

Follow-up study of former Even Start participants

*Rochester Even Start (Hand-in-Hand)
program*

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Summary

As part of the 2005-06 local evaluation of the Rochester Even Start (Hand-in-Hand) program, a follow up study was done with former participants to see how they were doing after leaving the program. The Even Start staff was interested in learning about the children's preparation for kindergarten, the parents' support and involvement in their children's learning, and the parents' pursuit of occupational and educational goals. They were also interested in hearing suggestions from the parents for how they might improve the program. Information on former Even Start children (N=29) and a comparison group of kindergartners from similar backgrounds was drawn from Rochester Public School (RPS) records. Information on the parents' progress was collected in telephone surveys with 29 former Even Start adult participants, who were parents of 35 children who participated in the program.

Results from the school record data revealed the following:

- Former Even Start children performed similarly to their RPS peers on the Initial Sounds Fluency measure.
- For the Letter Naming Fluency measure, former Even Start children tended to perform better than their RPS counterparts.
- Former Even Start and RPS children had similar teacher ratings in the area of Language Arts. For both groups, most children received a rating of “developing.”
- Teachers' ratings of former Even Start children's Personal and Social Growth were similar to that of their RPS peers.
- Some racial/ethnic differences emerged for former Even Start children with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The Black students outperformed the Hispanic students on the Initial Sounds Fluency and Letter Naming Fluency measures, as well as in the area of Language Arts. The one area in which Hispanic students performed better than their Black peers was Personal and Social Growth.
- The same differences were found between Black and Hispanic LEP students in the RPS student sample. The Black students outperformed their Hispanic peers on both DIBELS measures as well as in the area of Language Arts.
- When comparing children of similar backgrounds (i.e., LEP and low income), the Black former Even Start children outperformed their Black RPS counterparts on both DIBELS measures, and the Hispanic former Even Start children outperformed their Hispanic RPS counterparts on the Letter Naming Fluency measure. Teacher report

card ratings were similar between the two groups, with former Even Start children performing equal to or slightly better than their RPS peers.

Results from the parent survey indicated the following:

- All of the parents thought that their children's participation in Even Start helped prepare their children for school. The most commonly mentioned areas in which it helped the children were learning basic skills, interacting/sharing, learning English, and reading and writing.
- All of the parents were either somewhat (9%) or very (91%) satisfied with how well their children were doing in school.
- All of the parents felt that the program had helped them. The parents mentioned a variety of ways, but the most common response by far was learning English.
- Overall, the parents are very involved in their children's learning. All of the parents reported that they had talked with their child's teacher regarding their child's progress. Most parents also talk with their children about school, read school information sent home, sit down and read with their children, and attend events and activities at school. A smaller percentage also volunteers at their child's school.
- It appears that it is easier for parents to be involved in their child's education in ways that do not require their use of advanced English language communication and leadership skills. For example, only a small percentage of parents went on family field trips or attended school committee, advisory board, or council meetings. On the other hand, many of the parents attended family social events and student performances.
- Very few parents continued their education after leaving the Even Start program. Of the three that enrolled in other programs, one left before completing the program and two are still attending.
- At the time of the survey, just over half of the parents (52%) were staying at home full-time. About 41 percent were currently employed, working from 20 to 60 hours per week with an average of about 39 hours. The remaining 7 percent were unemployed and looking for work.
- Some racial differences were found between Black and Hispanic LEP parents. It appears that the Black parents are more comfortable with academics and their language skills. On average the Black parents received more education in their countries of birth before immigrating to the United States. The Black parents were active in ways that the Hispanic parents were not. Several of them attended PTA and school committee meetings, and two of them enrolled in other programs after leaving

Even Start. In contrast, more of the Hispanic parents attended family social events, and more of the Hispanic parents were employed.

- The majority of the parents liked the Even Start program and did not see any room for improvement. Among those who offered suggestions, the most common ideas were providing more time, offering a more flexible class schedule, and purchasing up-to-date materials.

Recommendations

Work more with Hispanic children on their early English literacy skills. Hispanic children who had attended Even Start were behind other LEP children in early English literacy skills upon entry to kindergarten. For example, over half of such LEP Hispanic children scored “0” on Letter Naming Fluency. This suggests that more emphasis on these skills in Even Start could be beneficial. Perhaps, more time could be set aside in Early Childhood Education to work with Hispanic children on early English language skills. It may be that these children receive less help from their parents in this regard than other LEP children because their parents tend to have lower education levels.

Continue and perhaps enhance parents’ education about how they can be involved in their child’s learning. Parents reported quite high levels of involvement in their children’s learning and felt that they were able to help their children more with school because of what they learned in Even Start. Survey results indicated that more than 8 in 10 parents talked with their children about school, read to their children, and attended parent-teacher conferences. Nevertheless, parents infrequently reported participation in school committees or councils and parent organizations (e.g., PTA, PTO). Limited English skills or work schedules may be a barrier to participation in such activities for many parents. Even Start staff might consider if more could be done to encourage and equip parents to participate in school committees/organizations or other school-related leadership activities.

