



PFA Program Quality

Erikson Institute • SRI International • Illinois State Board of Education

This fact sheet summarizes findings from the Illinois Preschool for All (PFA) program evaluation conducted by Erikson Institute and SRI International. PFA programs are funded by the Illinois State Board of Education to provide early education opportunities for children between the ages of three and five, with priority given to children from low-income families and those who are determined to be “at risk.” The evaluation took an in-depth look at PFA programs throughout the state (excluding the city of Chicago) from 2008 through 2010 to provide a picture of PFA program quality, children’s school readiness, and the characteristics of program participants.

What is the quality of Illinois’s Preschool for All (PFA) programs?

In fall 2009, trained staff observed PFA classrooms using two observational tools: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised (ECERS-R) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Scores on both the ECERS-R and the CLASS can range from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest). Generally, classrooms that score 5 or above are considered to be high quality, 3–4.9 are moderate quality, and below 3 are low quality.

Illinois’s PFA programs are of moderate to high quality.

Observations using the ECERS-R and CLASS tools found that, in general, PFA programs are of moderate to high quality. As the table below shows, the vast majority of programs were of high or moderate quality when measured using the ECERS-R total score and the emotional support and classroom organization dimensions of the CLASS. Programs showed lower quality on the instructional support subscale of the CLASS, which is consistent with results from evaluations of publicly funded preschool programs in other states.

ECERS-R

Provides a total quality score and scores in six subscales, which assess aspects of classroom structure and activities:

- Space and furnishings
- Personal care routines
- Language-reasoning
- Activities
- Interaction
- Program structure

CLASS

Comprised of three dimensions that assess interactions between teachers and children:

- Emotional support
- Classroom organization
- Instructional support

Distribution of ECERS-R and CLASS Quality Scores for PFA Classrooms

	Low	Moderate	High
ECERS-R			
Total	11%	65%	25%
CLASS			
Emotional support	2%	20%	79%
Classroom organization	2%	31%	67%
Instructional support	48%	32%	10%

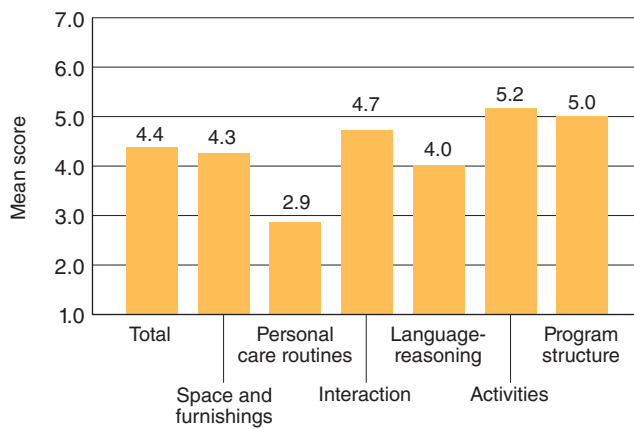
ECERS-R Scores

Observations using the ECERS-R found the following:

- The average total quality score for PFA programs was 4.4, which is considered medium or moderate quality.
- About two-thirds of PFA programs (65%) had overall scores in the medium range, and 25% of programs scored in the high-quality range.
- PFA programs scored in the medium to high range on most subscales; however, they scored in the low range for personal care routines.

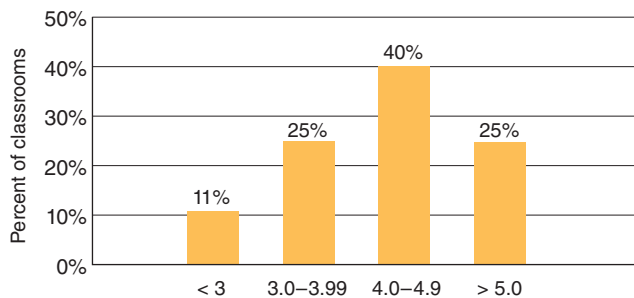
Average ECERS-R Total and Subscale Scores for PFA Classrooms

Source: Observations of 179 PFA classrooms



Distribution of ECERS-R Total Scores for PFA Classrooms

Source: Observations of 179 PFA classrooms



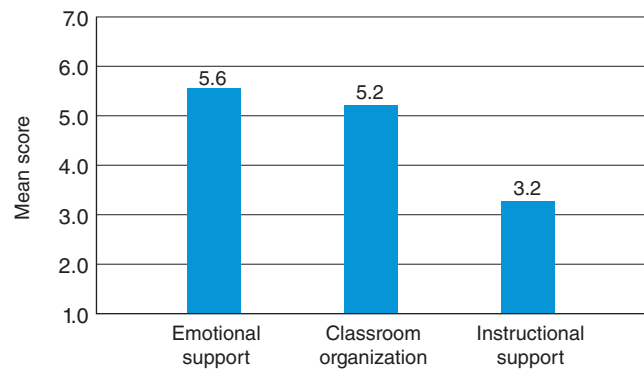
CLASS Scores

Observations using the CLASS found the following:

- The average scores on the emotional support dimension and classroom organization dimension were 5.6 and 5.2 respectively, indicating a high level of quality in these areas.
- The average score on the instructional support dimension was 3.2, indicating a moderate level of quality in this area. Only 10% of programs were scored as high quality in this area.

