
Gearing Up for Kindergarten
**Project Overview & Year-End Report for
2009-2010**

Sean E. Brotherson, PhD & Divya Saxena, MS
NDSU Extension Service
North Dakota State University – Fargo, ND
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16-Week Split Session Program

Executive Summary

The academic expectations of children entering kindergarten have changed a great deal from previous generations. In order to instill knowledge and self-confidence in children, parents need to be made aware of and given the correct tools to prepare their children for kindergarten. Parents are a child's first and best teachers, but many parents need and want support in their role of preparing their children for success in school. *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* provides support by improving access to information, providing preschool and parent education classes, and partnering with organizations that work with young families to ensure school readiness.

North Dakota State University (NDSU) and the NDSU Extension Service, in partnership with their statewide network of Parent Resource Centers, operated this school readiness and parent education program for its fourth year in 2009-10. *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* is a Preschool/Parent Education opportunity for parents and their children who will be entering kindergarten in the following year. The *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* program provides families with an intensive educational experience that combines preschool learning activities for pre-kindergarten children with parent education opportunities for adults. The key building blocks and objectives of the program are:

- *School Readiness for Children Entering Kindergarten*
- *Parent Education*
- *Early Awareness and Intervention*
- *Parent Involvement with Children's Learning & School*
- *Building Home-School-Community Partnerships*

In 2009-2010 the program operated at 15 sites across North Dakota with 251 families enrolled. This executive summary provides highlights of findings gathered through evaluation of the *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* program's 16-week session in fall 2009 and spring 2010.

- **Program participation – 88% of participants indicated involvement in 6 or more sessions of the program during the fall 2009 year (or first half of the program); 91% of participants in spring 2010 indicated involvement in 6 or more sessions of the program.** This is a very high rate of participation and retention in a parent education program involving parents and children.
- **General value of the program** - Participants expressed very positive feelings about the general value of the program, with **77% indicating it was very or extremely useful to them in fall 2009 and 86% saying the same thing in spring 2010.** Among participants in fall 2009, 77% said the handouts and learning activities were very useful to them while 78% responded similarly in spring 2010. Finally, all of them agreed that the information was presented well and they were treated respectfully, with those who strongly agreed they were treated well at 80% in both fall and spring.

- **General impacts of program participation** - Among participants, **49% in fall 2009 and 64% in spring 2010 indicated the program increased their knowledge of child development a lot or very much, 48% noted it increased their knowledge of healthy parenting a lot or very much (57% in spring 2010), 62% felt it increased their confidence in being a good parent a lot or very much, and 45% said it increased their parenting skills a lot or very much (58% in spring 2010).** Additionally, **80% felt it changed their parent behavior at least somewhat (85% in spring 2010), and 86% indicated that it influenced their relationship with their child positively (89% in spring 2010).**
- **Program value versus other information sources** - The results from the fall session of the program indicate that participants rated parents with children of a similar age (3.54), preschool/Head Start/child care (3.29), and their own parents (3.22) as the most useful sources of information for them on parenting and preparing their child for other school. However, **the Gearing Up for Kindergarten class and materials were rated higher than all other sources with a mean score of 3.70, indicating that participants felt the class was more useful to them regarding parenting and school readiness than any other information source assessed.** The results from the spring session of the program were similar, with **participants rating the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program even higher at a mean score of 4.10, substantially higher than any other information source assessed.**
- **Impacts on parental practices** - Participants were asked to answer questions about their specific activities as parents in a number of areas, both before and after participating in the program. Participants noted **small to moderate changes in 12 of the 18 parental practices related to school readiness that were measured, with all of the changes showing positive increases in a particular parental practice** (e.g., more actively discussing a story with children or engaging in more active play with a child). These changes **suggested incremental improvement in key aspects of parental involvement and guidance, and the increases that occurred in parents' efforts with their children in specific areas were typically three to four times higher than would be expected to occur** due to random chance. This is a good indicator that the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program is having a positive impact.
- **Increases in children's school readiness as described by parents** - Among 52 indicators of school readiness assessed by parents regarding their children, **significant differences were measured on 43 of the 52 indicators between fall 2009 and spring 2010. This means that 83 percent of the indicators for school readiness showed positive growth in children participating in Gearing Up for Kindergarten.** In analyzing all increases, **the findings suggest growth in five primary areas: (1) social skills and positive interaction with others; (2) ability to function more independently and learn actively in a guided environment; (3) development of specific pre-academic skills or knowledge that applies to a school setting (knowing the alphabet and numbers, etc.); (4) ability to express themselves through art and hands-on creative activities; and (5) ability to manage emotions and adapt in a new environment.**
- **School knowledge of parents and children** - For both parents and children, **indicators of school knowledge showed significant increases in preparation and knowledge for the school experience. For pre-kindergarten children, the percentage who had visited a school or kindergarten classroom increased by 21%, those who met a kindergarten**

teacher at their prospective school increased 12%, and those who meet peers they will be with in kindergarten increased 17%. For parents, the percentage who had visited a school or kindergarten classroom increased 23%, those who had met a kindergarten teacher at their child's prospective school increased 7%, and those meeting other parents who will have children in kindergarten increased 13%.

- **Children's comfort and familiarity with school** - For children in the program, among 8 indicators of comfort level and familiarity with school, **significant differences were measured on 7 of the 8 indicators between fall 2009 and spring 2010. Findings showed that children became more familiar with kindergarten routines and expectations, more comfortable with the school environment, more comfortable separating from parents, and more curious and excited about beginning school.**
- **Increases in children's school readiness as described by teachers** - Among 39 indicators of school readiness rated by teachers on a scale of 1 to 3, **significant differences were measured on 31 of the 39 indicators between fall 2009 and spring 2010. This means that 79 percent of the indicators for school readiness that were rated by teachers showed positive growth in children participating in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. In analyzing all significant increases in the findings, the findings suggest growth in five primary areas: (1) social skills and positive interaction with others; (2) ability to function more independently and learn actively in a guided environment; (3) development of specific pre-academic skills and knowledge regarding language and literacy; (4) development of specific pre-academic skills and knowledge regarding math and science; and (5) ability to express themselves through art and hands-on creative activities.**
- **Child social and emotional development** - On two measures of child social and emotional development completed by parents, **significant differences were measured on 11 of 12 indicators. This finding indicates that parents identify significant progress in areas of social and emotional development in their pre-kindergarten children participating in the program.**
- **Parent ratings of child change** – Parents indicated substantive levels of change for pre-kindergarten children on a variety of key items related to school readiness, with **those areas described as “somewhat” to “much improved”:** (1) child self-reliance (62%); (2) ability to identify letters and sounds from the alphabet (61%); (3) ability to get along with adults (64%); (4) ability to identify numbers and count (59%); and (5) ability to follow rules (63%).
- **Qualitative feedback on outcomes for parents in the program** – Parents who participated in the program shared a variety of comments that highlighted positive impacts in three areas:
 - ***More Time and Active Involvement with Children***
 - I am certainly more aware of the fact that every moment can be a teaching and learning moment for a young mind, and I am much more conscious in what I choose to do.
 - This is an excellent program. We have gained so much. It is nice to have dedicated learning time together.

- ***Improved Parenting Efforts in Specific Areas***
 - I learned more positive discipline approaches and teaching/learning techniques to apply than I ever have before.
 - We always read to our son every night, but since the program I try to really make sure we read at least 20 minutes every night. Also, thinking of him more and understanding his emotions has been helpful.
- ***Increased Awareness of Child's Specific Needs***
 - The class was helpful to see my child in a social and educational setting with peers. Being able to do the activities and letting my child experience new activities was a great experience. The teachers were very friendly and knew what they were talking about.
 - We have focused on preparing our child for kindergarten with activities suggested by this program that we may not have known he should know prior to starting school (zipping coat, writing name, etc.).
- **Qualitative feedback on outcomes children in the program** – Parents who participated in the program shared a variety of comments that highlighted positive benefits for children in three areas:
 - ***Increased Social Confidence and Positive Peer Interactions***
 - He has so much more confidence now. He is excited to start “real” kindergarten in the fall. He is calmer and can talk about things now.
 - He seems more confident in himself, talking to other kids and able to handle his emotions better.
 - It has been good for her to socialize with other kids her age, as well as to practice following a structured school routine with a teacher. She has had a great time socializing with other kids.
 - ***Increased Pre-Academic Skills in Reading, Math and Other Subjects***
 - She is more prepared for kindergarten – she has experiences now with science, math, literacy, and being in a class setting.
 - She has shown more interest in spending time reading, and writing her numbers and the alphabet letters.
 - ***Greater Awareness and Comfort with School Routines and Expectations***
 - I feel that my daughter has greatly benefitted from this program. She has met many kids her age and several of her teachers. The activities were something she very much enjoyed. Also, being in the school setting has made her feel much more comfortable and excited about starting school in the fall.
 - My child has been exposed to the classroom environment and knows what to expect when school starts. He has learned how to play and interact with other kids and teachers. He is definitely ready to start kindergarten now.
 - This program has definitely helped my child be ready for the transition to kindergarten. It has been great for developing social skills. Also, it helps him get familiar with the environment.

The findings from the assessment process concerning changes in parenting and in children’s social, emotional, cognitive, and practical abilities related to school readiness show that many changes are occurring for children and families enrolled in the *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* program. Many significant changes are occurring that strengthen parental knowledge and practices and move children toward greater school readiness. These findings indicate that the program has a number of positive impacts on children and their school readiness, and that it is making a strong contribution to the well-being of children, families and schools in North Dakota.

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The academic expectations of children entering kindergarten have changed a great deal from previous generations. In order to instill knowledge and self-confidence in children, parents need to be made aware of and given the correct tools to prepare their children for kindergarten. Parents are a child's first and best teachers, but many parents need and want support in their role of preparing their children for success in school. *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* has provided valuable and much-needed support by improving access to information, providing preschool and parent education classes, and partnering with organizations that work with young families to ensure programs focus on early literacy.

North Dakota State University (NDSU) and the NDSU Extension Service, in partnership with their statewide network of Parent Resource Centers, have operated this school readiness and parent education program for its fourth pilot year in 2009-10. *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* is a Preschool/Parent Education opportunity for parents and their children who will be entering kindergarten in the following year.

Curriculum Development and Description

The *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* program provides families with an intensive educational experience that combines preschool learning activities for pre-kindergarten children with parent education opportunities for adults. The curriculum has been piloted and refined over a three-year period to develop a high-quality educational program. The Preschool Education curriculum consists of a flexible, adaptive set of parent-child learning and activity sessions. The Parent Education curriculum consists of a series of structured educational sessions that focus on child development, school readiness, and healthy parenting.

The Preschool Education curriculum centers on learning and activity sessions for parents and children. Parents and children participate in 45-minute sessions at different learning stations with activities that are designed to address knowledge and skills in math, science, reading/literacy, sensory awareness, motor ability, imagination, and social-emotional ability. Parents and children then spend 10 minutes in a preschool-style "circle time" for reading. Children then spend the remainder of the session in additional preschool learning activities that are planned by the program facilitators using the curriculum guide. The curriculum for the parent-child activity sessions was developed/ compiled by Sharon Query, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development (NDSU Extension Service); Mandi McFadden, Gearing Up for Kindergarten Coordinator (NDSU Extension Service); and Sharon Rostad, Parent Facilitator and coordinator of the District 44 (ND) preschool program. Each site has two contracted facilitators for the child and parent sessions, as well as a classroom assistant, who are providing training and support in the program.

