



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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Data and program quality issues persist amid expansion of program for at-risk four-year-olds

Editor’s Note: Copies of the “*Report on the Implementation and Expansion of the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)*,” can be found online at www.eoc.sc.gov. The report was transmitted to members of the SC General Assembly today.

Columbia – The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) released a report today evaluating the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP), a full-day educational pre-kindergarten program for at-risk four-year-olds residing in 51 SC school districts. The program is currently in its eighth year of implementation in both public and private child care centers. Although the program has expanded the number of students served this year, data and quality issues persist.

CDEPP Expansion

During last year’s legislative session, the SC General Assembly appropriated \$48.8 million to the CDEPP program, an increase of \$26.1 million. As a result, it is projected an additional 2,966 at-risk four-year-olds will be served in 2013-14, bringing the estimated total of children served to 8,282. The number of children served in private centers approved by the Office of First Steps is projected to double while the number in public schools will increase by 50 percent.

2013-14 CDEPP (projections)	Public Schools	Private Settings
Number of Providers	47 districts 150 schools	82 Childcare Centers 8 Head Start Centers
Number of Classrooms	391	103
Number of Children	6,981	1,301

According to the Melanie Barton, Executive Director of the EOC, one explanation for the significant increase in the private centers is that CDEPP has expanded into more populated suburban districts that have more childcare centers.

“The expansion of the CDEPP program will require the inclusion of private childcare centers,” stated Barton. “Public schools are very often limited by space.”

Barton noted that approximately 68 percent of at-risk four-year-olds living in CDEPP-eligible school districts are estimated to be served in Head Start, the ABC Voucher Program, and CDEPP. Approximately one-third of at-risk four-year-olds statewide are estimated to be served in a federal or state-funded program.

Data and Program Quality Issues

While the program has expanded in both public and private centers, issues of program and data quality continue to be concerns, preventing a thorough and complete evaluation of the program. For example, student-level data and unique student identifiers were not provided to the evaluation team.

According to the report, the impact of CDEPP on early literacy, early mathematical ability, and social and emotional development is currently impossible to determine because there is no requirement for the administration of a readiness assessment to children entering CDEPP as four-year-olds.

“We simply cannot tell legislators or taxpayers whether this program is preparing young people for kindergarten because the data don’t exist until third grade,” stated Barton.

According to the academic performance of the initial CDEPP cohorts on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) in third grade, a greater percentage of students who as four-year-olds participated in CDEPP achieved or exceeded state standards in reading and mathematics as compared to their peers who qualified for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program, who resided in the same CDEPP districts, but who did not participate in the four-year-old program. In addition, a greater percentage of students who as four-year-olds participated in CDEPP achieved or exceeded state standards in reading as compared to other students in the state who received subsidized meals. However, in mathematics, the two groups of students performed the same.

The report looked at alternative measures of program quality including the ABC Quality rating on the South Carolina Division of Early Care and Education website which publicly documents deficiencies by providers.

According to Dr. Bill Brown, a professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of South Carolina “we know relatively little about the quality and nature of CDEPP services in both public and private centers. What we do know is that the quality of educational services offered to children can and should be improved.”

Six recommendations are included in the report to improve the implementation and administration of CDEPP in the future:

1. Unless the General Assembly expands the program to include at-risk four-year-olds living in other school districts in Fiscal Year 2014-15, no additional funds are needed to implement the program in Fiscal Year 2014-15. The school districts of Anderson 3, Lexington 2 and Union could participate in the program with the current appropriation levels as authorized to the Department of Education. Furthermore, current centers participating in the program through the Office of First Steps could experience a 15 percent increase in enrollment and still have enough funds to serve these children at current appropriation levels.
2. The General Assembly should determine how the projected end-of-year surplus funds, which should be at least \$7.1 million, should be expended, either for issues related to this program or for other purposes.
3. The South Carolina Department of Education and the Office of First Steps to School Readiness must mutually agree upon how students in this program will be monitored over time and enter into a formal memorandum of agreement that will be a condition of participation by non-public school providers participating in the program. For example, how will children be assessed and for what purpose?
4. The EOC has already recommended to the General Assembly that up to \$3.0 million in existing funds for the half-day EIA program funds to implement a readiness assessment for all four-year-olds entering CDEPP, for all four-year-olds enrolled in a half-day four-year-old program in public schools, and for all five-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten beginning in school year 2014-15. The assessment should not be used for state or federal accountability purposes but as a tool to

measure the effectiveness of educational programs provided to young children and most importantly, for diagnostic purposes to assist classroom teachers in meeting the individual educational needs of students. This recommendation does not prevent the state from collaborating with other states in creating future readiness assessments.

5. Looking to the future, the state should establish a CDEPP Provider Readiness Rate compiled from the screening results of children who attended and completed CDEPP in either public or private centers. Providers would have to have a readiness rate above the minimum set by the State Board of Education before they are granted provider status. Existing CDEPP providers whose readiness rate falls below the minimum would be placed on probation and required to submit and implement an improvement plan before participating in the program and receiving future state funds.
6. In the meantime, the EOC recommends that any private childcare center participating in CDEPP must have an ABC rating of B or better in order to participate. In addition, if the Department of Social Services documents that the health, safety or welfare of a four-year-old attending a public school participating in CDEPP is at risk, then the Department should be allowed to immediately revoke the license or approval of the public school to participate in CDEPP.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.

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