Encourage and support parents in pursuing further education after leaving Even Start. Very few parents were attending education programs at the time of the follow-up survey. Higher priorities for these parents may be staying at home and caring for their children or employment. However, it might be worth considering whether staff could do more to encourage parents to pursue further education after they leave Even Start – i.e., could staff help parents plan for further education while they are still in Even Start? Planning activities might include: exploring other educational opportunities or potential careers, visiting other education institutions, setting future education goals, and completing applications for admission to education institutions.

Introduction

Background on Rochester Even Start program

The Rochester Even Start family literacy program (Hand-in-Hand) is a project of the Rochester Public School District in partnership with Olmsted County Public Health Services. The program began in 1993 and is located at the Hawthorne Education Center and Riverside Central Elementary School. The program is held Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 2:30pm and includes the four Even Start components: adult basic education, early childhood education, parent education, and parent-child interaction time.

Nearly all of the enrolled families were at or below the federal poverty line and qualified for free or reduced price lunch. In the past few years, the number of adults served who were English Language Learners (ELLs) grew from 63 to 77 percent. The most common first language spoken by ELLs was Spanish.

Purpose of the study

Every year a local evaluation is conducted at each Even Start program site. In 2005-06, the Rochester Even Start evaluation took the form of a focused inquiry geared at addressing some of the questions raised by program staff. In particular, the staff was interested in how former participants do after leaving the program. A follow-up study of former participants was conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the children's preparation for kindergarten, the parents' support and involvement in their children's learning, and the parents' pursuit of occupational and educational goals. In addition, the former adult participants were asked to share their opinions and suggestions regarding the program.

Study questions

Before beginning the study, the program staff and the program evaluator formulated the questions to be addressed. The study questions included the following:

- How well do former Even Start children do upon entry to kindergarten?
- How well do former Even Start children do upon kindergarten entry in comparison to other children from similar backgrounds attending Rochester Public Schools?
- How involved are the parents in their children's learning at home and at school?

- Are the parents able to help their children with school more because of what they learned in Even Start?
- How well are former adult Even Start participants doing since leaving the program with regard to obtaining employment and further education?
- Do former participants think that Even Start was helpful to them? If so, in what ways?
- What suggestions do former Even Start participants have for Even Start program improvement?
- What are the implications of the study results for the Even Start program?

Study methods

School records

School records provided information on student demographics and progress. Upon entering kindergarten, students' early literacy development was assessed using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). The two measures given at the start of kindergarten included the Initial Sounds Fluency and Letter Naming Fluency measures. In addition to the DIBELS measures, teacher report card ratings also provided an indication of student progress. In the fall of kindergarten, teachers gave ratings (beginning, developing, or secure) for personal/social growth and language arts.

Data were available on 16 former Even Start children who entered kindergarten in the Rochester Public Schools (RPS) in 2004-05 and 13 who entered in 2005-06. Since the data indicated no major differences between the two groups of students, we combined the data from both school years for a total of 29 students. Most of the students (90%) were classified as having Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

School record data was also available for all other kindergartners in RPS in the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years. In order to compare children of similar backgrounds, only those children who were classified as Limited English Proficiency were included in the analysis (380 students). It should be noted that the two samples may not be comparable in every regard. For example, while nearly all of the former Even Start children qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, only about two-thirds of all Rochester LEP students qualified. In other words, more of the former Even Start children come from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to their RPS counterparts. When data were available, we compared the former Even Start children to RPS children who were classified as LEP *and* qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (275 students).

Telephone survey of parents

A telephone survey was conducted with former adult Even Start participants. Of the 29 former Even Start children who are included in the kindergarten analysis, 24 have parents who completed surveys. In total, 29 parents representing 35 out of 49 eligible children completed the survey, for a response rate of 71 percent. The most common reason we were unable to survey some families was lack of contact information. All of the families surveyed had participated in the program for at least nine months.

If the parent had more than one child enrolled in kindergarten during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, she was asked to answer the survey questions regarding her children separately for each child. The 29 parents surveyed shared information about 35 children in total. All 35 responses are counted in the analysis of the questions that asked the parents to reflect on their involvement in their child's education. For the questions that asked parents about themselves, only 29 responses are counted.

Evaluation results

Results from the children's evaluation are summarized below followed by results from the parent survey.

Results for kindergarten children

Demographics

Sixteen former Even Start children entered RPS kindergarten in 2004-05, and 13 entered in 2005-06, for a total of 29 students. The majority (60%) began kindergarten while they were still attending the program or shortly after leaving the program. The other 40 percent experienced a longer gap between program exit and kindergarten entry ranging from 4 to 18 months. About two-thirds of the children attended half-day kindergarten. Fifty-two percent of the former Even Start children were Black (African immigrants primarily), 41 percent were Hispanic, and 7 percent were Asian. Most (90%) were classified as having Limited English Proficiency. One child out of the 29 had an Individual Education Plan (i.e. received Special Education services). The ages of the children upon entry into kindergarten ranged from 5.0 to 6.7 years, with an average of 5.6 years (see Figure 1).

