

# **Can Teacher Training in Classroom Management Make a Difference for Children's Experiences in Preschool?**

**A Preview of Findings from the Foundations of Learning Demonstration**

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## Introduction

Policymakers recognize that early childhood education is a promising strategy for improving the school readiness of disadvantaged young children and for advancing their long-term academic success. Yet even as policymakers embrace greater investments in early childhood programs, they confront a difficult challenge: how can the quality of programs be maintained or enhanced when they are operated on a large scale? One critical aspect of quality is addressing children's emotional and behavioral development — that is, their ability to engage positively with peers and teachers and to focus their attention and behavior during classroom activities. Evidence suggests that improving young children's healthy emotional and behavioral development is both an important outcome in its own right and can also be a pathway to improved academic achievement. Recent research documenting high levels of behavior problems for children in preschool classrooms highlights the importance of this issue. Moreover, in survey after survey, teachers consistently emphasize their need for professional development and other supports to help them address children's behavioral issues.

This report offers a preview of promising findings from Foundations of Learning (FOL), a demonstration and random assignment evaluation in Newark and Chicago of an intervention that trains preschool teachers to better support children's behavior and emotional development. The model tested in Foundations of Learning combined teacher training in effective classroom management with weekly classroom consultation. Consultants coached and mentored the teachers in the new strategies learned in the training workshops and provided individualized support to the highest risk children.

The early results reported here are from the Newark demonstration, and they are well-aligned with findings from an earlier study of a similar demonstration, the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP). In brief, FOL and CSRP together provide evidence that the intervention:

- Improved teachers' ability to effectively support children's behavior and emotional development;
- Increased instructional time and created a positive climate for learning in classrooms;
- Reduced conflictual and acting-out behaviors by children; and
- Improved children's ability to focus their attention, to curb their impulsivity, and to show greater engagement in the classroom.

## Why Is This Issue Important?

Children in preschool with behavioral challenges are more likely to face social, behavioral, and academic difficulties throughout their school careers. Conversely, children who learn to focus their attention and regulate their impulsivity in the face of classroom distractions are likely to have greater opportunities for learning. In addition, a child who has difficulty negotiating the classroom environment may affect other children in the classroom. When children act out aggressively or become sad and withdrawn, teachers may be diverted from instructional time to manage these behaviors. This is not an insignificant problem, as studies have documented high rates of emotional and behavior problems among preschool children — 15 percent to 20 percent of children in some cases.<sup>1</sup> In a classroom of 15-20 children, that means as many as three or four children may be acting out — and taking a substantial portion of the teacher’s attention away from more productive activities, even in classrooms focused on play-based learning.

One approach to addressing this problem is to train preschool teachers to proactively support children’s positive behavior while more effectively limiting their aggressive and disruptive behavior.<sup>2</sup> Teachers and children can easily become caught up in cycles of negative interactions<sup>3</sup> in which adults inadvertently exacerbate children’s acting out and aggressive behavior through harsh and ineffective limit-setting techniques (by failing to set limits on children’s misbehavior or being overly negative with a child who is not cooperating in the classroom). Children respond poorly, and adults, exasperated, stop their own attempts to control children’s negative behavior, thereby reinforcing it.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, preschool teachers generally receive very little training about how to address these issues in their preschool classrooms, which can lead to ineffective classroom management, increased stress and burnout, and high rates of turnover.

## What Is Foundations of Learning?

The Foundations of Learning (FOL) program model draws heavily on the lessons of the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP). Designed and developed by Dr. Cybele Raver, who is now a member of the FOL research team, CSRP operated in 18 Head Start sites in high-poverty Chicago neighborhoods from 2004 to 2006. The evaluation of CSRP used a rigorous

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<sup>1</sup>Campbell (1995); Lavigne et al. (1996).

<sup>2</sup>Barrera et al. (2002); Brotman et al. (2005); Dumas, Prinz, Smith, and Laughlin (1999); Gorman-Smith et al. (2006); Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond (2001).

<sup>3</sup>Patterson (1982); Patterson, Reid, and Dishion (1992); Patterson (1996).