The Parent Education curriculum consists of 16 lesson modules designed to be adapted to the program model used for any specific site using the *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* program. Typically, the program model has been delivered in two 8-session split semesters (fall and spring sessions), a single 16-session program (spring prior to kindergarten), or a single 10-session program. Parent education lesson modules were adapted from the research-based curriculum *Bright Beginnings for Young Children*, developed by Dr. Sean Brotherson of the NDSU Extension Service, and other available parent education topics. Also, parent/child take-home activities and handouts were written by Parents as Teachers and adaptations for New Americans were developed by Even Start. Learning topics for the initial 8 lesson modules in the parent education curriculum include: (1) Orientation and Getting Ready for Kindergarten, (2) Parenting Styles, (3) Brain Development in Infancy and Early Childhood, (4) Raising a Reader & Early Literacy, (5) Choosing Effective Discipline Techniques, (6) Being Media Wise, (7) Developing Responsibility and Self-Help Skills, and (8) Importance of Sleep. Learning topics for the subsequent 8 lesson modules in the parent education curriculum include: (9) Learning Styles and School Readiness, (10) Children and Temperament, (11) Early Literacy and Math Skills, (12) Social & Emotional Development, (13) Nurturance and Prevention Tools, (14) Children and Nutrition, (15) Children and Safety, and (16) A Parent's Role in School Success. Objectives for each lesson module in the series are outlined below.

Fall Session (Session I) Objectives

Session 1 - Orientation & Getting Ready for Kindergarten

- Parents will meet and interact with other parents.
- Parents will understand ground rules.
- Parents will gain an understanding of the *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* program.

Session 2 - Parenting Styles

- Parents will understand how their parenting style directly impacts their children's behavior.

Session 3 - Brain Development in Infancy and Early Childhood

- Parents will gain a basic understanding about brain development in young children.
- Parents will gain knowledge about their role in their child's brain development and success.

Session 4 - Raising a Reader & Early Literacy

- Parents will understand the importance of reading to their kids.
- Parents will learn new and exciting ways to encourage reading in their kids.

Session 5 - Choosing Effective Discipline Techniques

- Parents will recognize that it is normal for children to test limits.
- Parents will identify discipline techniques that are ineffective and explain why they are ineffective.
- Parents will develop skills for positive discipline.

Session 6 – Being Media Wise

- Parents will be able to re-evaluate the rules they have set on media and how it affects their children.
- Parents will be able to help their children find other activities besides television or computer and limit media exposure.

Session 7 - Developing Responsibility & Self Help Skills

- Parents will understand the importance of their child being able to do things for themselves like zipping their coat and backpack, using the restroom, and putting on their own boots.
- Parents will understand their role in developing responsibility in their children and some techniques to use.

Session 8 - Importance of Sleep

- Parents will understand the link between their child's misbehavior and missing sleep.
- Parents will recognize and mediate factors occurring throughout the day and evening that interfere with their child's sleep.
- Parents will utilize information about their child's temperament to decrease tension during the day and at bedtime.
- Parents will plan and carry out effective bedtime routines.

Spring Session (Session II) Objectives

Session 1 – Learning Styles and School Readiness

- Parents will become reoriented with the program.
- Parents will understand the importance of knowing their and their child's learning style.
- Parents will discuss things to consider when contemplating school readiness.

Session 2 - Children and Temperament

- Parents will learn the meaning of temperament and the importance of understanding it.
- Parents will understand that their child's behavior is affected by their temperament.
- Parents will learn techniques in dealing with their child's specific temperament.

Session 3 – Early Literacy and Math Skills

- Parents will understand the importance of engaging their children in learning in “everyday” activities.
- Parents will learn new and exciting ways to encourage math skills in their children.

Session 4 – Social & Emotional Development

- Parents will understand social development in young children and its importance to their growth and well-being.
- Parents will understand emotional development in young children and its importance to their growth and well-being.

Session 5 – Nurturance and Prevention Tools

- Parents will identify strategies for managing conflict and teaching responsibility.
- Parents will identify strategies for teaching natural and logical consequences.

Session 6 – Children and Nutrition

- Parents will understand their role in feeding a well-nourished child.
- Parents will understand ways to encourage their child to consume healthy foods.

Session 7 – Children and Safety

- Parents will understand the importance of having children use booster seats and sitting in the back seat.
- Parents will understand the importance of having the entire family understand fire escape routes in their house.
- Parents will understand the importance of having and wearing properly fitted bike helmets.

Session 8 – A Parent’s Role in School Success

- Parents will understand their role in their child’s success in school.
- Parents will learn effective techniques for getting involved in their child’s school and approaching concerns.
- Parents will gain ideas for encouraging success at school.

Program Description

Gearing Up for Kindergarten

Gearing Up for Kindergarten is a prevention-focused parent and family education program designed to facilitate child development and school readiness. The program focuses on engaging families with a child entering kindergarten in the next 1-2 years. The key building blocks and objectives of the program are:

- ***School Readiness for Children Entering Kindergarten***
- ***Parent Education***
- ***Early Awareness and Intervention***
- ***Parent Involvement with Children’s Learning & School***
- ***Building Home-School-Community Partnerships***

The program was developed by the NDSU Extension Service at North Dakota State University and the Region V Parent Resource Center (NDSU Extension Service) in Fargo, ND, in collaboration with Fargo, West Fargo, and Northern Cass Public Schools; and SENDCAA Head Start. Funding for the program development and original implementation in Cass County, ND came from the United Way of Cass-Clay. Funding from the North Dakota State Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) for additional sites across North Dakota was added in the 2007-2008 school year and has continued since that time.

The goals of the program are:

- Children participating in Countdown to Kindergarten will show significant progress in being prepared to be successful in cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains as they enter kindergarten.
- Parents will become more active in their child’s development prior to entering kindergarten.
- Parents will increase their knowledge of child development, school readiness, and healthy parenting.
- Parents will increase their intent to be involved in their child’s schooling and build linkages with the school system.

Family Recruitment and Program Sites

Recruitment brochures designed to inform families about the program were developed and distributed through a variety of cooperating agencies, including Head Start, Public Schools, Child Care Resource & Referral agencies, Social Services, WIC, public libraries, and child care settings. News releases were published in local newspapers and the Parent Resource Center newsletters carried information for both semesters. Several sites were identified by the ND Parent Involvement Center (NDPIRC) based in Minot. The NDPIRC targeted schools that did not meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) criteria as defined by the federal government.

Targeted sites are intended to facilitate recruitment of participant families more likely to need assistance with preparing children for school achievement (new immigrant families, economically challenged families, etc.). In 2009-2010 the program operated at 15 sites with 251 families enrolled:

Cass County:

- Kindred/Davenport Elementary, Davenport
- Jefferson Elementary, Fargo
- Kennedy Elementary, Fargo
- Madison Elementary, Fargo
- SENDCAA Head Start, Fargo
- Mayville/Portland, Mayville
- Kindergarten Center, West Fargo

Other North Dakota Sites:

- Heart River Elementary, Dickinson
- Grand Forks, ND
- LaMoure, ND
- Fort Lincoln Elementary, Mandan
- Mary Stark Elementary, Mandan
- Sunnyside Elementary, Minot
- Surrey Elementary, Minot
- Wilkinson Elementary, Williston
- Lewis & Clark Elementary, Williston

Program Implementation

Participants were involved in one of two primary program models used to implement the program. They attended either two 8-week parent education sessions, one in the fall of 2009 and one in the spring of 2010, or a 10-week session in spring 2010. The hour and a half sessions begin with 45 minutes of parent-child interaction activities focused on math, reading, sensory, science, art and imaginary play. The parents then separate for parent education (see list of topics). The children, with a preschool facilitator and classroom assistant, have circle time and other preschool activities. The child activities focus on sharing, getting along with others, listening, taking turns, responsibility, and cognitive and literacy skills.

All children have been enrolled in *Imagination Library*, if they had not already done so. The families are able to check out a library book that they return the following week. On-site child care and refreshments were offered at each site. The program is facilitated by a team at each program site that includes preschool and parent facilitators, as well as classroom assistants. The curriculum was developed by NDSU Extension staff, with enhancements by Even Start for New

American families, and Parents as Teachers for weekly take home activities. Evaluation instruments were developed by the NDSU Extension Service with consultation from faculty in the Department of Child Development and Family Science at NDSU.

Program Participation

During the 2009-2010 year of operation in the *Gearing Up for Kindergarten* program in North Dakota, pre-kindergarten children and their families participated at 15 sites throughout the state. Support for the program was funded by the ND Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) and the United Way of Cass-Clay, as well as local support from schools and other organizations. This section of the report provides a brief summary of program participation at the respective program sites across the state of North Dakota in the 2009-010 year, as well as the type of program model each site implemented. It should be noted that the information included in this report is for those sites which participated in the NDSU evaluation study and does not include other sites that may have operated on their own initiative.

Program Type – Short Session of 10 Weeks (10 weeks in Spring 2010)

Program Site	Site Funder	Total # of Families	Sessions Attended	Attendance Percentage
Grand Forks, ND	GF School District	16	136/160	85%
LaMoure and Valley City, ND	ND-PIRC	18	153/180	85%
Mandan – Fort Lincoln site	ND-PIRC	17	135/170	79.4%
Mandan – Mary Stark Elementary	ND-PIRC	15	139/150	92.7%
Mayville-Portland, ND	ND-PIRC	9	71/90	78.9%
Minot, ND – Sunnyside Elementary	ND-PIRC	18	162/180	90%
Minot, ND – Surrey Elementary	ND-PIRC	14	125/140	89.3%
Williston – Lewis & Clark site and Wilkinson	ND-PIRC	18	132/180	73.3%
Total	8 sites	125	1053/1250	84.25%

Program Type – Split Session of 16 Weeks (8 weeks Fall 2009/8 weeks Spring 2010)

Program Site	Site Funder	Total # of Families (unduplicated)			Attendance Percentage	
		Fall	Spring	Total	Fall	Spring
Dickinson, ND	ND-PIRC & United Way	17	17	22	77.2%	85.3%
Cass County – Kindred- Davenport	ND-PIRC	20	17	21	80.6%	90.4%
Cass County – West Fargo site	United Way of Cass-Clay	27	30	32	88.9%	80.8%
Cass County – Madison site	United Way of Cass-Clay	10	13	15	73.8%	87.5%
Cass County – Kennedy site	United Way of Cass-Clay	13	13	15	84.6%	80.8%
Cass County – Jefferson site	United Way of Cass-Clay	11	12	12	76.1%	76%
Cass County – Head Start Central	United Way of Cass-Clay	6	4	9	75%	53.1%
Total	15 Total Sites 9 PIRC sites 5 United Way sites 1 school site	104	106	126	81.25%	82.3%

* Number of Families in Full Sessions (Split) = 84

* Number of Families in Partial Sessions (Split) = 42

- Fall - 20

- Spring - 22

* Total Number of Families in Sixteen Sessions – All = 126

* Number of Families in 10 Sessions – All = 125

* Total Families Served = 251

Evaluation Strategies for the Gearing Up for Kindergarten Project

A variety of evaluation strategies are being used to assess progress in meeting the program's objectives and the development of children and families who participate. This project report for 2009-2010 (fourth year of the program) provides results gathered from the entire year of the program's operation in fall 2009 and spring 2010. These results were compiled using feedback gathered from program participants through several different evaluation tools. These tools are briefly summarized below. The project report is divided into sections presenting results derived from each aspect of the evaluation process. It should be noted that this report summarizes key aspects of the data available for analysis, while further ongoing studies and analysis continue to be conducted.

Overall Program Evaluation – Pre and Post Program Forms

The first aspect of the evaluation process for the Countdown to Kindergarten project was accomplished by gathering participant information through using a traditional pre and post-program survey. Participants completed a brief parent survey that focused on program perceptions and impacts. This brief survey tool provides information on basic demographics of program participants, parent perceptions of the general value and impacts of the program, their perceptions on the value of specific topics in the program, and perceived impacts of the program on parent participants. This survey was offered to parents four times, once at the beginning and end of the first 8 weeks of the program, and also at the beginning and end of the second 8 weeks of the program. Modified surveys were used for the 10-session program. The findings are presented for both the first and second halves of the program separately.