1. Characteristics of former Even Start children entering kindergarten

Characteristic		Number	Percent
Total		29	100%
Year entered kindergarten	2004-05	16	55%
	2005-06	13	45%
Months between Even Start exit and kindergarten entry (data were available for 25 children)	0 ^a	10	40%
	1-3	5	20%
	4-6	3	12%
	7-12	4	16%
	13-18	3	12%
Kindergarten length	Half-day	19	66%
	Full-day	10	34%
Race/ethnicity	Asian	2	7%
	Hispanic	12	41%
	Black ^b	15	52%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	Yes	26	90%
	No	3	10%
Individual Education Plan (IEP)^c	Yes	1	3%
	No	28	97%
Age at kindergarten entry (in years)	Average	5.6	
	Range	5.0 – 6.7	

^a Includes children who were still enrolled in Even Start after kindergarten entry.

^b African immigrants primarily.

^c Receives Special Education services.

Initial assessment results (DIBELS)

The children's scores show a lot of variability for the Initial Sounds Fluency measure. In other words, the children are distributed nearly evenly across all three risk categories, with no clear pattern emerging. A slightly larger percentage of the children (39%) scored in the "at risk" category, followed by "some risk" (32%) and "low risk" (29%) (see Figure 2).

Overall, the children scored better on the Letter Naming Fluency measure. A smaller, yet notable percentage (29%) scored in the "at risk" category, while the majority (57%) received a "low risk" score (see Figure 2).

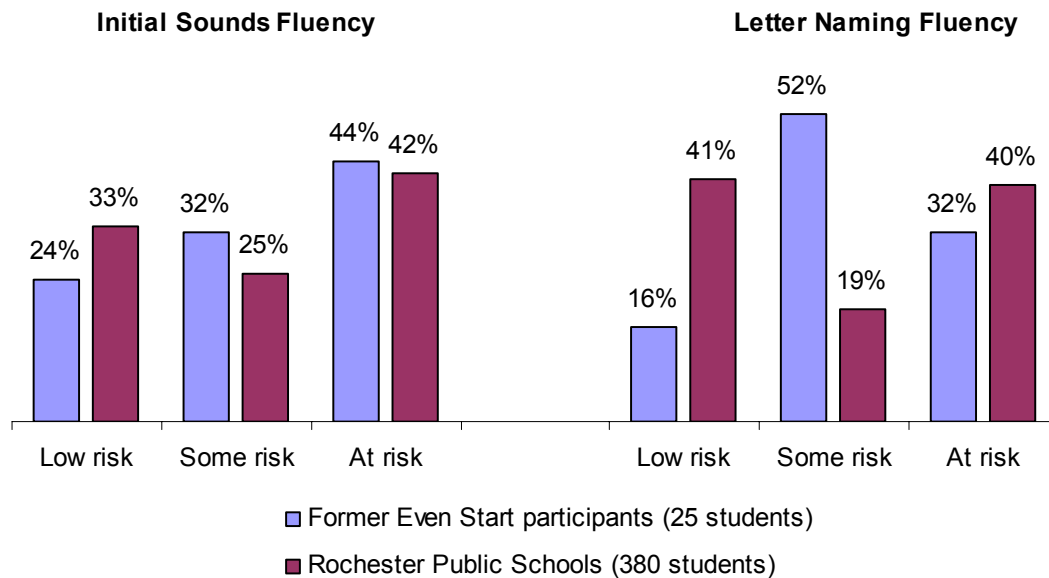
2. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) results upon kindergarten entry

Measure		Number	Percent
Initial Sounds Fluency	Low risk	8	29%
	Some risk	9	32%
	At risk	11	39%
	Total	28	100%
Letter Naming Fluency	Low risk	16	57%
	Some risk	4	14%
	At risk	8	29%
	Total	28	100%

The initial assessment results were compared between the former Even Start children and the RPS kindergartners. To compare children of similar backgrounds, only LEP children were included in this part of the analysis. The largest group of kindergartners, regardless of whether or not they had attended Even Start, scored in the “at risk” category for the Initial Sounds Fluency measure. In fact, the percentage of students in the “at risk” category was nearly equal for the two groups (44% of former Even Start participants and 42% of RPS students). However, a larger percentage of RPS students scored in the “low risk” category (33%) as compared to their Even Start counterparts (24%) (see Figure 3).

The largest percentage of former Even Start participants scored in the “some risk” category for the Letter Naming Fluency measure (52%). The next highest percentage scored in the “at risk” category (32%), followed by the “low risk” category (16%). In contrast, the opposite pattern appears for the RPS students. The smallest percentage scored in the “some risk” category (19%), with the rest of the sample split between the “low risk” (41%) and “at risk” (40%) categories. As a result, more RPS students scored in both the “low risk” and “at risk” categories as compared to their Even Start counterparts (see Figure 3).

