginning of year, MOY = middle of year. Dashes indicate subtests that were not assessed.



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