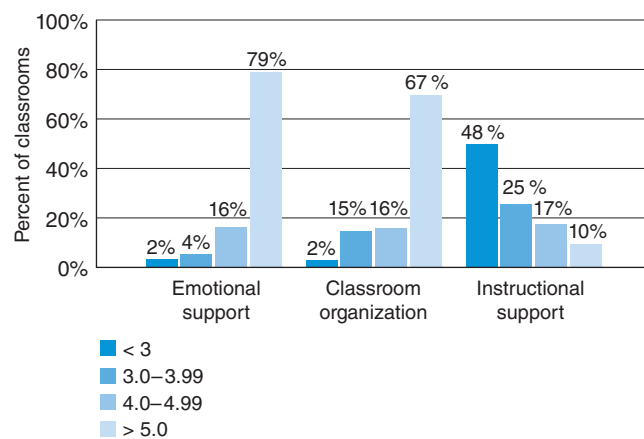
Average CLASS Dimension Scores for PFA Classrooms

Source: Observations of 179 PFA classrooms



Distribution of CLASS Dimension Scores for PFA Classrooms

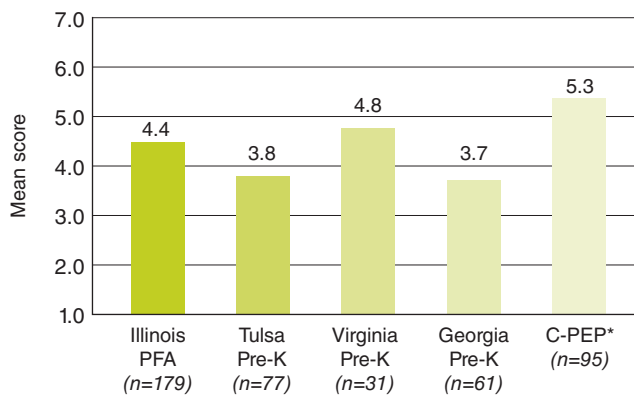
Source: Observations of 179 PFA classrooms



The quality of Illinois’s PFA programs was similar to the quality found in evaluations of other publicly funded preschool programs.

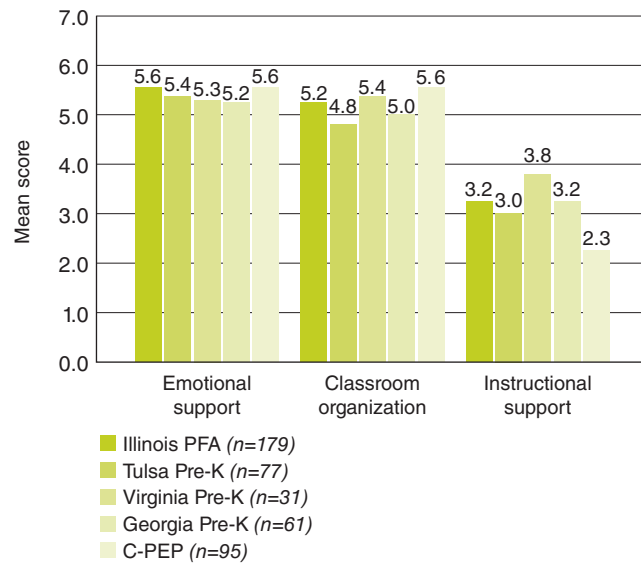
- The average ECERS-R total scores for Illinois’s PFA programs were comparable to those found in other publicly funded preschool programs.
- The average CLASS scores on the emotional support and classroom organization dimensions for Illinois’s PFA programs and for other publicly funded preschool programs show similar levels of moderate to high quality.
- The average CLASS scores on the instructional support dimension for Illinois’s PFA programs and for other publicly funded preschool programs show similarly low levels of quality.

Average ECERS-R Total Scores from Evaluations of Other Publicly Funded Preschool Programs



*The Chicago Program Evaluation Project (C-PEP) was conducted between 2005 and 2008 and studied the impact, strengths, and weaknesses of Chicago’s school- and center-based early care and education programs, including PFA programs.

Average CLASS Dimension Scores from Evaluations of Other Publicly Funded Preschool Programs



About the data: *The evaluation team collected data from multiple sources, including a web-based survey and interviews with program administrators, interviews with parents, teacher surveys, classroom observations, and direct assessments of children. The evaluation took an in-depth look at 120 programs and nearly 700 children and their families throughout the state (excluding the city of Chicago).*

For more information about the Illinois Preschool for All (PFA) Evaluation, visit www.erikson.edu/PFAEvaluation.

Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy at Erikson Institute

Lead Evaluator

Erikson Institute advances the ability of practitioners, researchers, and decision makers to improve life for children and their families through its academic programs, applied research, and community partnerships and initiatives.

The Herr Research Center conducts original research, evaluations, and analysis to inform, guide, and support effective early childhood policy.

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SRI International

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SRI International is an independent, non-profit research institute conducting client-sponsored research and development for government agencies, commercial businesses, foundations, and other organizations. The Early Childhood Program is part of SRI’s Policy Division.

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Early Childhood Division

Illinois State Board of Education

Funder

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) administers public education in Illinois. The Early Childhood Division focuses on children from birth to 8 years old.

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