

Hartford Children are Learning by Leaps and Bounds

Achievements of Children Involved
in Brighter Futures Child Care
Enhancement Project

October 2004

OVERVIEW

Over the years, a great deal of attention has been paid to increasing the school readiness of young children. A major breakthrough has been made here in Hartford involving children attending child care centers that receive special support from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

Hartford preschoolers who attended 14 child care centers, where staff receive intensive training and on-site consultation in a state-of-the-art early childhood curriculum, have demonstrated significant improvements in their readiness for school.



The children's dramatic progress toward school readiness is concrete evidence that intensive training and development for child care staff and a focus on curriculum *does* help prepare children for school – and later success in school. For the Foundation, it is confirmation that its investment in early childhood education for Hartford children is paying off.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Using the Early Screening Profile, a nationally-normed instrument that assesses children in five major developmental areas associated with school readiness, independent researchers found that:

- 1.** On each dimension assessed, students achieved significant gains from the fall to the spring that were far greater than those they would have achieved through normal development; and
- 2.** On each dimension, students assessed in May 2004 scored significantly higher than students graduating in 2003 from the same centers, indicating that the assistance provided through the Foundation's *Brighter Futures* Child Care Enhancement Project over the course of the year is having a substantial positive benefit for the children enrolled in these centers.
- 3.** The students assessed in May 2004 scored considerably higher than the national average, after having begun the year slightly below the national average.

INCREASING SCHOOL READINESS

Since 1990, when it developed its Brighter Futures Initiative, the Hartford Foundation has made a focused, intensive effort to increase the school readiness of Hartford's children. This involves a \$25 million commitment over 20 years to improve the early education and health care of young children and provide supports to their families.



As part of *Brighter Futures*, the Foundation created a three-year, **\$2 million Child Care Enhancement Project** to strengthen 14 child care centers in Hartford. The centers serve approximately 1,000 children, ages eight weeks to five years of age, and employ approximately 250 early childhood professionals.

Funding was provided to increase staff training and technical support to implement a state-of-the-art early

childhood curriculum, called ***The Creative Curriculum***.

Foundation support also enabled the 14 centers to improve program quality by: increasing staff qualifications, enhancing business planning and marketing, making facility improvements, strengthening parent engagement, increasing



staff time for planning and development, and improving management, leadership, and supervision. As a result of these improvements, the school readiness of children attending these centers was expected to increase.



In order to determine the effectiveness of the Project in increasing the readiness of children entering kindergarten, the Foundation commissioned Philliber Research Associates to evaluate this project and conduct this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Early Screening Profiles are used to measure the school readiness of children attending each of these centers. This tool assesses children in five major developmental areas associated with school readiness. Cognitive skills, language skills, and motor skills are measured through interaction directly with the children. Self-help and social skills are obtained from reports by teachers about what they have seen each child do.

Early Screening Profiles have been tested nationally and found to produce results that are both reliable and valid. In addition to raw scores, the profiles include national percentile ranks that take into account the performance of other children of the same age. Thus, children with a percentile rank of 60 have scored above 60% of the national sample of children the same age. When children score higher from one test period to

another, their new score reflects gains they've achieved beyond those they would have achieved through natural development. For example, children whose percentile rank increased from 60 at the initial testing to 80

at a later testing developed faster than many children their same age, so that these children now rank above 80% of the children nationally. The average child in the nation ranks at the 50th percentile.