3. DIBELS results for LEP kindergartners: Former Even Start children and all Rochester public schools children (2004-05 and 2005-06)



As noted above, the two samples are not completely comparable. A better comparison could be made between students who are both LEP and low income (i.e., qualify for free or reduced-price lunch). The complete data were not available for this subgroup (275 students), but we were able to compare average DIBELS scores. The former Even Start children outperformed their RPS counterparts on both DIBELS measures. The difference was minor for the Initial Sounds Fluency measure (5.3 vs. 5.1) and notable for the Letter Naming Fluency measure (8.2 vs. 7.5).

Teacher report card ratings

Teachers rated the majority of the former Even Start students (65%) as “developing” for their Personal and Social Growth rating. Several students (31%) were rated as “secure,” and only one of the 26 students was rated as “beginning” (see Figure 4).

More than three out of four students (77%) received a “developing” rating for Language Arts. The rest of the students were split evenly between the “beginning” (12%) and “secure” categories (12%) (see Figure 4).

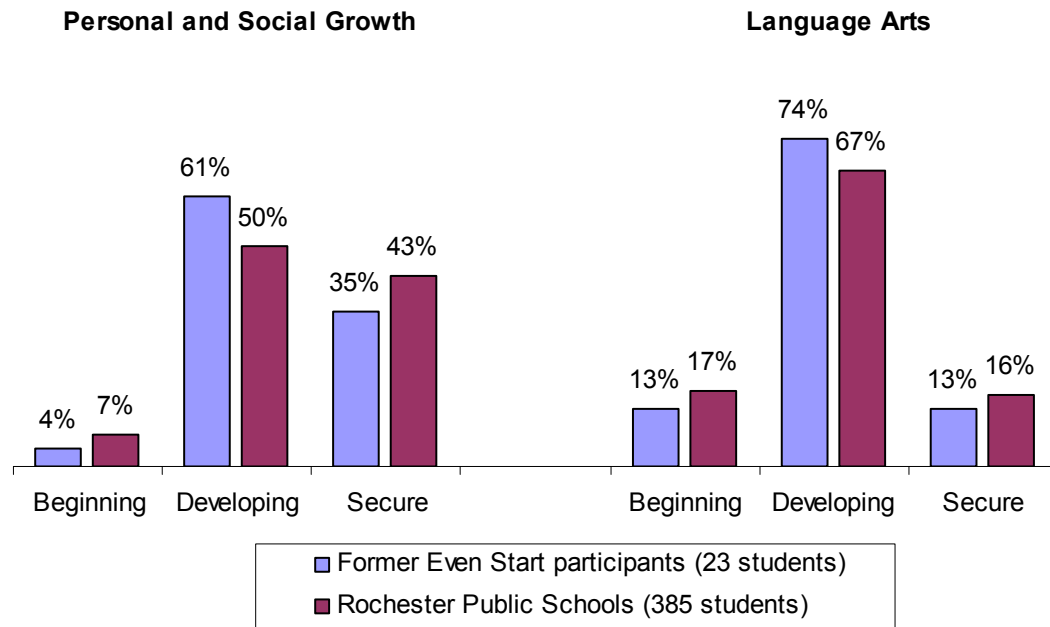
4. Teacher report card ratings: Fall of kindergarten

Domain		Number	Percent
Personal and Social Growth	Beginning	1	4%
	Developing	17	65%
	Secure	8	31%
	Total	26	100%
Language Arts	Beginning	3	12%
	Developing	20	77%
	Secure	3	12%
	Total	26	100%

Similar patterns are seen for the RPS students. Again, this comparison included LEP students only. Half of the students (50%) were rated as “developing” for their Personal and Social Growth rating, followed by “secure” (43%) and “beginning” (7%). In comparison to the former Even Start participants, a slightly larger percentage of RPS students were rated as “beginning” (7% as compared to 4%) and as “secure” (43% as compared to 35%), with a smaller percentage of students in the “developing” category (50% as compared to 61%) (see Figure 5).

Likewise, the RPS students’ rating distribution for Language Arts is similar to that of their Even Start counterparts. For both groups, the majority of the students were rated as “developing.” However, this percentage is larger for the former Even Start participants (74%) in comparison to the RPS students (67%), who have slightly larger percentages in the “beginning” (17% as compared to 13%) and “secure” (16% as compared to 13%) categories (see Figure 5).

5. Teacher report card ratings for LEP kindergartners: Former Even Start children and all Rochester public school children



In comparing the average report card ratings for only those children who were both LEP and low income, we find that the Even Start children performed as well as the RPS children in the area of Personal and Social Growth (2.3 for both groups) and in Language Arts (2.0 for Even Start children and 1.9 for RPS children). For purposes of calculating the average ratings, Beginning=1, Developing=2, and Secure=3.

Differences between Black and Hispanic LEP children

Initial assessment results (DIBELS)

Among the former Even Start participants, the Black LEP children performed better on the DIBELS measures than their Hispanic LEP peers. For the Initial Sounds Fluency measure, the largest group of the Black students (43%) scored in the “low risk” category, whereas the majority of the Hispanic students (60%) scored in the “at risk” category. The average score for Black students (7.1) was significantly higher than the score for Hispanic students (3.0) (see Figure 6).