Practical Parent Assessment for School Readiness (PPASR)

A second aspect of the evaluation process for the Gearing Up for Kindergarten project focused on gathering parent perceptions of their child's level of performance on a variety of indicators of school readiness. This evaluation tool was developed specifically for the Gearing Up for Kindergarten project, and is titled the Practical Parent Assessment for School Readiness. Children were rated on a 5-point scale by their parents in six key areas of development related to school readiness. Additionally, parents were asked to rate themselves on a number of key parenting practices related to preparing children for school. On the survey, 52 items focused on children's school readiness and 18 items on parenting practices. Additionally, parents completed 18 items about their child and 18 items about themselves that focused on school knowledge and familiarity. Parents were asked to complete this assessment at the beginning of the program and also at the end of the program. This approach allows for comparison of parent perceptions of a child's readiness in key areas over time that may be affected by program participation.

A personalized report was developed for each child who participated in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program, which allowed parents to see how they rated children in key areas and also a comparison of their child's scores to the overall average score of children in the program. This report was provided so that parents and teachers could have practical feedback specific to a child that could be used in discussing further needs regarding school readiness.

Teacher Assessment of School Readiness, Teacher Rating Scale (TASR)

A third aspect of the evaluation process for the Gearing Up for Kindergarten project focused on teacher ratings of a child's school readiness in key areas. The evaluation tool selected for this was the School Entry Profile, which we re-titled the Teacher Assessment of School Readiness (TASR), which is a highly regarded measure that allows children to be evaluated regarding their school readiness in several domains with key indicators. This instrument was added to the evaluation process based on participant and facilitator feedback from the first 2 years.

Teachers were asked to complete the assessment tool twice for each child, once at the start of the program after they had come to know the child and once at the end of the program. Filling out the assessment twice allows for comparison of a child's scores over a range of time and also from the teacher's perspective. Thus, the tool allows teachers to provide feedback on a child that enables them to:

- Highlight areas of positive growth and development in a child related to school readiness
- Identify potential areas of perceived concern regarding a child's development, learning or behavior
- Assess a child's perceived development and behavior in relation to established domains of development important to early learning and school readiness

Family Information Form (FIF)

A fourth dimension of the evaluation process, newly added in 2009-2010, focused on collecting information from parents on various aspects of social and emotional development, parent-child interactions, and parent involvement. This instrument consists of a number of well-developed and research-based measures and was instituted to more closely examine parent involvement and other issues among parent participants in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. Parents were asked to complete this assessment form twice, once at the start of the program and again at the end of the program. Filling out the assessment twice allows for a comparison of the parent's perceptions over time both prior to and following participation in the program.

Ratings of Change Form (RC)

A final aspect of the evaluation process, also newly added in 2009-2010, involved the parents completing a single post-program participation form called the "Ratings of Change" form. This form allowed parents to consider both their own and their pre-kindergarten child's behavior and rate the degree of change on each item. Children were rated on 10 items using a 7-point response scale from "much worse" to "no change" to "much improved." Parents also rated themselves on 11 items. This tool allows us to gain a sense of how parents perceive change in themselves and their child as a result of participating in the program.

I. Overall Program Evaluation Results for Gearing Up for Kindergarten

Basic Characteristics of Program Participants

A total sample of 90 participants from 7 of the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program sites completed the pre-program and post-program evaluation survey in fall 2009 or when the first 8-week session began. Participants from the eight 10-session sites were included in a separate analysis which is outlined later in this section. In spring 2010, 81 participants from 7 16-week sites completed the second round of the survey.

Total enrollment for the first half of the program was 104 families, so the response rate to the first program survey was 86.5%. Total enrollment for the second half of the program was 106 families, so the response rate to the second program survey was 76.4%. Demographic characteristics of participants in spring 2010 were highly similar to those recorded for fall, so are not reported here. Selected demographic characteristics of individuals participating in the first half of the program in fall 2009 who completed the survey are listed below.

- **Gender** – 88% women, 12% men
- **Age** – Average of 33.8 years; parents ranged in age from 20 to 52 years of age
- **Number of children** – Average of 2.40 children per parent
- **Location** – 69% live in an urban setting; 31% in a rural or farm/ranch setting (4.4%)
- **Family status** – Married (80%); Single (never married) (7.8%); separated/divorced (8.9%); cohabiting (3.3%)
- **Employment status** – Full-time employment (52.2%); employed 26-39 hours a week (7.8%); employed less than 25 hours a week (11.1%); not seeking outside employment (24.4%); other (4.4%)
- **Education level** – High school/GED (12.2%); some college (15.6%); 2-year college degree (17.8%); 4-year college degree (44.4%); master's degree or higher (10%)
- **Racial or ethnic background** – Caucasian (95.1%); Native American (1.2%); African American (1.2%); Hispanic (1.2%); other (1.2%)
- **First child to enter kindergarten** – 62% yes; 38% no
- **Child care** – No child care (7.8%); 6 hrs/wk or less (14.4%); 6-12 hrs/wk (7.8%); 12-20 hrs/wk (16.7%); 20 hrs/wk or more (53.3%)
- **Gender of participating child** – 66.7% male, 33.3% female
- **Program participation** – 88% of participants indicated involvement in 6 or more sessions of the program during the fall 2009 year (or first half of the program); 91% of participants in spring 2010 indicated involvement in 6 or more sessions of the program.

Overall Value of the Program – Full 16-Week Split Program

Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about their perceptions of the program as a whole and some of its effects on them. The tables below report participant feedback regarding the overall program, specific impacts of the program, the value of specific topics addressed, and value of the program compared to other sources of information. In each table, findings are included to each question for both the fall 2009 (or first half) and the spring 2010 (or second half) portions of the program (each an 8-week cycle of the program).

Where necessary, tables have been separated to include profiles of participant responses during both the fall and spring portions of the program. However, where possible the participant responses for both program portions have been included in the same table, and the responses are marked as to whether they indicate the findings for fall 2009 (F09) or spring 2010 (S10).

The first table, Table 1, highlights responses of participants in general to the program and its value to them as well as the quality of their experience.

Table 1: General Value of Countdown to Kindergarten Program (2009-10)

Question	Not Useful	Slightly Useful	Some what Useful	Very Useful	Extremely Useful
Overall value of the program to me:	1.1% (F09)	4.4% (F09)	17.8% (F09)	58.9% (F09)	17.8% (F09)
	--	2.5% (S10)	11.1% (S10)	50.6% (S10)	35.8% (S10)
Handouts and activities provided to me in this program were:	2.2% (F09)	6.7% (F09)	14.4% (F09)	64.4% (F09)	12.2% (F09)
	--	2.5% (S10)	19.8% (S10)	46.9% (S10)	30.9% (S10)
	NA	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Information presented in a clear and helpful manner:	--	--	1.1% (F09)	46.7% (F09)	52.2% (F09)
				48.1% (S10)	51.9% (S10)
I was treated in a respectful manner:	--	--	--	20% (F09)	80% (F09)
				21% (S10)	79% (S10)

Participants expressed positive feelings about the program thus far, with 77% indicating it was very or extremely useful to them in fall 2009 and 86% saying the same thing in spring 2010. Among participants in fall 2009, 77% said the handouts and learning activities were very useful to them while 78% responded similarly in spring 2010. Finally, all of them agreed that the information was presented well and they were treated respectfully, with those who strongly agreed they were treated well at 80% in both fall and spring.

Impacts of Program Participation

Parents described positive impacts as a result of participating in the first portion of Gearing Up for Kindergarten. The set of evaluation questions reported here were intended to assess how parents felt about the general impact of the program on their overall parenting capacity and knowledge as parents. A detailed frequency analysis of the findings is shared in Table 2 below.

The average mean scores regarding how the program impacted participants in each of these areas were given on a scale between 1 and 5, with higher scores indicating a more positive impact of the program (scale of 1 = not at all to 5 = very much). For parents who completed the overall program evaluation in fall 2009 and spring 2010, they responded as follows: (1) increased knowledge of child development (3.38 in fall 09, 3.77 in spring 10); (2) increased knowledge of healthy parenting (3.38 in fall 09, 3.73 in spring 10); (3) increased confidence in being a good parent (3.62 in fall 09, 3.85 in spring 10); (4) increased parenting skills (3.33 in fall 09, 3.69 in spring 10); (5) changed behavior as a parent (3.11 in fall 09, 3.51 in spring 10); and (6) influenced the relationship with your child (3.38 in fall 09, 3.56 in spring 10).

Table 2: General Impacts of Countdown to Kindergarten Program

Question Overall how much, if at all, did this program:	Not at All	A Little Bit	Some what	A Lot	Very Much
Increase your knowledge about child development	4.4% (F09)	7.8% (F09)	38.9% (F09)	43.3% (F09)	5.6% (F09)
	1.2% (S10)	2.5% (S10)	32.1% (S10)	46.9% (S10)	17.3% (S10)
Increase your knowledge of healthy parenting	5.6% (F09)	7.8% (F09)	38.9% (F09)	38.9% (F09)	8.9% (F09)
	2.5% (S10)	2.5% (S10)	38.3% (S10)	33.3% (S10)	23.5% (S10)
Increase your confidence in being a good parent	3.3% (F09)	7.8% (F09)	26.7% (F09)	47.8% (F09)	14.4% (F09)
	2.5% (S10)	3.7% (S10)	28.4% (S10)	37% (S10)	28.4% (S10)
Increase your skills as a parent	3.3% (F09)	12.2% (F09)	40% (F09)	36.7% (F09)	7.8% (F09)
	1.2% (S10)	6.2% (S10)	34.6% (S10)	38.3% (S10)	19.8% (S10)
Change your behavior as a parent	8.9% (F09)	11.1% (F09)	45.6% (F09)	28.9% (F09)	5.6% (F09)
	1.2% (S10)	13.6% (S10)	34.6% (S10)	34.6% (S10)	16% (S10)
Influence your relationship with your child	2.2% (F09)	12.2% (F09)	40% (F00)	36.7% (F09)	8.9% (F09)
	2.5% (S10)	8.6% (S10)	37% (S10)	34.6% (S10)	17.3% (S10)

In general, participating parents indicated very positive impacts from being involved in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. For example, **the percentage of participants indicating that the program impact was “a lot” or “very much” in a variety of areas generally held near or above 50 percent for both sessions of the program across all sites.**

Among participants, 49% in fall 2009 and 64% in spring 2010 indicated the program increased their knowledge of child development a lot or very much, 48% noted it increased their knowledge of healthy parenting a lot or very much (57% in spring 10), 62% felt it increased their confidence in being a good parent a lot or very much, and 45% said it increased their parenting skills a lot or very much (58% in spring 10). Additionally, 80% felt it changed their parent behavior at least somewhat (85% in spring 10), and 86% indicated that it influenced their relationship with their child positively (89% in spring 10). These overall findings were largely similar in both sessions of the program evaluated (fall 2009 and spring 2010), except for a few minor differences.

Value of Specific Topics to Parents

Participants were also asked to rate the usefulness of different class topics on a scale of 1 to 5, ranging from 1=not useful to 5=extremely useful. The perceived value of specific class sessions helps to provide insight into what topics may be most helpful to parents relative to the issue of school readiness. The findings for class topics are provided for both the fall 2009 session (first half of program - see Table 3) and the spring 2010 session (second half of program - see Table 4).

In fall 2009 or the first session of the program, the **most highly rated sessions were on effective discipline (3.44), parenting styles (3.27), and brain development (3.22)**; however, all sessions were rated as at least somewhat to very useful for participants in the program. The ratings for each specific topic covered in the fall 2009 session are listed below in Table 3.

