



An Overview of the PFA Evaluation

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 Preschool for All?

Preschool for All (PFA) programs 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 socially or academically “at risk” due to other family or community factors. PFA is funded through the Illinois Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG), established in 1997 to fund programs serving young, at-risk children and their families throughout the state.

In the 2008–2009 school year, PFA served approximately 67,000 children across Illinois outside the city of Chicago. Programs serving these children were located in nearly 700 school districts and community-based organizations, with over 1,500 program sites.¹ The majority of these programs were located in school districts and operated three or fewer PFA classrooms. On average, PFA programs served approximately 57 children per site.

¹ Data Analysis and Progress Reporting Division (2010). Illinois prekindergarten report, 2008–2009. Illinois State Board of Education. Available at: http://www.isbe.net/gov_relations/pdf/pre-k_program_report08-09.pdf.

The PFA evaluation

The evaluation was designed to answer the following questions about Illinois’s PFA programs:

- Program Overview: What are the characteristics of PFA programs and the children they serve?
- Children’s Outcomes: What are the developmental and school readiness outcomes of children attending PFA programs?
- Program Quality: What is the quality of PFA programs?
- Program Teacher Characteristics: What are the characteristics of PFA teachers?
- Family Involvement: How are families involved in PFA programs?

To address these questions, the evaluation team collected data from multiple sources, including a web-based survey of program administrators (fall 2008), classroom observations (spring and fall 2009), interviews with program administrators (spring and fall 2009), interviews with parents (fall 2009 and fall 2010), teacher surveys (spring and fall 2009), and direct assessments of children’s skills and knowledge (fall 2009 and fall 2010). The evaluators received information from more

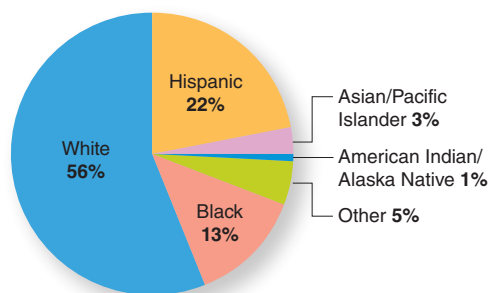
than 500 PFA programs through web surveys and took an in-depth look at a representative sample of 120 PFA programs and nearly 700 children in those programs.

Children in PFA programs

PFA programs serve children from three to five years of age. Data collected from program administrators in fall 2008 indicated that more than half of children in these programs were four years old and would be eligible for kindergarten the following year. More than half of the children (56%) in PFA at this time were white, 22% were Hispanic, and 13% were black.

Race/Ethnicity of Children in PFA Programs

Source: Web surveys

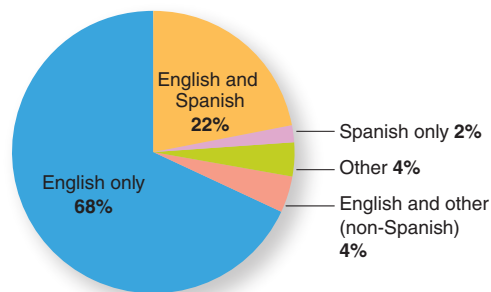


Most programs (77%) reported that they served at least one child with a diagnosed disability, and nearly one-third of programs (32%) reported that at least one or more of the children they served spoke a language other than English at home.

Percentage of PFA Programs

with Different Languages Spoken by Children

Source: Web surveys



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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