

Seattle Preschool Program Evaluation 2024

The [Seattle Preschool Program](#) (SPP) serves 3- and 4-year-olds throughout the city, partnering with classrooms in community-based organizations, family child cares, and Seattle Public Schools (SPS). SPP aims to eliminate opportunity gaps in kindergarten readiness and provide equitable access to high-quality early learning. The Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) partnered with [Education Northwest](#) to evaluate SPP. This brief presents selected findings from the evaluation (see full report for details).

Community Input

To ensure the evaluation reflects community priorities and perspectives, Education Northwest works with an advisory committee of SPP families, community members, program directors, and educators. The advisory committee has been a valuable partner in designing the evaluation, reviewing measures and questions, and framing the findings.

Evaluation data

This evaluation used quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources including:

- **Survey data.** The family survey had 1,056 respondents from approximately 2,060 families; 67% of respondents are people of color and 32% speak a language other than English at home. On the teacher survey, 139 of 296 SPP teachers responded; 64% of teacher respondents are people of color and 25% speak a language other than English.
- **Focus groups and interviews.** The evaluation team conducted 15 focus groups and interviews with SPP teachers (14 teachers from different types of sites), SPS kindergarten teachers (3 teachers), coaches (6 coaches), DEEL staff (8 staff members), and family members (26, including 19 people of color and 3 who participated in Spanish).
- **DEEL and Washington state data.** The evaluation team used administrative data on DEEL children, teachers, and classrooms to calculate descriptive statistics and examine relationships between different aspects of SPP. Washington state data were used to compare children in SPP to similar children enrolled in Washington's state-funded preschool program and estimate the impact of SPP participation on later child outcomes.¹



Family Perceptions of SPP Benefits and Quality

Families overall, families of color, and linguistically diverse families reported many benefits of SPP

- Family members reported in surveys and focus groups that their children gained social-emotional and academic skills as a result of participating in SPP, with families of color reporting positive changes at slightly higher rates than white families.
- SPP teacher diversity is viewed as a benefit of the program by many families of color and linguistically diverse families.
- Families shared that SPP helps make preschool affordable and has helped some families to build community.

“My daughter has grown so much emotionally and socially since beginning the preschool program.”

– SPP family member

SPP provides a high-quality experience for most children and families, although implementation could be improved in several areas

- More than 80 percent of surveyed families agreed that their child’s preschool meets their idea of a high-quality preschool. This percentage was similar among families of color, linguistically diverse families, and families whose child has an individualized education program (IEP).
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores measuring SPP classroom quality increased by 3 percent in classroom organization, 1.5 percent in emotional support, and 19 percent in instructional support over the last year.
- Education Northwest collaborated with DEEL to develop a checklist for ideal SPP implementation. This checklist includes items like use of required curriculum, teacher qualifications, and participation in professional development. Most classrooms had ideal implementation on several key SPP items, though no classrooms had ideal implementation on all items. Items with room for improvement include teacher planning time and participation in required training.



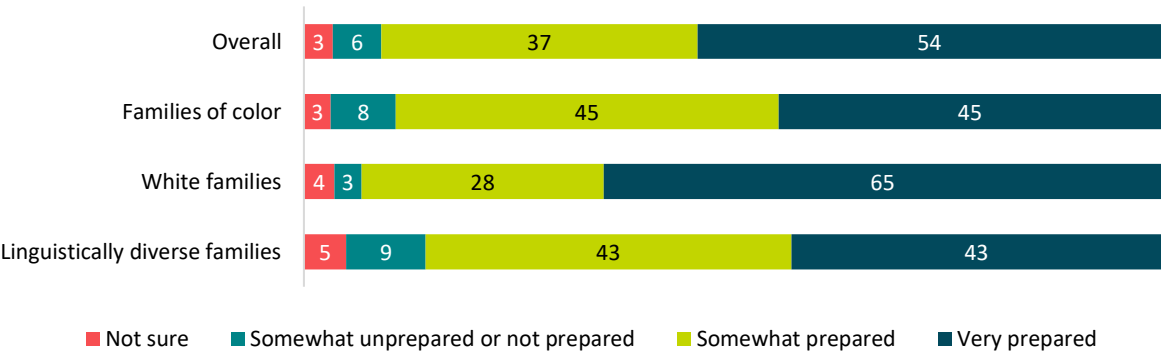
Kindergarten Readiness

Social-emotional skills are key to kindergarten readiness, and while most families believe their child is ready for kindergarten, some would like more information about individual readiness

- Most SPP teachers and SPS kindergarten teachers emphasized in surveys and focus groups that social-emotional skills, including self-regulation, are most important for kindergarten readiness.
- Some families and SPS kindergarten teachers would appreciate more information on individual children’s readiness for kindergarten.
- Most SPP families reported that they believe their child is somewhat or very prepared for kindergarten; however, a lower percentage of families of color (45%) think their child is very prepared compared to white families (65%; see figure).