The same pattern is found in the distribution of scores for the Letter Naming Fluency measure. Most of the Black students (71%) achieved a “low risk” score, while the majority of the Hispanic students (60%) scored in the “at risk” category. Once again, the

average score for Black students (10.9) was significantly higher than the score for Hispanic students (3.9) (see Figure 6).

In comparison to their Black peers, a larger number of the Hispanic students received a score of zero on the Initial Sounds Fluency (3 Hispanics, 2 Blacks) and Letter Naming Fluency (6 Hispanics, 2 Blacks) measures.

6. Black and Hispanic LEP kindergartners: DIBELS results

Measure	Black		Hispanic		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Initial Sounds Fluency	Low risk	6	43%	0	-
	Some risk	4	29%	4	40%
	At risk	4	29%	6	60%
	Total	14	100%	10	100%
	Average score*	7.1		3.0	
Letter Naming Fluency	Low risk	10	71%	2	20%
	Some risk	2	14%	2	20%
	At risk	2	14%	6	60%
	Total	14	100%	10	100%
	Average score*	10.9		3.9	

* *There is a statistically significant difference in average score between Black and Hispanic LEP children ($p < .05$).*

Interestingly, this same pattern was found among the RPS students who were both LEP and low income. The Black students outperformed their Hispanic peers on both the Initial Sounds Fluency measure (6.1 vs. 4.1) and the Letter Naming Fluency measure (9.4 vs. 3.6). Perhaps more importantly, the Black former Even Start children outperformed the Black RPS students on both the Initial Sounds Fluency (7.1 vs. 6.1) and Letter Naming Fluency (10.9 vs. 9.4) measures. The Hispanic former Even Start children also outperformed their Hispanic RPS peers on the Letter Naming Fluency measure (3.9 vs. 3.6), but they had a lower average score for Initial Sounds Fluency (3.0 vs. 4.1) (see Figure 7).

7. Even Start and RPS Black and Hispanic LEP low income kindergartners: DIBELS results

Measure		Black		Hispanic	
		Even Start (N=14)	RPS (N=107)	Even Start (N=10)	RPS (N=85)
Initial Sounds Fluency	Average score	7.1	6.1	3.0	4.1
Letter Naming Fluency	Average score	10.9	9.4	3.9	3.6

Teacher report card ratings

According to teacher report card ratings, the Black students also performed better than their Hispanic peers in the area of Language Arts. While 3 of the 11 Black students (or 27%) were rated as “secure,” no Hispanic students received this rating (see Figure 8).

In contrast, the teacher ratings suggest that the Hispanic students demonstrated more Personal and Social Growth than their Black peers. Half of the Hispanic students (50%) were rated as “secure,” whereas most of the Black students (73%) were rated as “developing” (see Figure 8).

8. Black and Hispanic LEP kindergartners: Teacher report card ratings

Domain		Black		Hispanic	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Language Arts	Beginning	1	9%	2	20%
	Developing	7	64%	8	80%
	Secure	3	27%	0	-
	Total	11	100%	10	100%
Personal and Social Growth	Beginning	0	-	1	10%
	Developing	8	73%	4	40%
	Secure	3	27%	5	50%
	Total	11	100%	10	100%

In comparing the former Even Start children to RPS children of the same race/ethnicity and background (LEP and low income), we find that their average report card ratings were very comparable. The Black and Hispanic former Even Start children were doing as well as, and in some cases slightly better than, their RPS counterparts for both the Personal and Social Growth rating and the Language Arts rating (see Figure 9).

**9. Even Start and RPS Black and Hispanic LEP low income kindergartners:
Teacher report card ratings**

Measure		Black		Hispanic	
		Even Start (N=11)	RPS (N=107)	Even Start (N=10)	RPS (N=85)
Personal and Social Growth	Average score	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.2
Language Arts	Average score	2.2	2.1	1.8	1.7