<sup>4</sup>Dishion, French, and Patterson (1995).

research design, in which the 18 sites were randomly assigned to one of two groups: half received the multicomponent CSRP intervention; the other half served as a control group.

Encouraged by early findings from CSRP, MDRC decided to test the model on a larger scale. Following a feasibility study and a year-long pilot phase, MDRC proceeded with a demonstration of FOL in Newark during the 2007-2008 school year and again in Chicago in the 2008-2009 school year.

The FOL intervention includes four components delivered across the school year:

- **Teacher training:** Lead and assistant teachers are invited to attend five Saturday training sessions, once a month for six hours each, from late September to January. The workshops are an adapted version of *The Incredible Years* curriculum developed by Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton.<sup>5</sup> They instruct teachers how to develop positive relationships with children and their families; present classroom strategies teachers can use, such as outlining clear rules, setting predictable limits, and using a discipline structure that minimizes classroom disruptions and avoids confrontation; and provide teachers with techniques to help develop children's social skills, anger management, and problem-solving ability.
- **Classroom-level consultation:** To complement the training, teachers are assigned a master's-level Clinical Classroom Consultant (CCC) to work with them in the classroom one day per week throughout the school year. The CCCs play an important role in modeling and reinforcing the content of the training sessions and in acting as a sounding board for teachers.
- **Stress management:** In January or February, lead and assistant teachers participate in a customized, 90-minute stress management workshop at their program sites. In the months leading up to and following the workshop, the CCCs help support the teachers' use of stress management skills and techniques.
- **Individualized child-centered consultation:** Beginning in March, the CCCs provide one-on-one clinical services for a small number of children (usually three to five) who have not responded sufficiently to the teachers' improved classroom management. By design, the individualized clinical consultation is delivered only after teachers have completed their training and

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<sup>5</sup>For more information about *The Incredible Years* curriculum, see <http://www.incredibleyears.com>.

have had an opportunity to use their newly acquired techniques and after children have had ample time to react.

MDRC played a key role in both the design and implementation of FOL. MDRC staff identified funding, assisted with recruitment of CCCs, and provided technical assistance to help ensure that the intervention was implemented with fidelity to the model.

The findings discussed in this preview report focus on the Newark FOL site, which included 51 preschools (26 in the program group and 25 in the control group). FOL operated in each of the three main types of preschool venues in Newark — Head Start programs, community-based child care centers, and public schools.

## **In What Context Was Foundations of Learning Implemented?**

The Newark demonstration, the focus of this preview report, was conducted in close collaboration with the Newark Public Schools, Newark Preschool Council, and Family Connections (a community-based counseling and family services agency), with generous funding from a number of foundations.

Having both Newark and Chicago in the demonstration offers the opportunity to test the program model in different contexts. Newark and Chicago both serve many low-income children in their preschool programs and share many of the challenges facing urban school systems nationwide. However, Newark is ahead of most of the country in its implementation of structural changes to promote quality in preschools. The New Jersey Supreme Court's landmark decisions in the *Abbott v. Burke* class action case required the state to increase education funding to disadvantaged districts. The *Abbott* mandates included smaller class sizes (limited to 15 children), higher teacher salaries, lower teacher-student ratios (each preschool classroom has both a lead and an assistant teacher), and stricter teacher credential requirements.<sup>6</sup> Chicago, in contrast, has class sizes, teacher salaries, and other features that are more typical of urban areas. Therefore, it is unsurprising that, prior to the intervention, independent observations of classroom climate were more favorable for Newark's preschool classrooms than Chicago's.<sup>7</sup>

With these two sites, the evaluation can determine the impact of the intervention in one system with typical levels of preschool resources (Chicago), as well as the incremental effect of adding the FOL approach on top of an already resource-rich environment (Newark). And, by conducting the program in a larger number of classrooms, the study evaluates whether the

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<sup>6</sup>New Jersey Department of Education (2008).

<sup>7</sup>These observations were conducted in September, prior to any teacher trainings or active in-classroom consultations. Chicago observations refer to baseline CSRP classroom observations.

intervention can be implemented with fidelity in a less tightly controlled situation than the original CSRP study.

