

## **Chicago Program Evaluation Project (C-PEP)**

October, 2006

### ***Background***

The Chicago Program Evaluation Project (C-PEP) is a system-level evaluation of the largest center- and school-based early care and education (ECE) programs operated by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services (CYS), including Head Start, State Pre-Kindergarten (SPK), and full-day collaborative programs. These three programs are the largest components of the overall CPS/CYS ECE system, serving a combined total of 27,500 children.

This evaluation represents the culmination of a year-long planning process led by Erikson Institute at the request of CYS and CPS. A project advisory committee composed of 16 leaders in the Chicago early childhood community assisted in the development of an evaluation design, research protocol, and Request for Proposals (RFP) for the project.

In June 2006, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. was selected through a competitive process to conduct the evaluation. Data collection on a sample of approximately 800 4-year-old children in over 100 Chicago classrooms began this month. A broad array of child, teacher, and classroom assessments will be conducted during the preschool year.

The C-PEP is supported by federal and state funds and a generous grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

### ***Purpose of the Evaluation***

The primary purpose of the project is to inform CPS and CYS of the effectiveness of these three primary program types and to measure the developmental gains children make during the preschool year. Specifically, the evaluation assesses the relationship among teacher and program characteristics, classroom quality, cognitive and social-emotional outcomes, and child and family characteristics including risk status and home language.

**Primary questions to be addressed by the evaluation include the following:**

#### ***Classroom quality***

- 1) What is the level and range of quality in CPS/CYS early childhood classrooms?
- 2) What teacher and program characteristics are most strongly associated with classroom quality?

#### ***Cognitive outcomes***

- 3) How do selected cognitive outcomes for children compare to national norms?
- 4) Controlling for risk status, do these outcomes vary significantly if children are in classrooms with higher or lower levels of quality?
- 5) How much progress do different groups of children make on these measures during the course of their preschool year?

#### ***Social-emotional outcomes***

- 6) What, if any, social-emotional outcomes demonstrate significant variation among low-, moderate, and high-risk children?
- 7) Controlling for risk status, do these outcomes vary significantly if children are in classrooms with higher or lower levels of quality?

### ***Comparative child outcomes***

- 8) Controlling for classroom quality levels and child risk status, do child outcomes differ significantly between children:
- a) whose home language is English or Spanish?
  - b) who are enrolled in full- versus half-day programs?

### ***Uses of the Evaluation***

CPS and CYS will use the information produced by the evaluation to develop program improvement strategies, inform funding decisions, determine the effectiveness of distinct curricula and professional development strategies, and provide a baseline for future research.

In addition to assisting CPS and CYS with the administration of their largest programs, the evaluation is expected to make a significant contribution to the larger ECE program evaluation field. Research conducted for this project during the planning stage found that no comparable evaluations of large, complex, multi-program ECE systems currently exist. Given the size and prominence of Chicago's publicly-funded ECE program system, this project promises to be of high interest to early childhood educators and experts nationwide.

### ***Data Collection***

Data collection began this October with about 105 randomly selected preschool classrooms in Chicago. In each selected classroom, the lead teacher and eight to fifteen children were asked to participate in the study.

Mathematica assessors are visiting the selected classrooms to conduct a 20- to 30-minute teacher interview and a 30-minute individually-administered child assessment for each of the selected children whose parents agreed to let them participate in the study. Teachers are asked to complete a Teacher Child Report Form for each selected child in their class. Each form will take 7 to 10 minutes to complete and measure the child's social and emotional development.

Classroom observations will be conducted in February. A Mathematica trained observer will visit each classroom for 2 to 3 hours on one day. The observer will be looking at teacher-child interactions and instructional practices. Then in April, Mathematica interviewers will visit the class again to conduct follow-up child assessments, a shorter teacher interview, and ask teachers to again complete the Teacher Child Report Forms for each selected child in their classroom.

A detailed table describing the measures used in the C-PEP is attached.