



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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More than 75 percent of high-poverty children in CDEPP districts being served with 4-year-old program

EOC releases annual report on the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)

Editor's Note: Copies of the "*Report on the Implementation and Expansion of the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)*," can be found online at www.eoc.sc.gov. The report will be presented to the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) at a full committee meeting on January 22, 2010.

Columbia – The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) released a report today evaluating the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP), a pilot full-day educational pre-kindergarten program for at-risk four-year-olds residing in the 37 plaintiff districts in the school funding lawsuit, *Abbeville County School District et al. vs. SC*. The program is currently in its fourth year of implementation in both public and private child care centers. This year's evaluation focuses on the program's implementation in school year 2008-09. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is responsible for implementation of CDEPP in public schools; the Office of First Steps to School Readiness (OFS) implements the program among private providers.

"CDEPP has been successful in attracting parents and providers to serve the high-risk population in the Plaintiff school districts," stated Melanie Barton, EOC Director of Policy Development and Evaluation. "The program serves as a model for expansion to the remaining districts."

While expansion was limited in 2008-09, there were several key findings:

- More than three-fourths (78.0%) of 4-year-olds at-risk for school failure due to poverty are being served with a publicly-funded pre-kindergarten program in school districts implementing CDEPP. This contrasts with the remaining 48 school districts, where just over one-half (57.2%) of the 4-year-olds at-risk due to poverty are being served with a publicly-funded program.
- There were a total of 4,318 CDEPP-eligible students served in CDEPP classrooms -- 3,859 in public schools and 459 in private child care centers.
- Total program expenditures for CDEPP were \$19.9 million in FY2008-09.
- Individual preschool assessments of children served in CDEPP showed modest yet meaningful gains; the program is improving school readiness.
- For the future, there will be an overall 6.7% increase in the number of 4-year-olds statewide by 2012 with percentage of 4-year-olds at-risk due to poverty expected to increase by 4.9% over

the same time period. The growth in eligible four-year-olds will not be consistent across counties. Nineteen counties will experience increases of 5% or more in the numbers of 4-year-olds by 2012, while 13 counties will experience 5% or greater decreases during this period. The number of at-risk 4-year-olds due to poverty is projected to increase 5% or more by 2012 in 15 counties, while the number of at-risk 4-year-olds is projected to decrease by 5% or greater in 13 counties.

Referencing the gains students in CDEPP have made, Bill Brown, member of USC/EOC Interdisciplinary Evaluation Team noted that “during these difficult economic times, South Carolinians should be especially proud of the investment they are making in the educational potential of 4-year-old children ‘at risk for school failure.’ “The children’s progress indicates that they are better prepared for learning when they enter kindergarten. The fact that the gains have been consistent across three groups of children during all three years of implementation greatly enhances our confidence in the children’s progress and the importance of CDEPP. “

This year’s report contained new analyses of the program’s administration. A review of the professional development and technical assistance information provided by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness (OFS) revealed that often, SCDE and OFS implement separate programs supporting their respective CDEPP personnel. To date, most information on professional development and technical assistance has been limited to process measures such as the number of hours of training, number of site visits, content of group trainings, and, at times, participant satisfaction. Although these measures are necessary, they are not sufficient to adequately evaluate the impact of efforts to enhance the CDEPP workforce.

Interviews were conducted with leaders in Florence and Berkeley Counties who oversaw tremendous expansion of the program in public and private centers. The interviews revealed common leadership characteristics: (1) commitment by the organization and its leadership to implement and expand the program to improve early childhood education opportunities regardless of obstacles; (2) designation of at least one staff person for implementation and expansion of CDEPP; (3) intentionality in expansion including the recruitment of children, the securing of funds, and the preparation of classrooms; and (4) collaboration among public schools, child care providers, Head Start and other community entities whenever possible.

Six recommendations are included in the report to improve the implementation and administration of CDEPP in the future:

1. Despite negative economic conditions, the General Assembly should continue funding CDEPP and when funds are available, expand the program in both public schools and private child care centers statewide.
2. With respect to continued expansion of CDEPP, the South Carolina Department of Education and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness should contract with personnel in those districts and private providers that have expanded student enrollment dramatically in recent years.
3. Following three years of evaluation, the South Carolina Department of Education has demonstrated efficient fiscal administration of CDEPP. The Office of First Steps to School Readiness has demonstrated a very hands-on coaching approach to technical assistance and quality control in private CDEPP centers. The evaluation has previously recommended that one agency or entity administer the program. An alternative approach might include a more collaborative model for administering the future fiscal and professional development components of the program prior to statewide implementation.
4. In order to maximize resources and expand services, there exist opportunities for greater collaboration at the state and local levels:

- a. The South Carolina Department of Education and local districts, particularly in rural settings, should develop and pilot a public-private transportation model to increase access to CDEPP.
 - b. The South Carolina Department of Education and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness should collaborate on implementing a formal model of professional development for the CDEPP workforce.
5. The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education should fund a Center of Excellence for Professional Development to Enhance the Recruitment and Retention of Preschool Teachers in South Carolina's State Funded Pre-kindergarten Programs for Children at Risk for School Failure.
6. The recurring funds for CDEPP should be moved from the general fund to the Education Improvement Act (EIA) fund with other funds in the EIA moved to the general fund, a recommendation made by the EOC in its 2009 budget recommendations. Because EIA revenues already support half-day programs for at-risk four-year-olds, funding CDEPP using EIA revenues would be consistent with prior legislative action. As the program expands, funds for the half-day program could be reallocated to a full-day program as well. Additional consolidation is also recommended by increasing the per child reimbursement rate by \$125 to cover the cost of supplies and materials while deleting the \$2,500 allocation per classroom.

The report is required annually by the General Assembly. An interdisciplinary evaluation team of University of South Carolina researchers and EOC staff completed the annual report, the third since the pilot program's inception.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.

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