## How Well Was Foundations of Learning Implemented in Newark?

Overall, the intervention was implemented with fidelity, as evidenced by the findings below.

- **Trainings for teachers were well-attended, and the quality of trainings was high.** For example, teachers gave high ratings (between 4.6 and 4.7 on a scale of 5.0) when asked whether the training content was clear, the training environment was conducive to learning, the trainers themselves were effective and clear, and the training enhanced the teachers' professional development.
- **The number of hours (or "dosage") of classroom consultation that CCCs provided to teachers was less than the full amount scheduled, but it exceeded what is typically offered in early childhood consultation models.<sup>8</sup>** CCCs provided an average of just over 162 hours (or about 23 days) of in-classroom consultation over the course of the academic year. Teachers gave high ratings to the quality of the consultation.
- **Stress management workshops turned out to be more important to teachers than program planners had expected.** All of the treatment classrooms in the FOL demonstration received an onsite stress management workshop. Forty-nine out of 50 teachers attended their onsite workshop and rated it highly.
- **As planned, children who needed additional services were provided individualized consultation from CCCs.** A small number of children in each classroom were identified by the consultant and the teacher to receive additional one-on-one support. The advantage of having these services provided by the CCCs is that they were delivered without delay, in the familiar setting of the classroom, and on a consistent basis (weekly or biweekly). This manner of delivering services was well-received by children and teachers.
- **Teachers appeared to adopt the FOL management techniques and to pay increased attention to children's emotional and behavioral devel-**

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<sup>8</sup>Brennan, Bradley, Allen, and Perry (2008).

**opment.** In focus groups, teachers identified three principal factors that helped change their practices: (1) the collaborative relationships with the CCCs and the strengthened relationships between lead and assistant teachers, (2) a reduced sense of isolation by providing opportunities for collaboration and information-sharing, both between teachers in the same classroom and with teachers in other FOL preschools, and (3) the reduction of stress facilitated the teachers' ability to use the intervention strategies in the classroom.

## **Did Foundations of Learning Make a Difference?**

The components of the FOL intervention led to measurable improvements in the ways that teachers managed their classes and addressed children's disruptive or withdrawn behavior. Together with earlier findings from CSRP, FOL provides evidence that early investments in children's emotional and behavioral readiness can "pay off" in children's experiences in preschool.

To determine whether the FOL intervention made a difference, the MDRC study used a random assignment design, in which preschool centers were assigned in a lottery-like process either to receive the intervention or to serve as a comparison or control center (and to continue "business as usual" programming). As a result, one can be confident that any significant differences that emerge between the teachers and students in these two groups can be attributed to the FOL intervention. In effect, the study reliably assesses the added value of FOL over standard practice in preschool classrooms.

Findings are summarized in Tables 1 and 2, which compare observer ratings on classroom and individual student measures between program and control group classrooms. Each measure is reported on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1-2 indicating low scores, 3-5 indicating moderate scores, and 6-7 indicating high scores. Stars indicate those differences that are statistically significant, signaling that there is evidence that the differences between the two groups are real and not likely due to chance. The effect size measure allows one to compare the impacts in this study with those from other studies, a topic that is addressed later in this paper.

- **The FOL intervention improved teachers' ability to address children's behavior and provide a positive emotional climate in the classroom.**

In data collected by independent observers, the FOL program group scored significantly better than the control group on a composite measure of positive classroom management — a measure that reflects teachers' positive affect with children, lack of sarcasm and anger, and ability to comfort children and prevent misbehavior by setting clear expectations and using effective praise. It is important to note that the control classrooms scored at the high end of the



