

Evaluating the Implementation and Impact of Tempe PRE

Arizona Mayors Education Roundtable

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WHO WE ARE



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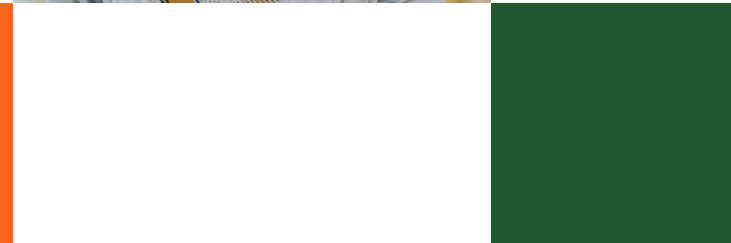
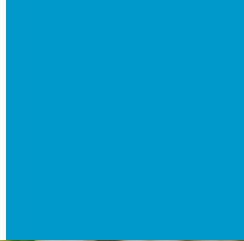


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Helios Education Foundation exists to support postsecondary attainment for low-income and under-represented communities in Arizona and Florida.

We have invested more than **\$300 million** in partnerships and initiatives focused on improving education outcomes.

We back the most-promising solutions to address achievement gaps, while we build a strategic and equitable response for all children in AZ and FL.



Our approach to third-grade reading: access to quality education

Helios supports improvements in early learning through:

1

Continual improvement of quality early learning teaching

2

Increasing access to quality early learning environments, particularly for Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds

3

Expanding the use of research-based literacy initiatives grounded in the science of reading



Components include:

- 1:9 teacher-to-student ratio
- Access to Quality First (AZ QIRS) which includes coaching, mental health consultants, and use of quality classroom assessments (ECERS/CLASS)
- Certified lead teacher w/ early childhood endorsement + instructional assistants
- Training/use of
 - HighScope Curriculum
 - Teaching Strategies GOLD
- Healthy meals + snacks
- Free before/after school and summer care for those who qualified
- *Use of KEA (Kindergarten Entry Assessment) at kindergarten entry - Alignment efforts*

1.

Publicly-funded (by the City of Tempe) for low-income families

2.

Full-day, full-week, high-quality program

3.

Key partners: City of Tempe, Tempe Elementary School District, local foundations

EVALUATION



NORC at the University of Chicago is an objective, nonpartisan, research organization that delivers insights and analysis decision-makers trust.



Evaluation Approach



- **Step 1: Planning**
 - Documented partners' expectations for and understanding of program implementation
 - **Step 2: Development of Evaluation Plan**
 - Co-created a plan for what the evaluation in Year 1 would look like
 - **Step 3: Implementation**
 - Collected qualitative information about implementation, analyzed quantitative data made available to us
 - **Step 4: Action and Improvement**
 - Shared ongoing learnings with City, district, and funder
 - Partners identified areas for improvement that they could tackle in the near future
- ↓
- **Step 1: Planning**
 - Redesigned the evaluation to capture findings unable to find in prior round

Key Goals for Evaluation

- Goal 1: Make causal inferences about student outcomes
- Goal 2: Conduct classroom observations and interviews to understand real-world implementation compared to the logic model the team developed
- Goal 3: Collaborate with policymakers, practitioners, and funder for bi-directional feedback based on what we were learning through research

*All within the context of studying *real-life implementation* of a new preschool program. We both wanted to do rigorous research *and* be mindful that we could not manage the implementation for the program itself.

Child Outcomes – Literacy

2018-2019 and 2019-2020 School Years

Evaluation Overview

We compared the kindergarten literacy skills of Tempe PRE students to similar students who did not attend Tempe PRE. Some comparison students attended other Tempe El preschool programs, and some attended an unknown preschool program (or none at all).

Tempe PRE vs **Alternative Tempe El Pre-k** vs **Unknown Pre-k Setting**

We examined literacy outcomes in the fall, winter, and spring.

Literacy outcomes included:

- Basic skills (such as letter naming)
- An early reading measure (such as sounding out words)

What did we find? *Fall*

At the beginning of the year, Tempe PRE students...