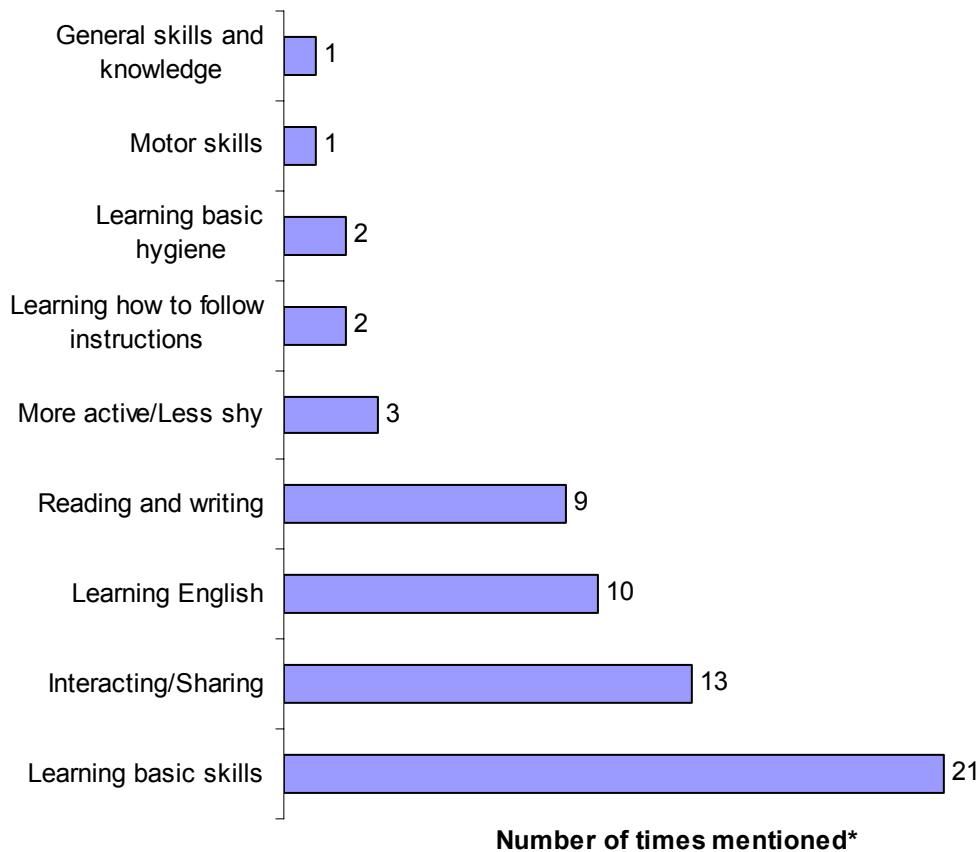
Parent survey results

Telephone surveys were conducted with 29 parents. They were asked questions regarding the ways in which the Even Start program has helped them, their involvement in their children’s learning, and suggestions for program improvement. The 29 parents shared information about 35 children in total.

How has the Even Start program helped?

All of the parents thought that their children’s participation in the Even Start program helped prepare their children for school. The parents specified a variety of ways in which the program helped their children. The most common way (mentioned 21 times) was by helping their children to learn basic skills such as letters, colors, and numbers. The next most common way (mentioned 13 times) was by helping their children learn how to interact, share, work, and get along with other kids. Several parents also mentioned that the program prepared their children for school because their children learned English (mentioned 10 times) and reading and writing (mentioned 9 times). Other less frequently mentioned reasons were that their children became more active and less shy; learned how to follow instructions from people other than their own parents; learned basic hygiene such as brushing teeth, washing hands, and getting dressed; developed motor skills such as building and making puzzles; and learned general skills and knowledge (see Figure 10).

10. Ways the program helped children prepare for school (29 parent respondents representing 35 children)



* Parents could mention up to three ways. Their responses were grouped into the categories shown.

Parents were either somewhat (9%) or very (91%) satisfied with how well their children were doing in school. Only four parents had concerns about how their children are doing:

- The homework is difficult to understand. I have a hard time helping my child.
- [I am concerned] that she is still in ESL classes.
- [I was concerned] that he was falling behind in the past, but now he's caught up with the other kids.
- I think she was too young when she began kindergarten, and now she's having problems keeping up with the other kids.

The Even Start program helped not only the children, but also the parents. All 29 parents mentioned that they were helped in some way or another by the program. The most

common response by far (mentioned by 19 parents) was that the program helped them learn English. There was less overlap among the rest of the responses, suggesting that many of the parents were helped in ways relatively unique to them. Six parents mentioned that the program helped them learn how to help their kids with homework, and four parents mentioned that it helped them to get to know other parents and share their experiences (see Figure 11).

11. Ways the program helped parents (29 respondents)



* Parents could mention up to three ways. Their responses were grouped into the categories shown.

How involved are the parents in their children's learning?

All of the parents had talked with their child's teacher about their child's progress and what he/she is learning. The number of times parents talked with the teacher since the beginning of the school year ranged from 1 to 10 times, with an average of about three times.