## Foundations of Learning Demonstration

**Table 1**

### Program Impacts on Observed Ratings of Classroom Climate and Instructional Time

Outcome	Program Group Mean	Control Group Mean	Difference (Impact)	Standard Error	Effect Size
<b><u>Positive classroom management composite<sup>a</sup></u></b>	5.77	5.18	0.60 **	0.27	0.75
Positive climate	5.61	5.03	0.58	0.36	0.60
Negative climate	1.12	1.75	-0.64 ***	0.20	-0.90
Teacher sensitivity	5.18	4.78	0.41	0.32	0.46
Behavior management	5.42	4.66	0.76 **	0.35	0.72
<b><u>Quality of language instruction composite</u></b>	4.26	3.76	0.49	0.33	0.56
Regard for student perspectives	5.13	4.89	0.24	0.30	0.28
Diversity of teaching methods	4.16	3.54	0.62 *	0.35	0.61
Promoting understanding through conversation	3.47	3.02	0.45	0.39	0.44
Encouragement of students' language use	4.27	3.61	0.66	0.48	0.54
Management of classroom time	5.43	4.90	0.53 *	0.26	0.63
Amount of instructional time (minutes)	35.64	25.09	10.55 **	4.40	0.96
Sample size	26	25			

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations in September-October 2007 and April-May 2008.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

The table presents adjusted means that control for random assignment blocks and baseline (Fall) CLASS dimension scores.

For each dimension observers rated classrooms on a scale from 1 to 7 with 1 representing "low" and 7 representing "high."

"Diversity of teaching methods" refers to the "Instructional learning formats" dimension of the CLASS.

"Promoting understanding through conversation" refers to the "Quality of feedback" dimension of the CLASS.

"Encouragement of students' language use" refers to the "Language modeling" dimension of the CLASS.

"Management of classroom time" refers to the "Productivity" dimension of the CLASS.

The effect size equals the impact divided by the standard deviation of the outcome measure for the control group.

<sup>a</sup>Negative climate is reverse coded for composite score.

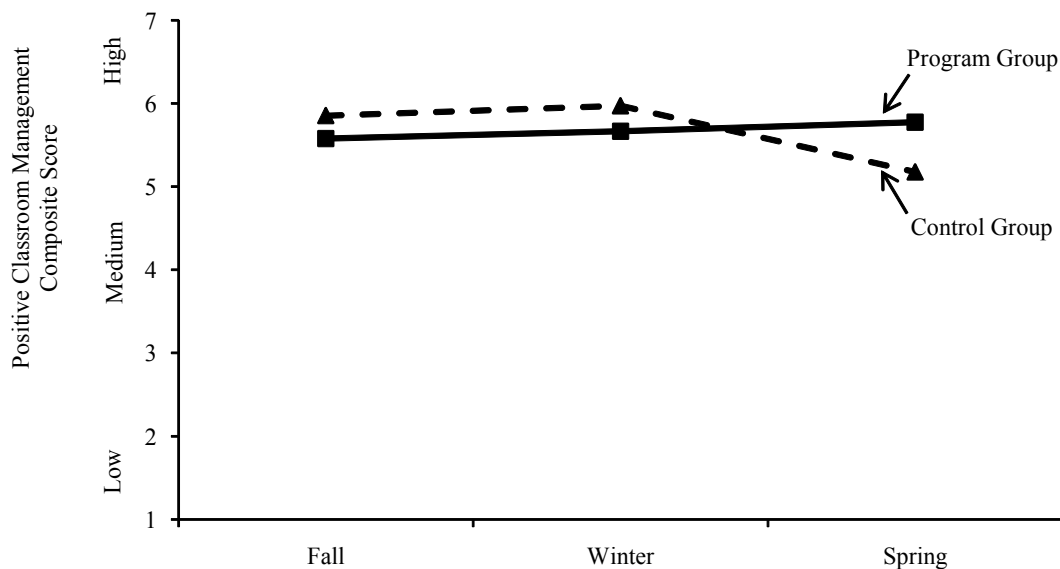
moderate range of this measure, meaning that the FOL program group had a relatively high bar to exceed. Nevertheless, the classrooms in the program group scored about a half point higher on average (on a seven-point scale) than the control classrooms. About two-thirds of classrooms in the program group had high scores on this composite measure, compared to about half of the classrooms in the control group.

