

MEMORANDUM – ISSUE REVIEW SESSION



TO: Mayor and Council
THROUGH: Greg Ruiz, Interim Deputy City Manager, (480) 858-7212
FROM: Tim Burch, Community Health and Human Services Director, (480) 858-2358
DATE: 2/8/2024
SUBJECT: An Independent Evaluation of Tempe PRE: Teacher and Family Experiences and Its Impact on Students (NORC at the University of Chicago)

AGENDA ITEM: 3A

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this presentation is to provide Mayor and Council with key implementation findings and lessons learned from an “Independent Evaluation of Tempe PRE: Teacher and Family Experiences and Its Impact on Students,” funded by Helios Education Foundation and conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago.

RECOMMENDATION OR GUIDANCE REQUESTED:

No recommendation or guidance is being requested.

CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITY AND RELATED PERFORMANCE MEASURE:

Quality of Life – 3.06: Achieve Quality Early Learning for children who attend licensed City of Tempe programs as measured by achieving 3, 4, or 5 stars on the Quality First Rating and Improvement System by 2030.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Explanation of Program

In March 2017, Mayor and Council directed staff to develop a two-year pilot preschool program serving low-income three and four-year-old Tempe children to collect sufficient data to demonstrate the effectiveness of high-quality preschool on Kindergarten readiness. Tempe PRE is a high-quality, city-sponsored full-day, year-round program with extended learning offering extended hours and school break camps for families in which the parents are in school or working. Tempe Preschool Expansion (PRE) was implemented in partnership with the Tempe Elementary School District.

Families apply to have their children attend Tempe PRE through an online application process. Tempe families with incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level are eligible for full tuition assistance. Tempe families with incomes between 200% and 300% of the Federal Poverty Level are eligible for 50% reduced tuition. All families of any income are eligible to pay full tuition. Applications are collected during an advertised period. Upon the conclusion of program registration, all applications are randomized and students are placed in order of randomization and according to parent preference for location. Applications that exceed space available are retained and randomized as additional spots become available. As families present with additional needs, staff facilitate connections to other resources such as housing, employment, parent education, and basic needs supports.

This presentation is the finality of a multi-year study of Tempe PRE funded by the Helios Education Foundation and conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago and demonstrates what program

implementation looked like in its early years; how teachers, principals, and parents experienced the program; and how Tempe PRE has impacted student outcomes.

Key Components

Tempe PRE's initial theory of change identified several key components for students, families, and teachers:

- Training and use of evidence-based curriculum (HighScope) and assessments;
- Free before/after school care for qualified families;
- Healthy meals and snacks for students;
- Use of Kindergarten Assessment aligned with Tempe PRE goals;
- Certified lead teachers with early childhood endorsement and instructional assistants; and
- Access to Quality First service benefits including coaching, mental health consultations, and the use of quality classroom assessments for teachers.

Hypothesis

From the very conceptualization of the program, a key component of Tempe PRE was the use of a high-quality curriculum. HighScope was selected as the program curriculum, prioritizing student-led instruction and social and emotional learning. As such, researchers hypothesized that Tempe PRE would lead to better kindergarten preparation through the implementation of HighScope alongside other components.

Research Goals

Goal 1: Make casual inferences about student outcomes.

Goal 2: Understand implementation compared to logic model developed by team.

Goal 3: Collaborate with policymakers, practitioners, and funder for bi-directional feedback based on what was learned through research.

Research Findings

Through a research-practice partnership including the City of Tempe and the Tempe Elementary School District, researchers from NORC at the University of Chicago collected the following types of information:

- Interviews with teachers and principals (2019, 2022);
- Classroom observations (2019, 2022);
- Administrative data on students enrolled in Tempe PRE and in kindergarten; and
- Student-level outcomes from kindergarten, directly from students and teachers (2022 to 2023).

Finding 1: The HighScope curriculum was implemented with fidelity.

Finding 2: Teachers scored high on classroom management.

Finding 3: Teachers increasingly supported student-directed learning.

OUTCOMES:

Receptive Vocabulary

Tempe PRE students began kindergarten with higher receptive vocabulary scores and grew faster than their control group peers over the kindergarten year. Upon the conclusion of kindergarten, more Tempe PRE students met receptive vocabulary expectations than their control group peers.

Social-Emotional Development

Tempe PRE students began kindergarten with more positive social-emotional skills and maintained a slight advantage in comparison to other students at the end of kindergarten. In addition, more Tempe PRE students began to regulate and verbalize their emotions than control group peers.

CONCLUSION:

Because this evaluation was designed to be collaborative with ongoing input from all partners, Tempe PRE was able to use key findings to make program adjustments. Lessons learned through implementation include:

- Consideration of the alignment between preschool and kindergarten teaching philosophies;
- Consideration of how structural decisions can better support stronger cross-grade collaboration and alignment; and the
- Importance of setting clear expectation for roles and responsibilities for integrating preschool into existing school communities.

FISCAL IMPACT or IMPACT TO CURRENT RESOURCES:

There is no financial request attached to this presentation.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 20240208_WSS_TEMPEPRE_EVALUATION_PRESENTATION.PDF