“I believe that preparing students socially and emotionally is most important. If a student doesn't know how to self-regulate, make friends, and know true kindness, then the academics part will be much harder to develop.”
– SPP teacher

Most SPP families reported believing their child is prepared for kindergarten, 2023



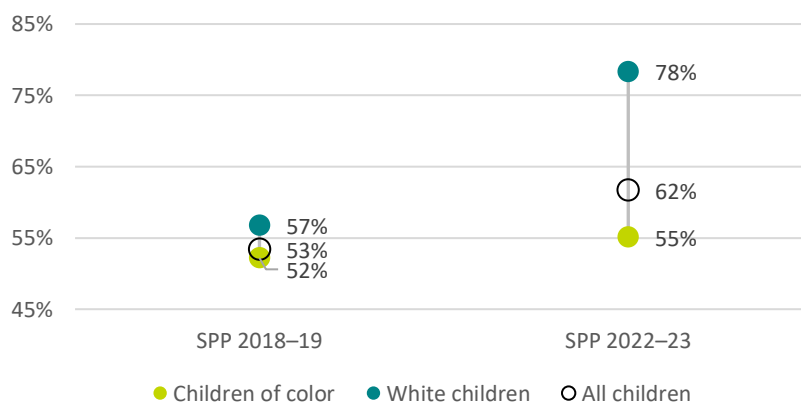
Race-Based Opportunity Gaps

Race-based opportunity gaps among SPP children increased from 2018–19 to 2022–23 for preschool and kindergarten outcomes

Race-based opportunity gaps are differences between racial/ethnic groups where children of color have lower outcome rates compared to white children. The evaluation team examined opportunity gaps on the Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) assessment, which is used in SPP preschools three times each year, and on the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), used in kindergarten classrooms across the state during the first few months of kindergarten.²

- When examining the percentage of SPP children who showed adequate growth on the TSG during their preschool year, children of color had higher or similar rates compared to white children in 2022–23, indicating no opportunity gaps in the growth from fall to spring.
- When examining the percentage of SPP children who met standards on all six TSG domains³ in the spring of preschool, white children met these standards at higher rates than children of color, indicating race-based opportunity gaps in meeting spring preschool standards. These opportunity gaps grew from 2018–19 to 2022–23.
- The percentage of children who met kindergarten readiness standards on all 6 WaKIDS domains among children formerly enrolled in SPP has increased since 2018–19, but opportunity gaps also increased. Gaps between children of color and white children grew from 5 percentage points in 2018–19 to 23 percentage points in 2022–23 (see figure; changes in gaps may be influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic).

Race-based opportunity gaps among SPP children for meeting WaKIDS kindergarten readiness standards increased from 2018–19 to 2022–23



Impact of SPP on Kindergarten Outcomes

Children who attended SPP in 2017–18 had higher kindergarten outcomes than similar children in state-funded preschool

Among children with similar characteristics who attended SPP or state-funded preschool in 2017–18, children who attended SPP had higher attendance rates in kindergarten (1.9 percentage points higher) and higher kindergarten readiness scores (between 16 and 29 percentiles higher, depending on the domain) compared to similar children who attended state-funded preschool. However, these results should be considered with caution, as findings may differ among children who attended preschool in other years.

Selected Recommendations

- Consider additional funding to help teachers access both planning and release time to engage in quality improvement coaching and training.
- Improve communication between preschools and families about each child’s growth and progress toward kindergarten readiness.
- Examine and enhance supports to groups with opportunity gaps and explore potential root causes of gaps.
- Conduct additional analyses to understand the impact of SPP in more recent years and with more students.

¹ Washington’s state-funded preschool program is known as the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, or ECEAP, and most children are eligible to participate based on age and family income level (Department of Children, Youth, and Families. [2023]. [ECEAP and Head Start](#)). The evaluation team used a weighting technique to create a sample of similar children in SPP and state-funded preschool—meaning the two groups of children had similar demographic characteristics (race/ethnicity, income level, and language) and fall TSG scores from the child’s first preschool year. Only state-funded preschool children who attended classrooms located in or near Seattle were included in the sample.

² These measures are imperfect: they may have cultural biases toward what is considered appropriate development, are available in limited languages, and are based on teacher observations (which are subject to inherent biases). Even with these issues, these data can help us understand child development over time.

³ These TSG standards are the nationally calculated “widely held expectations” measures. The six domains in TSG and WaKIDS are language, literacy, cognitive, math, social-emotional, and physical.