Figure 1 shows how classrooms scored on this dimension in the fall, prior to the implementation of the program, in the winter of the program year, and in the spring. Note that the program group line stays relatively flat — indicating little change in positive classroom

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Figure 1

### Positive Classroom Management Composite Scores



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations in September-October 2007, January-February 2008, and April-May 2008.

NOTES: Scores represent adjusted means that control for random assignment block. Winter and Spring control for baseline Fall CLASS dimensions as well.

Scores for the program group are statistically different from the control group at the  $p < 0.05$  level for the Spring.

management. By contrast, the control group classrooms decline in this dimension of quality from the winter to the spring. Thus, FOL was primarily effective at helping teachers *maintain* a positive classroom climate over the course of the year.

These classroom climate findings are well-aligned with earlier findings from CSRP, where the same intervention yielded a somewhat larger benefit (in the context of control group classrooms with lower scores) for Head Start sites in the program group. There, too, the intervention was effective at maintaining a positive classroom climate rather than improving it.

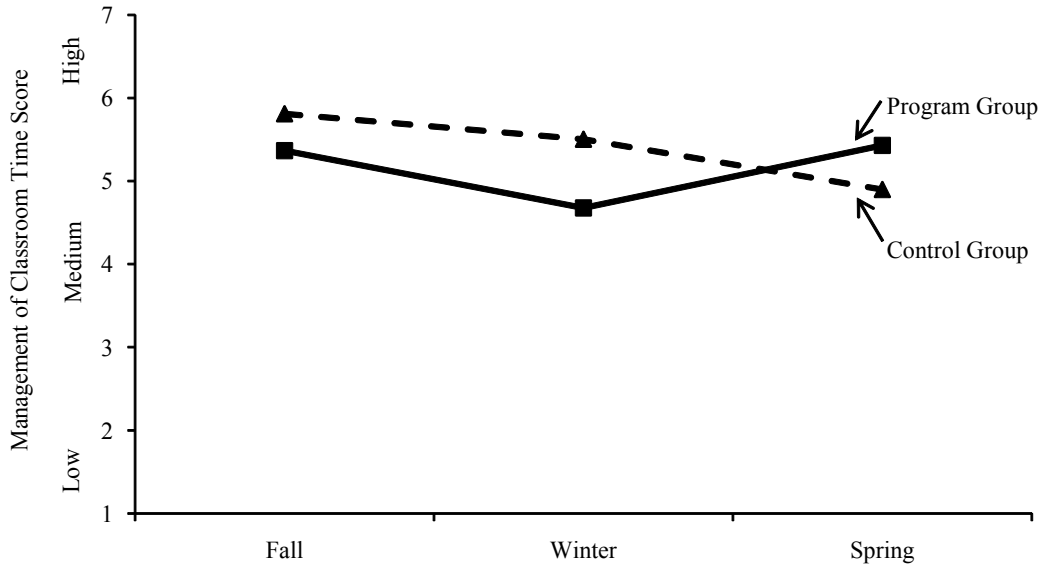
Therefore, the first hurdle for the intervention was cleared — showing benefits on those aspects of classroom climate that were directly targeted by the intervention.

- **The FOL intervention also improved classroom productivity, lesson preparation, and the amount of instructional time.**

## Foundations of Learning Demonstration

Figure 2

### Management of Classroom Time Scores



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations in September-October 2007, January-February 2008, and April-May 2008.

NOTES: "Management of classroom time" refers to the "Productivity" dimension of the CLASS.

Scores represent adjusted means that control for random assignment block. Winter and Spring control for baseline Fall CLASS dimensions as well.

Scores for the program group are statistically different from the control group at the  $p < 0.05$  level for the Fall and the Winter and at the  $p < 0.10$  level for the Spring.

Teachers randomly assigned to receive the FOL intervention scored higher on an instructional measure assessing their use of diverse and engaging lessons but otherwise did not differ from control group classrooms in other aspects of the quality of language instruction they were providing. In addition, program teachers were rated higher on the extent to which they managed classroom time, including better planning, use of classroom routines, and ability to minimize disruptions. These findings are illustrated in Figure 2, which shows that productive use of classroom time increased in the program group from the winter to the spring, while it decreased in the control classrooms.