Paraprofessionals (e.g., school aides, home visitors), and other community members were trained to conduct the assessments. Training involved the completion of a one-day seminar conducted by Philliber Research Associates as well as ongoing supervision throughout the data

collection process. Assessments were conducted in English or Spanish. ¹



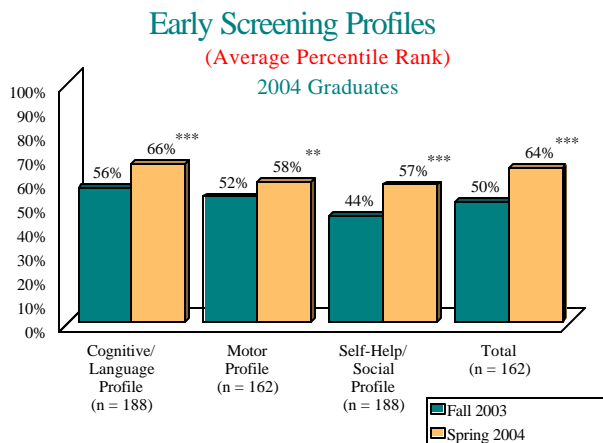
¹ There are no norms for the Spanish version of the test. The assessments were scored using the English norms.

FINDINGS

Early Screening Profile assessments were made of 188 children who were enrolled in child care centers in October 2003 and also again of the same children in May 2004. These children were moving up to kindergarten in the fall. ² Comparison of fall and spring assessments demonstrates two major results:

> **First**, during the year, students significantly increased their abilities in each area.

> **Second**, they were substantially above the national average on every dimension by spring 2004. Their cognitive and total achievements were higher than two-thirds of similar age children in the nation, and their motor and self-help profile scores were higher than three out of five.

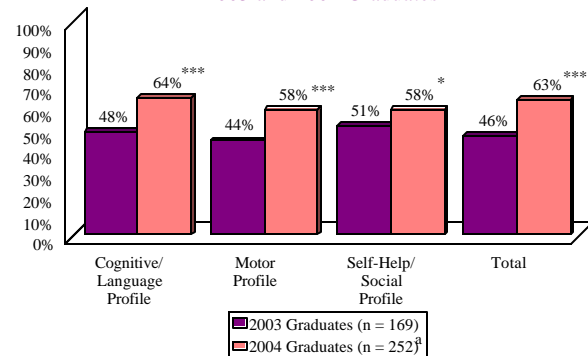


** Difference is statistically significant at $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Their cognitive, language, motor, self-help, and social abilities developed faster than other children, causing their percentile ranks to rise.

The 2004 graduates also scored significantly higher than the 2003 graduates from the same centers. ³ Before the Child Care Enhancement Project began, the average graduate from these centers scored slightly below the national

Early Screening Profiles
(Average Percentile Rank)
2003 and 2004 Graduates



* Difference is statistically significant at $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$ ^a (n = 219) on Motor and Total

average. In 2004, the average graduate scored 17 percentile points higher and ranked well above the national average.

Beginning in spring 2003, the Child Care Enhancement Project began providing Assistance to strengthen participating child care centers. Each center has been provided extensive training to implement **The Creative Curriculum** and additional assistance to improve the quality of staff and upgrade the facilities at the center.

The children who were assessed in 2003 did not have the opportunity to benefit from the Child Care Enhancement Project. Even the assessments completed in the fall were made before most of the children were reached by many of the changes related to the project. The spring 2004 assessments are the first after major portions of the Child Care Enhancement Projects have been implemented. There are no other known differences between the centers in these two years.

² Motor profiles were completed for only 162 of these students; the missing 26 profiles were incorrectly administered.

³ There were a total of 252 students assessed in the spring, but only 188 of these had also been assessed in the fall.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

This study demonstrates that focused, intentional intervention to improve the quality of child care can, within a relatively short period of time, result in significant improvements in the school readiness of young children.

While it is not possible at this point to say which specific elements of the **Brighter Futures** Child Care Enhancement Project, have proven to be the key variables that have led to dramatic increases in children's scores on the Early Screening Profile, it is clear that focused attention by staff on curriculum is key to the improvement of program quality in child care.

The goal of the **Brighter Futures** Child Care Enhancement Project is to create measurable changes in children's readiness for school by making improvements in child care programs. The improvements in the school readiness of graduating preschoolers from the 14 participating centers confirm that the Foundation's investment in the Child Care Enhancement Project is paying off.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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for Hartford's children**

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