Table 3: Value of Specific Topics in Gearing Up for Kindergarten Program (Fall 2009)

Question Please rate the following class topics in the GUK program	Overall Mean Score from 1 (not useful) to 5 (extremely useful)
Gearing Up for Kindergarten Orientation	3.13
Parenting Styles	3.27
Brain Development	3.22
Raising a Reader	3.14
Choosing Effective Discipline Techniques	3.44
Media Wise	2.83
Developing Responsibility and Self Help Skills	3.12
Importance of Sleep	3.19

In spring 2010, the **most highly rated sessions were on social and emotional development (3.98), learning styles and school readiness (3.85), and child temperament (3.91)**, and many topics were rated very highly at 3.60 or above. It seems clear that participants valued the specific topics they learned about and gained value from the learning experience. The ratings for each specific topic covered in the spring 2010 session are listed below in Table 4.

Table 4: Value of Specific Topics in Gearing Up for Kindergarten Program (Spring 2010)

Question Please rate the following class topics in the GUK program	Overall Mean Score from 1 (not useful) to 5 (extremely useful)
Learning Styles and School Readiness	3.85
Child Temperament	3.91
Early Literacy and Math Skills	3.35
Social and Emotional Development	3.98
Nurturance, Guidance and Prevention Tools	3.53
Nutrition and Children	3.67
Child Safety	3.59
Parent's Role in School Success	3.69

Value of Program Versus Other Sources of Information

Participants in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program were asked to rate the usefulness of various sources of information for them in learning about parenting their young child and preparing him/her to be ready for school. The information sources were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, ranging from 1=not at all useful to 5=very useful. This process for evaluating perceptions of the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program was added in 2008. It provides a clear sense of how participants rate the value of their program participation as compared to other sources of information on parenting and school readiness. A higher rating means that participants found that information source to be more highly useful to them. Participant ratings of each information source, assessed in both sessions of the program, are included below in Table 5.

Table 5: Value of Specific Information Sources on Parenting and School Readiness (Fall 2009 & Spring 2010)

Question Please rate how useful each of the following sources of information has been for you on parenting and school readiness	Overall Mean Score from 1 (not useful) to 5 (very useful)	
	Information Source	First Session (Fall 09)
a. Your parents	3.22	3.57
b. Your child's other parent	2.82	3.40
c. Friends	3.18	3.58
d. Parents with children of a similar age	3.54	3.80
e. School	3.10	3.20
f. Preschool, Head Start or child care	3.29	3.78
g. Books, magazines or newspapers	3.08	3.20
h. Internet	2.63	3.01
i. <i>Gearing Up for Kindergarten</i> class and materials	3.70**	4.10**
j. Other	--	--

** Highest ranking

The results from the fall session of the program indicate that participants rated parents with children of a similar age (3.54), preschool/Head Start/child care (3.29), and their parents (3.22) as the most useful sources of information for them on parenting and preparing their child for other school. However, the Gearing Up for Kindergarten class and materials were rated higher than all other sources with a mean score of 3.70, indicating that participants felt the class was more useful to them regarding parenting and school readiness than any other information source assessed. The results from the spring session of the program were similar, with participants rating the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program even higher at a mean score of 4.10, substantially higher than any other information source assessed. The other sources rated in the spring which were somewhat close were preschool/Head Start/child care (3.78) and parents with children of a similar age (3.80).

Perceived Impacts of Gearing Up for Kindergarten on Participants

Participants were also asked to answer questions about their specific activities as parents in a number of areas, both before and after participating in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. Parents responded to 18 questions regarding their parental practices that link with healthy parenting and school readiness. These activities by parents are linked with assisting children toward school readiness in a variety of areas.

By assessing the parents' perceptions of their activities with children both before and after the program, it is possible to gain a sense of whether the program may have an impact on them. It is important to note three things in explaining this portion of the Gearing Up for Kindergarten evaluation. First, the method used with parents to get their perceptions was a traditional pre and post-program assessment of their behaviors in various aspects of parenting. Second, since the parents rate themselves it is likely that they may rate themselves higher in these parenting activities than others might rate them. In fact, parents often rate themselves so highly that it is difficult to detect any potential differences over time. Finally, the scores they use to rate themselves are on a 1 to 5 frequency scale, with answers ranging from "hardly ever" (1) to "almost always" (5). It cannot currently be said with certainty that perceived impacts of the program are due to participation in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. It can reasonably be assumed, however, that any differences measured are likely (though not certain) to occur due to participation in Gearing Up for Kindergarten.

The scores received by parents were calculated as average scores, or mean scores, on the scale from 1 to 5. The average scores for each area of parenting from "before participation" were compared with the average scores from "after participation." The two scores were compared statistically to measure whether there was a significant difference before and after participation in the program, and if the difference was likely to be due to the program itself rather than random chance (in this case, it is called a "paired sample T-test analysis").

Findings are presented in Table 6 for the participants who completed a full session of the program. The findings show, based on the statistical analysis, that **participants experienced significant differences in 12 of the 18 parental practices related to school readiness** as a likely result of their participation in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. There are several important points to make as a result of these findings:

- Participants noted **small to moderate changes in 12 of the 18 parental practices related to school readiness that were measured, with all of the changes showing positive increases in a particular parental practice** (e.g., more actively discussing a story with children or engaging in more active play with a child).
- The findings showed significant differences in parental practices for participants before and after their participation in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. These changes were **small to moderate increases between .15 and .45 in specific parental practices, suggesting incremental improvement in key aspects of parental involvement and guidance.**
- Participants typically rated themselves quite highly already on most indicators of parenting linked to school readiness. The average beginning scores showed that most parents felt they performed most of these practices well, usually rating between "often" and "almost always" on the scale of performance. This means that most participants already perceive themselves as well-adjusted in their parenting efforts and there is minimal opportunity for change.

Table 6: Perceived Impacts on Parental Practices of Gearing Up for Kindergarten (2009-10 Program)

Question As a Parent, I:	Before Participation (Mean Score)	Now, After Participation (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
1. Give my child a variety of activities and learning experiences.	4.08	4.41	.33	Yes
2. Do arts and crafts, puzzles or other hands-on activities with my child.	3.83	4.23	.40	Yes
3. Get down and actively play with my child.	3.95	4.21	.27	Yes
4. Go walking, swimming or do other physical activities with my child.	4.15	4.31	.16	Yes
5. Provide my child with hands-on materials, such as crayons and paper, scissors, play dough, etc.	4.33	4.56	.23	Yes
6. Give my child opportunities to be physically active (tumbling, playing at the park, dancing, playing ball, etc.).	4.51	4.59	.08	No
7. Arrange for my child to play with other children his or her age.	3.96	4.19	.23	Yes
8. Talk with my child about how to get along with others even when they have a disagreement.	4.13	4.37	.24	Yes
9. Assist my child to begin play or interact with other children.	3.76	3.99	.23	No
10. Read with my child each day.	4.28	4.57	.29	Yes
11. Discuss contents of a book or story with my child when we read.	3.99	4.43	.44	Yes
12. Talk, laugh, sing, and converse with my child.	4.69	4.77	.08	No
13. Respond quickly to my child's cues for attention (crying, questions).	4.32	4.47	.15	No
14. Help my child identify feelings such as sadness or fear.	4.33	4.47	.13	No
15. Discuss with my child how to handle feeling sad or upset.	4.17	4.43	.26	Yes
16. Teach my child self-care skills such as brushing teeth, using the toilet, etc.	4.68	4.80	.12	No
17. Provide my child with regular routines at home.	4.49	4.63	.14	Yes
18. Work together on simple chores.	4.16	4.45	.29	Yes

- The **largest seven differences** for participants occurred in the following areas: **discussing contents of a book or story with child (.44), doing arts and crafts or other hands-on learning activities with children (.40), giving children a variety of learning experiences (.33), reading with the child daily (.29), working together on simple chores (.29), engaging with children actively in play (.27), and discussing with children how to handle feeling sad or upset (.26).**
- The increases **that occurred in parents' efforts with their children in specific areas were typically three to four times higher than would be expected to occur** due to random chance, and so this is a good indicator that the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program is having a positive impact.
- The **findings suggest that Gearing Up for Kindergarten has made good progress in assisting parents and influencing them in a positive manner to behave in ways that will help their children toward school readiness and positive development.**

This set of findings from Gearing Up for Kindergarten was generated as a result of involvement in the 2009-10 session of the program at Gearing Up for Kindergarten sites in North Dakota. The findings suggest the program has positive impacts on parents who are involved and aids them in making incremental improvements in parenting practices that link to school readiness.

Additional Findings with Parental Practices

In addition to specific parental practices that were examined, parents were also asked about parenting knowledge and efforts connected to the content of the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. During the first session of the program, parents were assessed on 16 items associated with the educational content of the program. During the second session of the program, parents were assessed on 17 items associated with the educational content of the program.

The findings from this portion of the analysis are presented in brief and again the following points apply: (1) Participants typically rated themselves highly already on most items and so there was limited opportunity for change to occur in their measurements; (2) The method used to assess participant ratings was a traditional pre- and post-program assessment to compare their two scores at the beginning and end of program participation; (3) The scale used to allow participants to rate themselves was a 1 to 7 scale, with answers ranging from “never” (1) to “about once a week” (4) to “several times each day” (7).

The scores received by parents were calculated as average scores, or mean scores, on the scale from 1 to 7. The average scores for each area of parenting from “before participation” were compared with the average scores from “after participation.” The two scores were compared statistically to measure whether there was a significant difference before and after participation in the program, and if the difference was likely to be due to the program itself rather than random chance (in this case, it is called a “paired sample T-test analysis”).

Findings which illustrate significant differences are presented for both the fall 2009 and spring 2010 sessions of the program, followed by brief discussion points regarding the findings. Eleven of 16 items from the fall session illustrated significant change, while only one item showed significant change in the spring session. The significant findings are highlighted in Table 7, followed by some brief discussion points.

Table 7: Additional Parenting Impacts - Gearing Up for Kindergarten (2009-2010)

Question As a Parent, how often do you:	Before Participation (Mean Score)	Now, After Participation (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
Fall 2009				
1. Do specific things with your child to help prepare for school.	4.91	5.26	.34	Yes
2. Seek out information on factors that affect your growing child.	3.99	4.48	.49	Yes
3. Avoid raising your voice or expressing anger in parenting interactions with your child.	5.08	5.43	.36	Yes
4. Hold, hug or snuggle with your child.	6.61	6.76	.14	Yes
5. Initiate specific learning activities or experiences for your child.	5.07	5.51	.44	Yes
6. Spend specific time talking with and listening to your child.	6.26	6.46	.20	Yes
7. Select a book and read with your child.	5.50	5.93	.43	Yes
8. Discuss contents of a book or story with your child.	5.06	5.67	.61	Yes
9. Give your child praise and appreciation for things well done.	6.32	6.72	.40	Yes
10. Make an effort to be positive and reassuring when giving discipline.	5.56	6.11	.56	Yes
11. Limit your child's exposure to TV or other media (computer, movies, etc.) to less than 1-1/2 hours a day.	4.74	5.26	.51	Yes
Spring 2010				
1. Have your child use booster seats while riding in the car.	6.78	6.53	-.25	Yes

The findings show, based on the statistical analysis, that **participants experienced significant differences in 12 of the 33 items of parental knowledge and behavior linked to program content**, as a likely result of their participation in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. There are several points to make as a result of these findings:

- Participants noted **small to moderate changes in a variety of additional areas of parental knowledge and behavior related to school readiness that were measured.**
- The findings showed significant differences in parental practices for participants before and after their participation in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. Again, these changes were **small to moderate increases between .15 and .60 in specific parental practices, suggesting incremental improvement in key aspects of parental involvement and guidance.**

- Assessing the conceptual areas in which parents seem to respond most to the program in initiating changes with their children, the following areas seem to reflect such changes the most: (1) Increased understanding of children and key developmental issues (temperament, etc.) that affect their growth; (2) Increased efforts to facilitate learning opportunities and activities for children on a daily basis; (3) Increased involvement in learning activities such as play, hands-on learning, and reading; (4) Increased attentiveness to a child's social and emotional experiences and development; and (5) Increased facilitation of academic readiness skills such as reading, math, routines, and hands-on learning.
- The increases **that occurred in parents' efforts with their children in specific areas were typically two to five times higher than would be expected to occur** due to random chance, and so this is a good indicator that the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program is having a positive impact.
- The **findings suggest that Gearing Up for Kindergarten has established a good foundation and a sound program that assists parents and influences them in a positive manner. Parents who are involved in the program tend to indicate changes that may help them behave in ways that will help their children toward school readiness and positive development.**

II. Parental Assessment of Children’s School Readiness

Practical Parent Assessment for School Readiness

One of the identified goals for the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program is that participating children will show significant progress in being prepared to be successful in cognitive, social, emotional, physical and practical domains as they enter kindergarten. To get a sense of where parents perceived their children to be in regard to school readiness, a brief assessment tool was developed called the Practical Parent Assessment for School Readiness (PPASR). This short survey asks parents to rate their children on a 5-point scale in six key areas of development related to school readiness (a total of 52 items). Parents are asked to rate how their child typically thinks and behaves for each item. The range of responses that parents can give in rating their children goes from 1 to 5, with 1 = “hardly ever,” 2 = “once in a while,” 3 = “sometimes,” 4 = “often,” and 5 = “almost always.”