Linked to these higher ratings of time management, instructional time was significantly higher in the FOL classrooms, by an average of 10 minutes (see Table 1). In an 80-minute observation period, an average of 35 minutes was spent in small and large group, teacher-led

instruction in FOL classrooms, as compared to 25 minutes in control group classrooms. This significant gain — a 40 percent change — may be a result of fewer disruptions by children during large group activities and a reduction in the downtime between activities.

- **Foundations of Learning led to reductions in student conflicts but did not otherwise change the quality of teacher-student or peer interactions.**

A second observation team rated individual children's behavior in the classroom. Again, these ratings ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 7, with scores of 3-5 considered to be in the moderate range. As shown in Table 2, children in FOL classrooms exhibited lower levels of conflict than did children in control group classrooms, but notably they were not rated differently on other aspects of teacher-child and peer interactions (communication or sociability, for example). Ratings of conflict are in the low range in all classrooms — with scores on average just above a 1 (the lowest rating on a scale). Such low scores are not surprising — conflict is a rare but highly salient event in preschool classrooms, and observing such behavior in the course of one 80-minute observation period is unusual. Yet, even with these overall low ratings, FOL program classrooms were observed to have statistically lower levels of conflict on average. By contrast, the lack of effects on the positive aspects of teacher-child and peer interactions are disappointing given the aim of this intervention to not only reduce conflict but improve children's relationships.

As with the findings on teacher behavior, these observational results are consistent with prior findings from CSRP, where children were reported by teachers to exhibit less acting-out and aggression, as well as less sad and withdrawn behavior, than were children in the control group. However, in FOL, *teachers* did not report differences in children's behavior between the program and control groups, even though the independent research team did. One hypothesis is that the training that teachers in FOL received made them more primed to “see” challenging behaviors, even as it made them more likely to effectively manage these behaviors when they occurred (although, in fact, the same should have been true in CSRP). Future reports from the study will explore this discrepancy in findings from different sources (teachers vs. independent observers).

- **Children in the FOL treatment group demonstrated greater levels of engagement in the classroom than did children in the control group.**

As shown in the bottom of Table 2, children in FOL classrooms were rated higher on engagement in activities and on their ability to regulate behavior during tasks than children in control classrooms. Statistically significant differences are observed in the overall classroom level of student engagement as well, indicating a higher level of focus and participation during classroom activities. This latter measure was assessed by a different observer in the classrooms. To give a sense of the magnitude of these effects, 75 percent of program group classrooms had

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**Table 2**

**Program Impacts on Observed Ratings of Child Behavior**

Outcome	Program Group Mean	Control Group Mean	Difference (Impact)	Standard Error	Effect Size
<b><u>Conflict</u></b>					
Teacher conflict	1.25	1.46	-0.22 ***	0.07	-0.40
Peer conflict	1.40	1.57	-0.18 *	0.09	-0.27
<b><u>Positive social interaction</u></b>					
Teacher communication	2.20	2.36	-0.16	0.12	-0.20
Teacher positive engagement	3.21	3.42	-0.21	0.16	-0.27
Peer communication	2.46	2.57	-0.11	0.16	-0.14
Peer sociability	3.44	3.53	-0.09	0.15	-0.11
Peer assertiveness	2.08	2.27	-0.19	0.17	-0.21
<b><u>Task orientation</u></b>					
Task engagement	4.87	4.62	0.25 *	0.14	0.31
Task self-reliance	3.08	3.14	-0.06	0.20	-0.07
Task behavior control	5.40	5.08	0.32 *	0.19	0.34
Overall classroom student engagement	5.75	5.19	0.55 *	0.28	0.60
Sample size - students	130	121			
Sample size - classrooms	26	25			

SOURCES: Based on MDRC calculations of Classroom Assessment Scoring System - Child Version (CLASS-C) observations in April-May 2008.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Regression-adjusted means control for random assignment status and blocking, baseline CLASS measures, and baseline student characteristics.

The outcomes "Conflict," "Positive social interaction," and "Task orientation" come from the CLASS-C observations. "Overall classroom student engagement" comes from the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).