- Performed **better** than students who did not attend preschool in Tempe El
- Performed **similarly** to students who attended an alternative Tempe Preschool Program



What did we find? *Spring*

By the end of the year, Tempe PRE students' literacy scores...

- *Increased less* than students who did not attend preschool in Tempe El (the gap closed)
- *Increased more* than students in the alternative Tempe Preschool program (the gap grew)

AND Tempe PRE students grew more than both groups on the early reading measure.



Observation & Interview Findings

2019-2020 and 2021-2022 School Years

Kindergarten Readiness

Definitions & Alignment

- Tempe PRE and kindergarten teachers defined kindergarten readiness differently. Kindergarten teachers tended to focus more on academic skills, while Tempe PRE teachers focused more on social-emotional skills.

Perceptions

- Teachers and principals felt Tempe PRE was successful in preparing students for kindergarten.

Implementation of HighScope

HighScope is the curriculum used in Tempe PRE. HighScope emphasizes active learning, student choice, and social-emotional skills.

Teacher Perceptions of HighScope

- Teachers felt comfortable implementing HighScope and believed student choice was the most beneficial part of the curriculum.

Fidelity of Implementation

- Teachers implemented most aspects of HighScope across classrooms with fidelity, but still had some room to grow in facilitating active learning.

Child directed interaction scores improved between 2018-19 and 2021-22.

Child directed interactions are key component of the HighScope curriculum and have been a focus of professional development opportunities over the years.

Examples of child directed interactions include:

- Children deciding where and how they want to play
- Children exploring their own interests
- Teachers asking questions about the child's interests

In contrast, teacher directed interactions allow less room for child input or choice.



Conflict resolution scores were strong and similar in 2018-19 and 2021-22.

Teachers follow a four-step conflict resolution process, including

- (1) Approach conflict as a matter of fact, rather than a problem,
- (2) Help diffuse conflicts, approaching calmly and acknowledging feelings,
- (3) Involve children in identifying the problem, and
- (4) Involve children in the process of finding and choosing a solution for a problem.

Maintaining high conflict resolution quality scores is particularly notable given the lingering effects of COVID-19 on child development.



Early Implementation Findings & Lessons Learned

2018-2019 and 2019-2020 School Years

Because the evaluation was designed to be collaborative with ongoing input from all partners, Tempe PRE was able to use key learnings to make program adjustments.

When starting a preschool program, early awareness of these lessons learned could lead to better outcomes.

1.

Consider alignment between preschool and kindergarten teaching philosophies

2.

Consider how structural decisions can better support stronger cross-grade collaboration and alignment

3.

Set clear expectations for roles and responsibilities for integrating preschool into existing school communities

EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS AND FAMILIES



EXPERIENCES

“We have been blessed to be part of the Tempe PRE program since its inception. The impact of the program over the last three years has been profound on the overall well-being of our family. Not only has the program provided access to high-quality early childhood education for both of my daughters, it has also afforded me the opportunity to continue to advance my personal education and career. During this time period we have seen a 44% increase in our gross annual income— this life altering increase would not have been possible without this program. My gratitude for Tempe PRE staff and all of those that support the program cannot be put into words. Thank you, thank you for providing a program that allows our community to reach our full potential.”

—Parent of Tempe PRE Student



“**Tempe Elementary students are stronger, healthier and better prepared for learning in kindergarten because of the impact of Tempe PRE on our youngest, most vulnerable children. This collaborative partnership with the City of Tempe, supported by funding from Helios Education Foundation in helping us measure the impact of preschool on kindergarten readiness, has shown unequivocally the positive and often astounding impact of Tempe PRE on the success of our children.**”

—Tempe Elementary Superintendent Christine Busch



NEXT STEPS

Evaluation:

Randomized Controlled Trial through a Lottery Process (best approach to measuring true “impact”) for Tempe PRE applicants in 2021-22

- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-5)
- Emotion Regulation Checklist

Resources:

- [City of Tempe Preschool Research and Expansion brief](#)
 - Provides history of Tempe PRE, description of evaluation plan and key findings from first two years of research
- Stacy Ehrlich Loewe, Loewe-Stacy@norc.org
- Julie Norwood, jnorwood@helios.org