In addition, for the second year a section of evaluation was added to the process which examined both parent and child feelings and experiences related to school knowledge and familiarity. Parents were asked to assess their child’s familiarity with school, peers, and routines, as well as their feelings and comfort level in varying aspects of the school-related experience. Similarly, parents rated themselves also on familiarity with school, teachers, and routines, as well as comfort level and familiarity with school personnel and routines. These questions were asked either on a “yes/no” basis or a response scale of 1 to 4, with 1 = not at all to 4 = to a great extent.

Understanding What the Current PPASR Assessment Process Shows

Several important points should be made about using the findings from this assessment tool and process to gauge children’s progress.

- First, the PPASR is a newly developed instrument and so understanding of how well it allows parents to gauge a child’s school readiness across different areas is just emerging.
- Second, the PPASR encourages parents to think of their children’s development of skills on a continuum, not as either-or categories of development. This allows for tracking a sense of progress over time.
- Third, the level of growth or change that can be tracked in a given child’s development, or for a group of children, depends on where a parent rates the child in the beginning (pre-test). If parents already rate their children very highly on indicators of school readiness at the beginning (e.g., parent says the child is already at “5” on “can sort things into basic groups by color, shape, etc.”), then the scale cannot reveal further growth for that child (there is no “room” left on the scale for growth).
- Fourth, it is a common characteristic for parents to rate their children highly on varying measures of development.
- Fifth, usage of a comparison group for this year’s program of Gearing Up for Kindergarten will allow us, once the findings are complete, to assess whether a similar group of children without the program would show similar results or changes in their parental scores regarding school readiness.
- Sixth, children in their early years between ages 3 and 5 are already developing on a continuous basis, and so it is somewhat difficult to know whether changes are due to participation in the program, predictable patterns of normal growth over time, or other factors (involvement with new friends, going to child care, etc.).

So, with all of those beginning points, what does the parental assessment of school readiness allow us to know?

- We can determine at what level parents in the program area rate their children to begin with in six key areas related to school readiness. We can also assess any variation in these ratings by age of the child, education of the parent, or other potentially important factors.
- We can determine whether parental ratings show a perceived change in children's school readiness over time while participating in the program, and how great those changes are that do occur.
- We can prepare a feedback report for parents that shows their rating of a child on specific items related to school readiness, and how their rating compares to the overall ratings of children in the group (as well as the child's individual scores over time).
- We can examine whether particular categories of school readiness showed greater changes than others over time.

Participants in the PPASR Assessment

Participation in the Practical Parent Assessment of School Readiness required that parents fill out the PPASR survey twice, once in fall 2009 and once in spring 2010 during the program. Only those parents who filled out a PPASR assessment for their child at both times were included in the analysis. A total sample of 75 children were rated by parents in the Countdown to Kindergarten in both the fall and the spring (this sample represents a response rate of approximately 67% of participating children). Demographic characteristics were similar to those previously reported.

Each parent received a PPASR Report Sheet that highlighted their individual child's score on each item and the comparison score for the entire group. A single example of a PPASR Report Sheet is included at the end of this section (with no identifying information) to show how the findings from this process were used to provide individualized feedback to parents with children in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. These report sheets are meant to facilitate insight, reflection and discussion for parents and teachers on school readiness for a child. The score given for a child on each specific item was designated as either "developing" (score of 1 or 2), "partly proficient" (3), "proficient" (4), and "advanced" (5).

Findings on Parental Perceptions of Children's School Readiness

The key areas of school readiness selected for assessment by parents were: (1) *Learning and Exploration* (cognitive); (2) *Physical Skills and Abilities* (physical); (3) *Friends and Social Interaction* (social); (4) *Knowing the Basics* (academic); (5) *Feelings and Families* (emotional); and (6) *Health, Fitness and Practical Skills* (practical). Six tables are included below, one of which covers each dimension, and there are beginning group scores (fall 2009), completing group scores (spring 2010), and difference scores (difference in the average group scores, or means) for each item. The data collection and analysis for this important section of the evaluation was the most rigorous yet completed on this project.

The difference scores indicate progress (or lack thereof) that has occurred for children (as perceived by parents) on average in the group between fall 2009 and spring 2010. The table indicates whether there is a "significant" difference between the scores, which may be due to program participation, individual growth, or other factors.

Table 8: Learning and Exploration – School Readiness Scores

Question My Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
1. Is curious and asks questions to learn more about the topic.	4.55	4.60	.05	No
2. Works with hands in putting together puzzles or building with blocks.	4.33	4.53	.20	Yes
3. Explores the environment and participates in new opportunities.	4.11	4.33	.23	Yes
4. Learns and recites familiar songs, nursery rhymes, finger plays or stories.	4.09	4.40	.31	Yes
5. Enjoys participating in small groups to play games or do learning activities.	4.07	4.19	.12	No
6. Draws and uses art to express ideas or feelings.	3.59	4.17	.59	Yes
7. Is able to work independently on a task (painting, picking up clothes, etc.)	3.92	4.29	.37	Yes
8. Likes to work at solving problems.	3.52	3.99	.47	Yes
9. Is persistent when solving problems.	3.25	3.80	.55	Yes

Table 9: Physical Skills and Abilities – School Readiness Scores

Question My Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
10. Holds a pencil or crayon with fingers (not fist).	4.28	4.61	.33	Yes
11. Can button, snap or zip pants or coat.	4.15	4.61	.47	Yes
12. Moves easily from place to place when walking.	4.88	4.85	-.03	No
13. Creates things using hands and paper, crayons, scissors, etc.	4.43	4.67	.24	Yes
14. Is able to cut with scissors.	4.49	4.71	.22	Yes
15. Can catch or pick up a rolled or thrown soft ball.	4.56	4.65	.09	No
16. Shows large motor skills, such as hopping, skipping, running, jumping or throwing	4.80	4.83	.03	No

Table 10: Friends and Social Interaction – School Readiness Scores

Question My Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
17. Shares with other children (such as toys, crayons, etc.)	3.95	4.17	.23	Yes
18. Works or plays cooperatively with friends.	4.01	4.33	.32	Yes
19. Listens in a group situation.	3.95	4.29	.35	Yes
20. Takes turns with others.	3.83	4.24	.41	Yes
21. Remembers and follows simple directions in playing games.	3.99	4.36	.37	Yes
22. Enjoys talking to or playing with other children.	4.43	4.57	.15	Yes
23. Gets along without quarreling or fighting.	3.75	4.12	.37	Yes
24. Understands and follows rules that are explained.	3.97	4.29	.32	Yes
25. Understands how to enter into talking or play with other kids.	3.65	4.25	.60	Yes
26. Tries to solve problems with friends.	3.33	3.95	.62	Yes

Table 11: Knowing the Basics – School Readiness Scores

Question My Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2008 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2009 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference?
27. Is familiar with books and enjoys having others read to him.	4.73	4.89	.16	Yes
28. Tries to learn/use new words.	4.43	4.63	.20	Yes
29. Is able to speak and communicate thoughts, needs and feelings in a way others understand.	4.39	4.55	.16	Yes
30. Is familiar with (or able to recognize) letters of the alphabet.	4.15	4.72	.57	Yes
31. Is familiar with (or able to recognize) numbers between 1 and 10 (or higher).	4.20	4.76	.56	Yes
32. Is able to do counting, understanding of basic numbers (adding items together, etc.)	4.00	4.63	.63	Yes
33. Can sort things into basic groups, (such as by color, shape, things that match, etc.)	4.63	4.84	.21	Yes
34. Is creative in asking questions or trying to solve problems.	4.11	4.49	.39	Yes

Table 12: Feelings and Families – School Readiness Scores

Question My Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
35. Feels loved and supported from family members at home.	4.85	4.85	.00	No
36. Spends time away from me in a variety of settings (child care, friend's house) without too much anxiety.	4.15	4.55	.40	Yes
37. Can identify his or her feelings (such as sad, happy, angry).	4.41	4.56	.15	Yes
38. Can talk about how others might feel.	3.99	4.32	.33	Yes
39. Manages feelings, such as anger or frustration, without hurting or being mean to others.	3.59	4.09	.51	Yes
40. Can adapt to new situations within a reasonable period and feel comfortable.	3.95	4.29	.35	Yes
41. Regularly shares how he/she is feeling with me or other adults.	4.05	4.41	.36	Yes
42. Appreciates getting to know new people or friends through time.	4.15	4.47	.32	Yes

Table 13: Health, Fitness and Practical Skills – School Readiness Scores

Question My Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
43. Independently uses basic self-care skills, such as brushing teeth, using the toilet, washing hands, etc.	4.45	4.76	.31	Yes
44. Eats a variety of snacks and foods.	4.40	4.65	.25	Yes
45. Is active and enjoys physical movement.	4.76	4.83	.07	No
46. Can recite his or her name, parents' names and contact information (address, phone number).	3.13	3.80	.67	Yes
47. Is able to understand location and get him or herself from one place to another (walk to a friend's house, ride a bike to the playground, etc.).	3.51	3.91	.40	Yes

48. Has experience with following a routine at home, child care or preschool (such as bedtime routine, lunch routine, etc.).	4.57	4.65	.08	No
49. Is aware of who to contact if he or she needs help.	3.79	4.33	.55	Yes
50. Has experience using school-related supplies, such as pencils, paper, markers, backpack, etc.	4.67	4.79	.12	No
51. Is able to put on clothes (coat, shoes, etc.), and take care of belongings (book, etc.).	4.49	4.69	.20	Yes
52. Assists with simple household chores and is able to complete them with guidance.	4.20	4.44	.24	Yes

These six tables summarize the findings from the Gearing Up for Kindergarten project for the 2009-10 year on perceived changes in children's school readiness on specific items. A number of important points emerge as a result of these findings:

- Currently, parents of children in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program **routinely rate their children very highly on most indicators of school readiness.** This means that there is somewhat limited room for change to be indicated across specific items. For example, the average beginning score on every item (all 52 items) was in the direction of the Proficient (3 or higher) or Advanced (4 or higher) category. Only 18 of 52 items had a beginning average score below 4, and the remainder were all average beginning scores above 4.
- **Small to moderate gains were noted for many indicators of school readiness in children. These gains are likely due to a combination of participation in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program, normal processes of child development, and other contributing factors. Other indicators showed no or limited evidence of change. Sometimes this was due to the fact that the children were already perceived as highly developed on that indicator, while on others there was change but it was not enough to reach statistical significance. However, the wide-ranging evidence of growth in children's specific domains of development related to school readiness is highly encouraging and evidence of program success.**
- Among 52 indicators of school readiness, **significant differences were measured on 43 of the 52 indicators between fall 2009 and spring 2010. This means that 83 percent of the indicators for school readiness showed positive growth in children participating in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. Positive increases occurred on indicators in all six of the school readiness categories.**
- These findings showed significant differences in parental perceptions of children's school readiness from the beginning of the program to the end of the program on 43 indicators. These changes included **14 small to moderate increases between .10 and .30, 19 substantive increases between .30 and .50, and 10 significant increases of .50 or higher on specific items of school readiness.**

- The **20 largest significant differences for children** (as perceived by parents) occurred in the following areas:
 - **Ability to recite family names and contact information (.67)**
 - **Ability to count and do basic numbers (.63)**
 - **Trying to solve problems with friends (.62)**
 - **Ability to enter talking or play with other children (.60)**
 - **Drawing and using art to express ideas or feelings (.59)**
 - **Familiarity with letters of the alphabet (.57)**
 - **Familiarity with numbers (.56)**
 - **Persistence in solving problems (.55)**
 - **Awareness of who to contact in case of a need for help (.55)**
 - **Ability to manage feelings of anger and frustration (.51)**
 - **Can button, snap or zip pants or coat (.47)**
 - **Likes to work at solving problems (.47)**
 - **Taking turns with others (.41)**
 - **Spending time away without anxiety (.40)**
 - **Awareness of locations and moving between them (.40)**
 - **Creativity in asking questions or solving problems (.39)**
 - **Following directions that are given (.37)**
 - **Getting along without quarreling or fighting (.37)**
 - **Ability to work independently on a task (.37)**
 - **Sharing feelings with parent or adults (.36)**

- In analyzing all increases over .20 or higher (whether significant or not), **the findings suggest growth in five primary areas: (1) social skills and positive interaction with others; (2) ability to function more independently and learn actively in a guided environment; (3) development of specific pre-academic skills or knowledge that applies to a school setting (using a pencil, knowing the alphabet and numbers, awareness of personal contact information, etc.); (4) ability to express themselves through art and hands-on creative activities; and (5) ability to manage emotions and adapt in a new environment.**

- Assessing the six domains of development related to school readiness that are examined in the evaluation process, while all domains have specific items that demonstrate change after program participation, the areas that show the greatest impact as a result of the program are: **(1) Child Learning and Exploration; (2) Positive Peer Interactions and Social Development; (3) Knowing the Basics and Pre-Academic Skills; (4) Emotional Development and Management; and (5) Practical Awareness and Self-Care Skills.**

The findings from the assessment process concerning changes in children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and practical abilities related to school readiness show that many changes are occurring for children enrolled in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. Parents largely rate their children as already doing well in most categories, and some significant changes are occurring that move children toward greater school readiness. These findings indicate that the program likely has a number of positive impacts on children and their school readiness.

Findings on School Knowledge and Familiarity

Since parental involvement in children’s learning and children’s preparation for school are key objectives in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program, an element was added to the evaluation process in the 2008-09 year that asked parents to respond regarding their and their child’s knowledge and familiarity with school expectations, routines, and relationships.

Parents were asked to assess their child’s familiarity with school, peers, and routines, as well as their feelings and comfort level in varying aspects of the school-related experience. Similarly, parents rated themselves also on familiarity with school, teachers, and routines, as well as comfort level and familiarity with school personnel and routines. Five of these questions were asked on a “yes/no” basis and 8 questions were answered on a response scale of 1 to 4, with 1 = not at all to 4 = to a great extent. There were 13 items asked of the parent and 13 items asked regarding the parent’s perception of the child. The findings related to this aspect of the program evaluation are provided in Tables 14-17.

Table 14: Children in Gearing up for Kindergarten – School Knowledge

My child:	Beginning of Program		End of Program	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
1. Has visited the school or kindergarten classroom.	34.7%	65.3%	13.3%	86.7% (+21.4)
2. Has met a kindergarten teacher at the school he/she will attend.	60%	40%	48%	52% (+12)
3. Knows how he/she will get to and from school.	50.7%	49.3%	28%	72% (+22.7)
4. Knows where he/she will go before and after school.	40%	60%	26.7%	73.3% (+13.3)
5. Has met peers who will be in kindergarten at the same school.	38.7%	61.3%	21.3%	78.7% (+17.4)

Table 15: Parents in Gearing up for Kindergarten – School Knowledge

As a parent, I:	Beginning of Program		End of Program	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
1. Have visited the school or kindergarten classroom.	34.7%	65.3%	12%	88% (+22.7)
2. Have met a kindergarten teacher at the school my child will attend.	46.7%	53.3%	40%	60% (+6.7)
3. Know where my child will go before and after school.	22.7%	77.3%	13.3%	86.7% (+9.4)
4. Have met other parents who have children or will have children in kindergarten.	20%	80%	6.7%	93.3% (+13.3)
5. Have discussed going to kindergarten with my child.	4%	96%	4%	96% (--)

Table 16: Children in Gearing Up for Kindergarten – School Comfort and Familiarity

Question My Child:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
6. Is excited about beginning kindergarten.	3.17	3.61	.44	Yes
7. Is familiar with the routines and expectations that exist in kindergarten (raising hands, etc.).	2.68	3.21	.53	Yes
8. Is comfortable with the environment of the school setting.	3.11	3.44	.33	Yes
9. Talks positively about going to kindergarten.	3.19	3.65	.47	Yes
10. Is comfortable interacting with peers of a similar age who will be in kindergarten.	3.41	3.59	.18	Yes
11. Is comfortable separating from me as a parent.	3.16	3.53	.37	Yes
12. Is comfortable participating in a group with other children.	3.43	3.48	.05	No
13. Is curious about school and the experiences he/she will have there.	3.45	3.61	.16	Yes

Table 17: Parents in Gearing Up for Kindergarten – School Comfort and Familiarity

Question As a parent, I:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
6. Am excited about my child beginning kindergarten.	3.53	3.55	.02	No
7. Am familiar with the routines and expectations for children that exist in kindergarten.	3.39	3.59	.20	Yes
8. Am comfortable with being in a school setting.	3.69	3.68	-.01	No
9. Am comfortable interacting with school personnel or teachers.	3.77	3.77	0.0	No
10. Have a good idea of how my child acts with peers in a group setting.	3.47	3.64	.17	Yes
11. Understand the general ability level of the average kindergartner.	3.41	3.56	.15	No
12. Am curious about school and the experiences that he/she will have there.	3.76	3.80	.04	No
13. Am comfortable leaving my child in the care of others.	3.49	3.59	.10	No

These four tables summarize the findings on reported changes regarding school knowledge, comfort level and familiarity for both children and parents in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. Several substantial changes emerged in these findings:

- For both parents and children, **indicators of school knowledge showed significant increases in preparation and knowledge for the school experience. For pre-kindergarten children, the percentage who had visited a school or kindergarten classroom increased by 21%, those who met a kindergarten teacher at their prospective school increased 12%, and those who meet peers they will be with in kindergarten increased 17%. For parents, the percentage who had visited a school or kindergarten classroom increased 23%, those who had met a kindergarten teacher at their child's prospective school increased 7%, and those meeting other parents who will have children in kindergarten increased 13%.**
- For children in the program, among 8 indicators of comfort level and familiarity with school, **significant differences were measured on 7 of the 8 indicators between fall 2009 and spring 2010. Findings showed that children became more familiar with kindergarten routines and expectations, more comfortable with the school environment, more comfortable separating from parents, and more curious and excited about beginning school.**
- For parents involved in Gearing Up for Kindergarten, **significant differences were measured on just 2 of the 8 indicators regarding comfort level and familiarity with school between fall 2009 and spring 2010. Findings showed that parent became more familiar with kindergarten routines and expectations for their child, as well as more aware of their child's behavior with peers.**

III. Teacher Assessment of Children’s School Readiness

Teacher Assessment for School Readiness

An important objective for the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program is that participating children will show significant progress in being prepared to be successful in cognitive, social, emotional, physical and practical domains as they enter kindergarten. In addition to the perceptions of parents, the program evaluation for 2009-10 also included an independent evaluation by the child’s preschool facilitator/teacher in the program.

This aspect of the evaluation focused on teacher ratings of a child’s school readiness in key areas. The evaluation tool selected for this was the School Entry Profile, which we re-titled the Teacher Assessment of School Readiness (TASR), which is a highly regarded measure that allows children to be evaluated regarding their school readiness in several domains with key indicators. This instrument was added to the evaluation process based on participant and facilitator feedback from the first 2 years. Teachers were asked to complete the assessment tool twice for each child, once at the start of the program after they had come to know the child and once at the end of the program. Filling out the assessment twice allows for comparison of a child’s scores over a range of time and also from the teacher’s perspective. Thus, the tool allows teachers to provide feedback on a child that enables them to:

- Highlight areas of positive growth and development in a child related to school readiness
- Identify potential areas of perceived concern regarding a child’s development, learning or behavior
- Assess a child’s perceived development and behavior in relation to established domains of development important to early learning and school readiness

The seven domains assessed in the Teacher Assessment for School Readiness included (1) *Symbolic Development* (4 items – creativity, etc.), (2) *Communication* (13 items – language, literacy, etc.), (3) *Mathematical/Physical Knowledge* (6 items), (4) *Working with Others* (7 items – social skills, etc.), (5) *Learning to Learn* (9 items – learning, emotions, etc.), (6) *Physical Development* (4 items), and (7) *Conventional Knowledge* (8 items – basic pre-academic skills, practical knowledge, etc.). The first five domains and their corresponding items were rated by teachers on a 3-point scale ranging from 1 = “not yet/almost never” to 3 = “almost always.” The last two domains were rated using simple “yes/no” response options.

Understanding Findings from the TASR Assessment of School Readiness

Several important points should be made about using the findings from this assessment tool and process to gauge children’s progress.

- First, the TASR is a carefully developed research instrument and so results from it tend to be valid and reliable. It allows trained pre-school teachers/facilitators to gauge a child’s school readiness across seven different areas.
- Second, the TASR allows for tracking a sense of progress over time. The level of growth or change that can be tracked in a given child’s development, or for a group of children, depends on where a teacher rates the child in the beginning (pre-test). If teachers already rate a child very highly on indicators of school readiness at the beginning, then the scale cannot reveal further growth for that child (there is no “room” left on the scale for growth).
- Third, usage of a comparison group for this year’s program of Gearing Up for Kindergarten will allow us, once the findings are complete, to assess whether a similar group of children

without the program would show similar results or changes in their scores regarding school readiness.

- Fourth, children in their early years between ages 3 and 5 are already developing on a continuous basis, and so it is somewhat difficult to know whether changes are due to participation in the program, predictable patterns of normal growth over time, or other factors (involvement with new friends, going to child care, etc.).

However, the teacher assessment of school readiness does allow us to do the following:

- We can determine at what level teachers operating the program perceive children to be at in several key areas related to school readiness. We can also assess any variation in these ratings by age of the child, gender of the child, or other potentially important factors.
- We can determine whether teacher ratings show a perceived change in children's school readiness over time while participating in the program, and how great those changes are that do occur.
- We can examine whether particular categories of school readiness showed greater changes than others over time.

Participants in the TASR Assessment

Participation in the Teacher Assessment of School Readiness required that preschool teachers/facilitators fill out the TASR survey for each child twice, once in fall 2009 and once in spring 2010 during the program. Only those children who had a TASR assessment completed at both times were included in the analysis. A total sample of 71 children were assessed by teachers in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program in both the fall and the spring (this sample represents a response rate of approximately 63% of participating children who were administered the assessment – not all sites used the assessment). Demographic characteristics were similar to those previously reported.