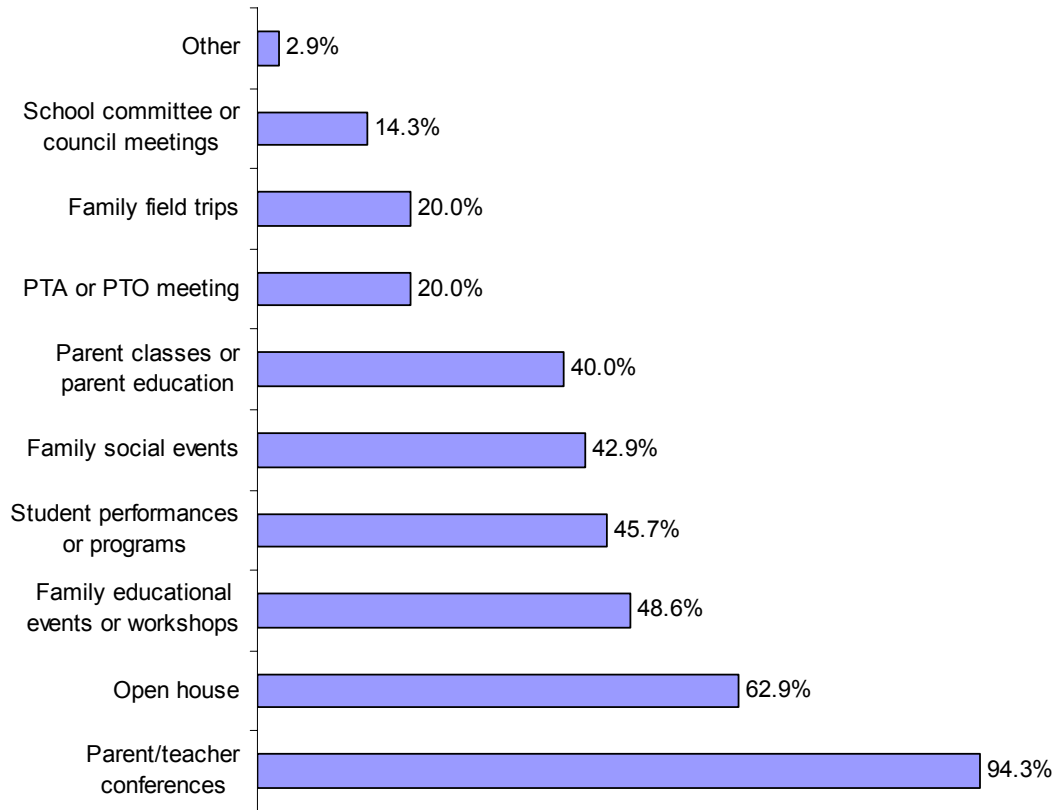
All but one of the 29 parents reported that they talk with their child about what they are doing in school or help their child with school work. Of the 34 children who were helped by their parents, most (88%) were helped frequently, with 68 percent being helped almost every day and 20 percent being helped 1-2 times a week. The parents of 89 percent of the children reported that they are able to help their children with school more now because of what they learned in Even Start.

About 77 percent of the time, the parents reported that they always or almost always read the information that their children bring home from school, while the other 23 percent reported that they read the information some of the time.

The parents of about 83 percent of the children reported that they sit down and read with their children. Of the 29 children that read with their parents, 15 of them (or 52%) read almost every day, 13 (or 45%) read 1-2 times a week, and one (or 3%) reads 1-3 times a month.

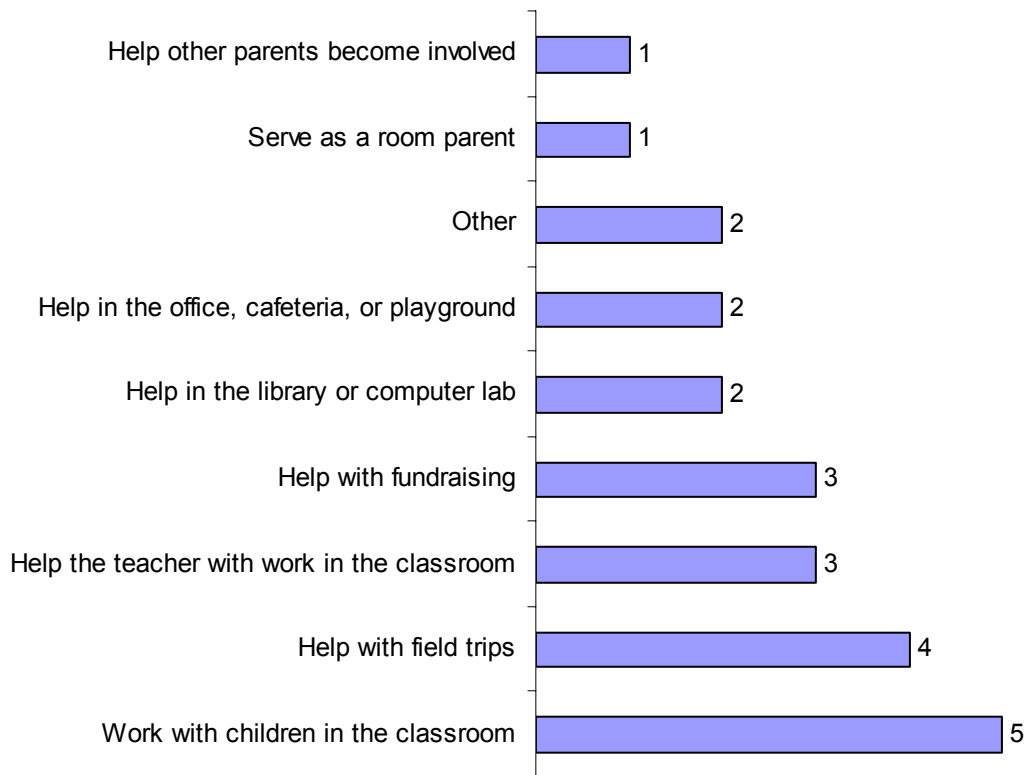
The parents were also asked whether they had attended a list of events at their child's school since the beginning of the school year. The number of different events attended by parents ranged from 1 to 8 events, with an average of about four events. The most common event (attended for 94% of the children) was parent/teacher conferences, followed by open house (attended for 63% of the children), family educational events or workshops (attended for 49% of the children), and student performances or programs (attended for 46% of the children) (see Figure 12).

