

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Quality and Characteristics of the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program 2011–2012 Statewide Evaluation



Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, PhD  
Jennifer Schaaf, PhD  
Lisa Hildebrandt, MA  
Doré LaForett, PhD

## Study Overview

The North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program (NC Pre-K) is a state-funded initiative for at-risk 4-year-olds, designed to provide a high quality, classroom-based educational program during the year prior to kindergarten entry. Children are eligible for NC Pre-K based on age, family income (at or below 75% of state median income), and other risk factors (limited English proficiency, identified disability, chronic health condition, and developmental/educational need). The statewide pre-k program was initiated in the 2001–2002 school year as the More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program, and became the NC Pre-Kindergarten Program in 2011–2012, shifting from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) in the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). In the 2011–2012 year, the NC Pre-K Program served over 29,000 children in a variety of settings across the state, including local school systems, private providers, and blended Head Start/pre-k classrooms.

The 2011–2012 evaluation study included information about characteristics of the NC Pre-K Program statewide and observations of classroom quality and teacher surveys in a random sample of 100 classrooms. The primary research questions addressed by this evaluation included:

- What were the key characteristics of the local NC Pre-K programs?
- What was the quality of the NC Pre-K classrooms attended by children?
- What factors were associated with better quality?
- To what extent were these results similar to past years under the More at Four Program?

## Key Findings

### Program Characteristics

**The NC Pre-K Program has not changed substantially in comparison to prior years of its predecessor program More at Four.** Similarities were found across most characteristics that were examined, including class size, curriculum, the variety of setting types, and the population of children (half boys and girls, variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, 90% from poor families, and demonstrate a variety of other risk factors).

**There were a few aspects in which the NC Pre-K Program differed in comparison to prior years of the More at Four Program.** The NC Pre-K Program was slightly smaller than in recent years of the statewide pre-k program, serving just under 30,000 children. The children in NC Pre-K included a somewhat higher proportion of those who had never previously been served in a program, as well as all those who were unserved at the time of enrollment, compared to prior years. Further, the NC Pre-K Program continued to maintain the trend for improving the qualifications of teachers, both in terms of teacher education levels and B-K licensure.



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CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

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Ellen S. Peisner-Feinberg,  
FPG Child Development  
Institute, The University of  
North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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[http://www.fpg.unc.edu/  
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## Teacher Beliefs

**NC Pre-K teachers generally reported being satisfied with their work environment.** They rated a variety of aspects of the work climate fairly positively, including the adequacy of resources; the overall work environment; and their decision-making role, especially for areas more closely tied to daily teaching.

**NC Pre-K teachers reported that they planned to remain in the early childhood field.** These teachers were experienced, having taught in early childhood education for an average of 11 years. The majority (71%) of teachers surveyed reported that they planned to continue working in an early childhood setting for the next three years.

## Classroom Quality

**The quality of classroom practices in NC Pre-K was in the medium to high range overall.** A variety of aspects of classroom practices was examined, including global quality, teacher-child instructional interactions, language and literacy environment, and sensitivity of teacher-child interactions. Quality was relatively stronger in more global educational environment and teacher-child interactions than in more specific instructional practices. Further, there were no consistent patterns of predictors of quality, including teacher qualifications, class size, and classroom characteristics of children, although there was some evidence that teacher beliefs were associated with quality.

**The quality of the NC Pre-K classrooms was similar in almost all areas when compared to recent years of More at Four.** Scores did not differ between NC Pre-K and previous More at Four classes for measures of global classroom quality (ECERS-R), emotional support and classroom organization (CLASS), and sensitivity of teacher-child interactions (CIS). The one exception was in the area of instructional support (CLASS), where NC Pre-K classrooms scored lower than the More at Four classrooms. However, for both the NC Pre-K and More at Four classrooms, scores for this aspect of quality were substantially lower than for other aspects.

## Conclusions

In sum, the primary characteristics of the NC Pre-K Program have remained quite similar to those of recent years of the More at Four Program, its predecessor. One important area to note in which the NC Pre-K Program has continued or maintained a trend toward improvement is in the area of teacher qualifications, both education and licensure levels. Two areas recommended to explore with regard to quality improvement include efforts focused on instructional practices and on beliefs about teaching practices. The quality of the NC Pre-K Program also was quite similar to recent years of the More at Four Program, indicating that there was little change at the level of classroom practices with the shift in program auspice. Taken in total, these results suggest that the NC Pre-K Program continues to offer a strong pre-k experience for at-risk 4-year-olds throughout the state. ■