Findings on Teacher Ratings of Children's School Readiness

The key areas of school readiness assessed by teachers were: (1) *Symbolic Development* (4 items – creativity, etc.), (2) *Communication* (13 items – language, literacy, etc.), (3) *Mathematical/Physical Knowledge* (6 items), (4) *Working with Others* (7 items – social skills, etc.), (5) *Learning to Learn* (9 items – learning, emotions, etc.), (6) *Physical Development* (4 items), and (7) *Conventional Knowledge* (8 items – basic pre-academic skills, practical knowledge, etc.). Seven tables (Tables 18-24) are included below, one of which covers each dimension, and there are beginning group scores (fall 2009), completing group scores (spring 2010), and difference scores (difference in the average group scores, or means) for each item. For the last two tables, the scores represent percentages and simple percentage changes.

The difference scores indicate progress (or lack thereof) that has occurred for children (as perceived by preschool facilitators in the program) on average in the group between fall 2009 and spring 2010. The table indicates whether there is a “significant” difference between the scores, which may be due to program participation, individual growth, or other factors. Again, in Tables 18-22 the scores are represented on a scale between 1 and 3, with higher scores indicating greater preparation or readiness on a specific item.

Table 18: Symbolic Development – Teacher School Readiness Scores

Question This Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
1. Takes part in interactive play with others.	2.55	2.61	.06	No
2. Creates or responds to music.	2.62	2.61	-.01	No
3. Uses art to convey feelings and ideas.	2.37	2.69	.32	Yes
4. Talks about his or her creations.	2.35	2.56	.21	Yes

Table 19: Communication – Teacher School Readiness Scores

Question This Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
1. Uses language to communicate ideas, feelings, questions, or to solve problems.	2.48	2.61	.13	Yes
2. Uses language to pretend or create.	2.55	2.69	.14	Yes
3. Responds to questions.	2.55	2.72	.17	Yes
4. Follows directions.	2.54	2.66	.12	No
5. Shows interest in reading and books.	2.65	2.83	.18	Yes
6. Exhibits book-handling skills.	2.75	2.87	.13	Yes
7. Identifies letters in the alphabet.	2.32	2.82	.50	Yes
8. Recognizes that there is a relationship between letters and sounds.	2.03	2.63	.61	Yes
9. Recognizes that written spellings represent spoken words.	2.01	2.62	.61	Yes
10. "Reads" simple books.	1.92	2.62	.70	Yes
11. Scribbles with intended meaning.	2.61	2.86	.25	Yes
12. Uses some letters in writing.	2.25	2.58	.32	Yes
13. Recognizes first name in print.	2.93	2.96	.03	No

Table 20: Mathematical/Physical Knowledge – Teacher School Readiness Scores

Question This Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
1. Writes some numbers.	1.97	2.51	.54	Yes
2. Determines “same,” “more than” and “less than” by comparing.	2.21	2.62	.41	Yes
3. Shows understanding of sequence of daily events.	2.44	2.87	.44	Yes
4. Classifies objects used in daily experiences or identifies similarities and differences.	2.31	2.77	.46	Yes
5. Makes one-to-one correspondence.	2.48	2.76	.28	Yes
6. Experiments with objects to produce effects.	2.52	2.83	.31	Yes

Table 21: Working with Others – Teacher School Readiness Scores

Question This Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference?
1. Uses adults as resources.	2.65	2.73	.08	No
2. Initiates conversation with familiar adults.	2.35	2.56	.21	Yes
3. Works cooperatively with others in a give-and-take manner.	2.52	2.54	.02	No
4. Uses peers as resources.	2.24	2.51	.27	Yes
5. Shares resources with others.	2.58	2.66	.08	No
6. Shows sensitivity and respect for others.	2.69	2.72	.03	No
7. Suggests appropriate solutions to conflicts.	2.18	2.52	.34	Yes

Table 22: Learning to Learn – Teacher School Readiness Scores

Question This Child Typically:	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
1. Shows curiosity and interest.	2.80	2.92	.12	Yes
2. Explores and tries new things.	2.77	2.90	.13	Yes
3. Takes responsibility for belongings.	2.62	2.82	.20	Yes
4. Makes choices.	2.58	2.92	.34	Yes
5. Stays focused and productive while playing/working independently.	2.48	2.75	.27	Yes
6. Stays focused and productive while playing/working in a group.	2.34	2.62	.28	Yes
7. Shows pride in accomplishments.	2.69	2.87	.18	Yes
8. Copes with frustration and failure.	2.30	2.55	.25	Yes
9. Talks about what he or she is learning.	2.27	2.62	.35	Yes

Table 23: Physical Development – Teacher School Readiness Scores

This Child typically:	Beginning of Program		End of Program	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
1. Is physically active.	--	100%	--	100% (--)
2. Demonstrates gross motor skills.	--	100%	--	100% (--)
3. Demonstrates fine motor skills.	--	100%	4.2%	95.8% (-4.2)
4. Appears to be healthy.	--	100%	--	100% (--)

Table 24: Conventional Knowledge – Teacher School Readiness Scores

This child typically:	Beginning of Program		End of Program	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
1. Tells first and last name.	9.9%	90.1%	7%	93% (+2.9)
2. Knows first and last names of an adult family member.	28.2%	71.8%	21.1%	78.9% (+7.1)
3. Knows age.	1.4%	98.6%	4.2%	95.8% (-2.8)
4. Knows birth date.	47.9%	52.1%	22.5%	77.5% (+25.4)
5. Recognizes some basic shapes.	2.8%	97.2%	1.4%	98.6% (+1.4)
6. Identifies basic colors.	--	100%	--	100% (--)
7. Counts by rote to 10.	9.9%	90.1%	1.4%	98.6% (+8.5)
8. Recognizes and names some numbers to 10.	14.1%	85.9%	4.2%	95.8% (+9.9)

These seven tables summarize the findings from the Gearing Up for Kindergarten project for the 2009-10 year on teacher's perceived changes in children's school readiness on specific items. The following points can be made from the findings:

- As with parents, teachers in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program **routinely rate pre-kindergarten children quite highly on most indicators of school readiness.** This suggests that most children are already developing quite well in their preparation for the school experience. It also means that there is somewhat limited room for change to be indicated across specific items.
- **The findings on school readiness of children across several domains are quite similar to the parent-rated findings for children in the program. These findings from an independent second source of assessment for children on school readiness reaffirm and strengthen the findings as provided by parents of children. Small to moderate gains were noted for many indicators of school readiness in children. These gains are likely due to a combination of participation in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program, normal processes of child development, and other contributing factors. Other indicators showed no or limited evidence of change. Sometimes this was due to the fact that the children were already perceived as highly developed on that indicator, while on others there was change but it was not enough to reach statistical significance. However, the wide-ranging evidence of growth in children's specific domains of development related to school readiness is highly encouraging and evidence of program success.**
- Among 39 indicators of school readiness rated by teachers on a scale of 1 to 3, **significant differences were measured on 31 of the 39 indicators between fall 2009 and spring 2010. This means that 79 percent of the indicators for school readiness that were rated by teachers showed positive growth in children participating in Gearing Up for**

Kindergarten. Positive increases occurred on indicators in all five of the school readiness categories using this rating scale.

- These findings showed significant differences in teacher perceptions of children’s school readiness from the beginning of the program to the end of the program on 31 indicators. These changes included **18 small to moderate increases between .10 and .30, and 13 substantive increases between .30 and .70.**
- The **12 largest significant differences for children** (as perceived by teachers) occurred in the following areas:
 - **“Reads” simple books (.70)**
 - **Recognizes that there is a relationship between letters and sounds (.61)**
 - **Recognizes written spellings represent spoken words (.61)**
 - **Writes some numbers (.54)**
 - **Identifies letters in the alphabet (.50)**
 - **Classifies objects used in daily experiences (.46)**
 - **Shows understanding of sequence of daily events (.44)**
 - **Determines “same,” “more than” and “less than” by comparing (.41)**
 - **Talks about what he or she is learning (.35)**
 - **Makes choices (.34)**
 - **Uses some letters in writing (.32)**
 - **Uses art to convey feelings and ideas (.32)**
- For children in the program, **indicators of school readiness related to physical development showed little or no change (not surprising as no room existed for change) while indicators related to practical knowledge showed a few substantive increases. For pre-kindergarten children, the percentage who knew their birth date increased by 25%, and those who were able to count by rote to 10 or recognize and name some numbers from 1 to 10 increased between 8 and 10%.**
- In analyzing all significant increases in the findings, **the findings suggest growth in five primary areas: (1) social skills and positive interaction with others; (2) ability to function more independently and learn actively in a guided environment; (3) development of specific pre-academic skills and knowledge regarding language and literacy; (4) development of specific pre-academic skills and knowledge regarding math and science; and (5) ability to express themselves through art and hands-on creative activities.**

These findings regarding changes in children’s social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and practical abilities related to school readiness show that many changes are occurring for children enrolled in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. While teachers indicate children are already doing well in most categories, there are also many significant changes occurring that move children toward greater school readiness. These findings indicate that the program likely has a number of positive impacts on children and their school readiness.

IV. Additional Parent and Child Assessments

Additional Parent and Child Assessments

As the Gearing Up for Kindergarten educational program has been assessed each year, a recurring question that has been asked focuses on whether existing assessment efforts are capturing the full story of parent and child experiences in the program. For example, parents may describe outcomes associated with their child's involvement in the program that are simply not asked about directly in current assessment efforts. Also, an assessment question may ask about impacts on a parent's behavior that is unlikely to be affected by the program since the program may not target the behavior in question. Refining assessment efforts to match identified program objectives and targeted outcomes is a continuing process in evaluation.

To further refine the program evaluation process with Gearing Up for Kindergarten, a small variety of additional parent and child assessments were included in the evaluation process in 2009-10 so that greater understanding of program impacts (or the lack thereof) could be investigated. Seven small measures were included that examined the following areas: (1) social and communication patterns of children; (2) emotional patterns of children; (3) parent-child daily interactions; (4) positive parenting activities; (5) orientation to parent involvement in school; (6) importance of parent involvement; and (7) parent views of child academic skills preparation. It was not expected that there would be significant findings in relation to each of these areas. Rather, these measures were included as an investigative process to understand more fully how the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program does or does not seem to affect participants. Thus, only a brief report on the investigative assessments is included here.

Social and Communication Patterns in Children

Social development and communicative ability is an important aspect of a child's readiness to enter the schooling experience. To further assess the perceived influence of the program on social and communication patterns in pre-kindergarten children, an existing measure which examined 6 items was included in the assessment. Parents rated their children both before and after participation in the program on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 – "not at all" to 5 = "very well." A higher score represents a more positive assessment of the child's patterns. Scores are provided in Table 25 which indicate the pre-test score, post-program score, difference score and level of significance.

Emotional Patterns in Children

Developing the ability to handle anxiety and process emotions in a group or learning environment is another important domain of child development related to school readiness. Similar to social and communicative ability, an existing measure was used to examine emotional patterns in children. Again, 6 items were assessed by parents. Parents rated their children both before and after participation in the program on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 – "not at all" to 5 = "very well." A higher score represents a more positive assessment of the child's patterns. Scores are provided in Table 26 which indicate the pre-test score, post-program score, difference score and level of significance. More in-depth results are provided for these two measures because the results were of greater significance.