12. School activities and events attended by parents (29 parent respondents representing 35 children)



Six parents (or 17%) reported that they also volunteer at their child's school. The frequency of volunteering ranged from less than monthly to 1-2 times a week. From a list of possible volunteer activities provided to parents in the survey, the most common volunteer activity (reported by 5 of the 6 parents who volunteer) was working with children in the classroom. Four of the six parents also reported helping with field trips (see Figure 13).

13. Volunteer activities done by parents (6 respondents)



After leaving the program

Only 3 (or 10%) of the 29 parents had enrolled in another school or education program since leaving the Even Start program. One of the three parents attended a nursing program at Rochester Technical College but left before completing the program. The other two parents are currently attending programs, one in a medical laboratory and the other at Hawthorne Family Education Center.

About 52 percent of the parents surveyed are currently at home full-time. The next largest group (41%) is currently employed, working from 20 to 60 hours per week with an average of about 39 hours. The remaining 7 percent is unemployed and looking for work.

Differences between Black and Hispanic parents of LEP children

Differences between Black and Hispanic LEP parents might help explain why the initial DIBELS assessments and teacher report card ratings differed between Black and Hispanic LEP children. On average the Black parents received more education in their countries of origin before immigrating to the United States. Fifty percent of the Black

parents completed at least some high school before immigrating in comparison to only 10 percent of the Hispanic parents (see Figure 14).

14. Parent's education before immigrating to the United States

	Black LEP		Hispanic LEP	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than high school	4	50%	9	90%
Some high school	2	25%	1	10%
High school graduate	2	25%	0	-
Total	8	100%	10	100%

Two of the nine Black LEP parents (or 22%) enrolled in another school or education program after leaving Even Start. In contrast, no Hispanic parents enrolled in other programs. This finding, along with the parents' education levels, suggests that the Black parents are more experienced academically, and as a result, they may have an easier time helping their children in school.

Although the Black parents received more education in their countries of origin than the Hispanic parents, both groups were about equal with regard to their English skills when they began the Even Start program. The average ESL level for both groups was about 2 (beginning). Our survey results show that Black and Hispanic parents were also similar with regard to how often they talk to their child's teacher, talk to their child about school, and read to their child.

There were some differences between Black and Hispanic LEP parents with regard to the number and type of school activities and events that they attended. The average number of different events attended by parents for each child was 3.9 for the full sample. On average, Black parents attended a slightly higher number of event types (4.3), while Hispanic parents attended a slightly lower number (3.2). Several of the Black parents attended PTA, PTO, or other parent organization meetings (36%) as well as school committee, advisory board, or council meetings (27%). No Hispanic parents attended these events. Instead, a larger number of Hispanic parents attended family social events (50%) in comparison to the Black parents (18%).

Many of the Black parents (44%) stayed at home full-time. Among the Black parents who did not stay at home (5 parents), three were employed and two were unemployed and looking for work. Like the Black parents, many of the Hispanic parents (40%) stayed at home full-time. However, none were unemployed and looking for work. In comparison to the full sample (41% employed), the percentage of Hispanics employed

(60%) is high (see Figure 15). Working parents may not have as much time to help their children with school work and to attend school activities and events.

15. Parent's employment status

	Full Sample		Black LEP		Hispanic LEP	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Employed	12	41%	3	33%	6	60%
Unemployed and looking for work	2	7%	2	22%	0	-
At home full-time	15	52%	4	44%	4	40%
Total	29	100%	9	100%	10	100%

Suggestions for improving the program

All but one of the parents responded to a question asking if they had any suggestions for improving the Even Start program. Of those who responded, 57 percent liked the program as is and did not see any room for improvement. The other 43 percent offered a wide variety of suggestions. Only a few suggestions were mentioned by more than one parent. These included the following:

- Provide more time (mentioned by 3 parents), including more class time, more time specifically for learning English, and more time to meet and talk to people.
- Offer more classes at different days and times (mentioned by 3 parents) with particular interest in night classes (mentioned by 2 of the 3).
- Purchase up-to-date class materials (mentioned by 2 parents).

Other less common suggestions included the following: expand services, open up more spaces, offer age-specific classes for children (i.e., focus the age span more narrowly), teach more about different situations for different families, have the child read to the parent, hire a new teacher with better “people skills,” form smaller reading group circles, and practice speaking English with native speakers. One parent had no suggestions for the program itself but mentioned that the parents should be better motivated and should attend and participate in the program.