For each dimension, observers rated children and classrooms on a scale from 1 to 7 with 1 representing "low" and 7 representing "high."

The effect size equals the impact divided by the standard deviation of the outcome measure for the control group.

high scores on student engagement, while only half of control group classrooms received such high scores.

If children are able to spend more time on task, they are likely to be able to take greater advantage of the formal and informal learning opportunities in the preschool classroom. New preliminary findings from CSRP offer complementary evidence: Children in the program group were found to demonstrate greater attention and lower impulsivity. In other early findings, children in CSRP classrooms have higher scores on preliteracy and math skills on standardized

individual assessments than do children in control group classrooms. Unfortunately, such “child assessment” data were not collected in Foundations of Learning.

## **How Do These Results Compare With Findings from Other Rigorous Studies of Preschool Interventions?**

To understand the relevance of these early results from the FOL evaluation in Newark, it is worth comparing them with other studies of preschool interventions that seek to improve the school readiness of young children. A common metric, called the effect size, is used to compare the magnitude of impacts across programs. The effect size represents the difference between the program and control groups in standardized units, and its values range from 0 to 1. FOL’s effect sizes for classroom climate and management (approximately 0.60 to 0.75) are similar to or somewhat larger than those of other studies that have evaluated enhancements to an existing preschool curriculum.<sup>9</sup> What makes this particularly noteworthy is that the effects in Newark occur in a relatively resource-rich environment and involve a large number of classrooms. Comparisons to other widely cited preschool evaluations, such as Perry Preschool or the Head Start Impact Study, are more difficult. These studies tested a particular form of preschool, rather than an enhancement, and had few overlapping measures for comparison with FOL.

## **Conclusion**

The preliminary evidence emerging from FOL in Newark is promising: the program has effects in improving teachers’ positive classroom management and productivity, in reducing peer conflict, and in engaging students in the learning tasks of preschool. In addition, the experience of FOL in Newark suggests that it is possible to implement an intervention like this on a relatively large scale in a variety of early education settings: Head Start programs, community-based child care centers, and public schools.

The study shows that intervening in teachers’ classroom management skills can improve the quality of the preschool experience by affecting the productivity and engagement of children in the classroom. This confirms the governing hypothesis behind the demonstration: that children with challenging behaviors were diverting teachers from providing instruction to all children in the classroom. Focusing an intervention on how teachers manage behavior in

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<sup>9</sup>Examples of these studies include the Head Start REDI trial of the Preschool PATHS program, the Tools of the Mind evaluation, and earlier tests of the Incredible Years program that included both teacher and parent training components. Effect sizes ranged from 0.50 to 0.75 for these studies (Barnett et al., 2008; Bierman et al., 2007; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, and Munro, 2007).

their classrooms (rather than how they manage instruction) can have important spillover effects in the way that classrooms are organized and the extent to which children are able to engage in productive activities in the classroom (including both small group instruction and “free play”). The increase in instructional time and student engagement, when considered over the course of the preschool year, suggests that pairing FOL with a well-implemented academic curriculum could further improve children’s preschool experience.

There are a number of forthcoming Foundations of Learning reports. In late 2009, MDRC will publish *Promoting Preschool Quality Through Effective Classroom Management: Implementation Lessons from the Foundations of Learning Demonstration in Newark*. Policy-makers and practitioners interested in specific FOL practices should review the lessons in that report. Because the demonstration tested the effects of the full intervention rather than any individual component, one should not attempt to draw lessons about the likely effects of the intervention’s individual components. The impact findings previewed here will be part of a future report scheduled for release in early 2010 that will also include findings on children’s transition into kindergarten in Newark. Knowing the longer-term effects of this intervention will be important to understanding the full value-added of investing in teachers’ ability to support children’s emotional and behavioral development. While the early results from Newark are encouraging, only longer follow-up will determine whether the positive effects observed in preschool classrooms will carry over into the elementary school years and beyond. Information on whether teachers sustain their changes in classroom practice into subsequent years will be released in 2010. Lastly, comprehensive results from the Chicago site will be released in 2011.





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## About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.