Table 25: Child Social and Communication Patterns – Parent Assessment

Question Description of Child	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
1. My child resolves problems with friends or brothers or sisters on his/her own.	2.88	3.39	.51	Yes
2. My child is very good at understanding other people's feelings.	3.49	3.84	.35	Yes
3. My child shares things with others.	3.59	3.93	.34	Yes
4. My child is helpful to others.	3.97	4.22	.25	Yes
5. My child listens to others' points of view.	3.22	3.73	.51	Yes
6. My child can give suggestions and opinions without being bossy.	3.09	3.61	.51	Yes

Table 26: Child Emotional Patterns – Parent Assessment

Question Description of Child	Beginning of Program Fall 2009 (Mean Score)	End of Program Spring 2010 (Mean Score)	Significant Difference Score	Is there a significant difference in this area?
1. My child can accept things not going his/her way.	2.78	3.16	.38	Yes
2. My child copes well with failure.	2.81	2.99	.18	No
3. My child thinks before acting.	3.07	3.36	.30	Yes
4. My child can calm down when excited or all wound-up.	3.27	3.47	.20	Yes
5. My child does what he or she is told to do.	3.45	3.73	.28	Yes
6. My child controls his/her temper when there is a disagreement.	2.96	3.41	.45	Yes

These two tables summarize the findings from the Gearing Up for Kindergarten project for the 2009-10 year on parent assessments of children's social and emotional patterns. The following points can be made from the findings:

- Parents noted growth in the capacities of children in both the social and communicative and emotional domains over the 6-month period of the program. This growth mirrors similar patterns found in other assessments done with children in the program. Change and growth in such abilities is a common feature of development in early childhood.
- Among 12 indicators of social and emotional development rated by parents on a scale of 1 to 5, **significant differences were measured on 11 of the 12 indicators between fall 2009**

and spring 2010. This means that nearly all of the indicators for social and emotional development that were rated by parents showed positive growth in children participating in Gearing Up for Kindergarten. These changes included small to moderate increases between .20 and .50.

- **The 6 largest significant differences for children** (as perceived by parents) occurred in the following areas:
 - **Child resolves differences with other children individually (.51)**
 - **Child listens to others' points of view (.51)**
 - **Child can give suggestions without being bossy (.51)**
 - **Child controls temper when there is a disagreement (.45)**
 - **Child can accept things not going his/her way (.38)**
 - **Child is good at understanding others' feelings (.35)**

These findings simply provide further positive evidence that the program seems to be linked with positive growth in the areas of social and emotional development for children.

Parent-Child Daily Interactions

To assess how involvement in the program may or may influence parent-child daily interactions at home, a short measure consisting of 6 items was given to parents to complete both prior to and following program participation. Parents described the frequency of interactions over the previous two-day period on basic interactions including eating a meal together, showing affection, and other common interactions. Since the program does not specifically target such interactions, it was interesting to investigate whether it appeared to impact their frequency in any significant manner. There were no differences measured in the levels of interaction recorded on any item between parents and children, except in two areas.

There was a .30 mean difference (increase) in pre and post-program scores for parents' interactions in non-school type activities (playing, etc.) which approached statistical significance. Further, there was a significant pre and post-program difference (mean score difference of .49) on shared reading time with children, indicating that parents read significantly more often with their pre-kindergarten child following the program than before it. These two items were perhaps the most likely to involve differences since they are most closely linked to program objectives.

Positive Parenting Activities

Another element of family life that was assessed to investigate how the program might affect family interactions was positive parenting activities. Parents completed a short 5-item measure that examined positive parenting activities, such as laughing together or playing games together. Again, parents rated their activities both before and after participation in Gearing Up for Kindergarten, rating the frequency of each activity on a 5-point scale from "never" to "many times each day." Most items were already rated quite highly and there was minimal room for change, but even so, measurable change was indicated on only one item. **A significant difference emerged for the frequency with which parents spent time doing something special with their child that he or she enjoys.** This increase in behavior was modest (.22 mean difference) but significant, suggesting that the program impacts selected behaviors but not all aspects of parenting.

Orientation to Parent Involvement in School

As parent involvement is a central interest of the program, a couple of measures were selected to assess parents' level of orientation toward parent involvement in their child's upcoming school experience. This was somewhat difficult to assess since the child was not yet in school, but parents did complete a 7-item measure asking them to agree or disagree with varying aspects of orientation to parent involvement in school (knowledge of how to help a child learn, etc.). Each item was measured on a 6-point scale of disagreement to agreement. Two of the seven items measured indicated some improvement over the course of the program. Statistical comparison showed that **parents felt significantly more confident in knowing how to help their child do well in school following the program. Also, parents indicated they felt more certain that they were reaching their child as they worked together.** Other items did not indicate any significant changes.

Importance of Parent Involvement

We used portions of a measure assessing attitudes toward parent involvement and selected 13 items to assess with parents. Parents completed this measure prior to and following participation in the program. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from "not at all important" to "extremely important." Nearly every item was rated well above 6.0 in importance at the first assessment by the group of parents, and so there was very little room to measure perceived change. Each item remained high in importance among the group of parents, but as they were already very high, then there was no meaningful change in any item measured. This pattern is likely to involve "ceiling effects" in that the initial "ceiling" of measurement is so high that there is very little likelihood of finding any measurable change on the items assessed. It was gratifying to note that parents already felt very strongly about the importance of parent involvement and this was maintained over the course of the program.

Parent Views of Child Academic Skills Preparation

Parents were asked to rate the importance of 4 aspects of child academic skills preparation. These items included knowledge of the alphabet, ability to count, and similar abilities. The ratings were given on a 7-point scale from "not at all important" to "extremely important," and similar to the ratings for importance of parent involvement, were extremely high from the beginning and showed no meaningful change during the program. It is critical to note, however, that quite dramatic changes were noted in actual child abilities in these areas during the program, some evidence of the important that parents placed on assisting their children in this area.

V. Parent Ratings of Child and Adult Change

One barometer of how children and parents are affected by the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program is how parents describe whether any perceived change has occurred in the abilities and behavior of their children or themselves as a result of participation. In order to assess perceptions of change in children and adults, parents completed a post-program Ratings of Change Form in the 2009-2010 program year. This brief survey allowed them to record their observations regarding whether there had been negative change, no change, or positive change in the abilities and behavior of themselves and/or their participating child during the program year.

The Ratings of Change Form was filled out a single time following the conclusion of the program. Each question asked parents to rate the perceived degree of change on specific items related to their own or their child's abilities and behavior. Parents responded to 10 questions regarding the perceived degree of change in their child's abilities and behavior, including such items as self-esteem, ability to follow rules, ability to identify numbers and count, and level of conflict with other children. Each item referred to a specific ability or behavior linked with school readiness. Additionally, parents responded to 11 questions regarding the perceived degree of change in their own abilities and behavior relative to parenting issues, such as difficulty in parenting their child, amount of praise given to the child, and how well the parent and child get along with each other. Each item was rated by parents on a 7-point scale ranging from -3 = "Much worse" to 0 = "No change" to 3 = "Much improved." For purposes of analysis, the scale was modified to a 1 to 7 scale. Therefore, listed scores represent the following:

- 1 to 3 – Much worse to A little worse
- 4 – No change
- 4 and above to 7 – A little improved to Much improved

Participants in the Ratings of Change Form

Participation in the Ratings of Change Form were individual parents whose children were involved in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program from fall 2009 to spring 2010. These families participated in the split 16-session model of the program, and the Ratings of Change Form was completed once at the conclusion of the program by parents. Parents provided feedback on perceived ratings of change for their participating pre-kindergarten child and also for themselves. A total sample 87 participants responded to the form, resulting in a response rate of 78%.

Findings on Parent Ratings of Child and Adult Change

The key areas of change assessed by parents related to school readiness and healthy parenting were: (1) *Child School Readiness Items* (10 items), (2) *Adult Healthy Parenting Items* (11 items). Two tables (Tables 27-28) are included below, one of which covers each category, and there are mean group scores for each item. Again, in Tables 27-28 the scores are represented on a scale between 1 and 7, with higher scores between 4 and 7 indicating greater perceived change on a specific item. Also, the combined frequency scores for each item indicating the percentages that parents rated as "somewhat improved" or "much improved" are also included.

Table 27: Ratings of Change – Child School Readiness Items

Question How much change has there been in:	Mean Score – Perceived Change	Combined Frequency Score (“Somewhat” & “Much Improved”)
1. Your child’s self-esteem.	5.57	58.6%
2. Your child’s ability to get along with other children.	5.46	56.3%
3. Your child’s ability to get along with adults, such as the teacher in the program and you.	5.63	64.3%
4. Your child’s ability to follow rules.	5.60	63.2%
5. Your child’s self-reliance.	5.66	62%
6. Your child’s ability to identify letters and sounds from the alphabet.	5.64	60.9%
7. Your child’s ability to identify numbers and count.	5.61	58.6%
8. Your child’s willingness to follow your instructions.	5.44	50.5%
9. Your child’s ability to stop and calm down when excited or upset.	5.25	43.6%
10. Your child’s level of conflict with other children.	5.13	41.3%

Table 28: Ratings of Change – Adult Healthy Parenting Items

Question How much change has there been in:	Mean Score – Perceived Change	Combined Frequency Score (“Somewhat” & “Much Improved”)
1. Your ability to increase your child’s positive behavior.	5.66	59.8%
2. Your ability to decrease your child’s negative behavior.	5.61	56.3%
3. Your satisfaction with being a parent to your child.	5.70	65.5%
4. Difficulty in parenting your child.	5.21	41.4%
5. Your ability to stop and calm down when upset with your child.	5.55	56.3%
6. Amount of yelling at your child.	5.47	49.4%
7. Amount of praise you give to your child.	5.71	63.2%
8. Your ability to clearly state what you want your child to do.	5.68	58.6%
9. Your ability to follow through on instructions or directions that you have given your child.	5.57	55.1%
10. Your ability to discipline your child effectively when necessary.	5.56	55.2%
11. How well you and your child get along with each other.	5.49	52.8%

These two tables summarize the findings from the Gearing Up for Kindergarten project for the 2009-10 year on perceived changes in child and adult abilities and behaviors, as stated by parents. The following points can be made from the findings:

- Parents perceive significant levels of change for pre-kindergarten children on a variety of key items related to school readiness. For each of the 10 items related to school readiness, parents indicated a substantial amount of change during the course of the program. **The five areas in which parents assigned the highest degree of perceived change were: (1) child self-reliance; (2) ability to identify letters and sounds from the alphabet; (3) ability to get along with adults; (4) ability to identify numbers and count; and (5) ability to follow rules.** In addition, parents noted a significant level of perceived change on the other items related to school readiness as well.
- As with their perceptions of children, parents also suggest that there are significant levels of change for many adults who participate in the program on key items related to healthy parenting. For each of the 11 items related to healthy parenting, parents indicated moderate levels of change during the course of the program. For adults, **the five areas in which they assigned the highest degree of perceived change were: (1) amount of praise given to the child; (2) satisfaction in being a parent to the child; (3) ability to clearly state what you would like the child to do; (4) ability to increase the child's positive behavior; and (5) ability to increase the child's negative behavior.**
- On most items of potential change identified, approximately one half to three-fifths of the children or participants are noted as experiencing “some” or “much” change in a positive manner. Thus, among participants, the program seems to be associated with having a significant impact on a majority of children and parents who participate over a 16-week period. The wide-ranging evidence of growth in children's specific abilities and behavior, as well as that of adults, related to school readiness and healthy parenting is highly encouraging and evidence of program success.

These findings amplify our understanding regarding potential changes in children's abilities related to school readiness. The responses of parents suggest that many changes are occurring for children enrolled in the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. Furthermore, there are also substantive changes indicated for adults who become involved in the program and make incremental changes to their parenting approaches.

IV. Parent Feedback on Gearing Up for Kindergarten

In addition to the detailed information gathered from participants in Gearing Up for Kindergarten, a final and important aspect of the program evaluation involved gathering feedback through having parents respond to open-ended questions about the program. In the post-program surveys, parents were asked to respond to the following three questions:

- Is there anything you would like to share from your participation in this program? What, if anything, have you been led to do differently as a result of Gearing Up for Kindergarten?
- How has your child benefited from attending Gearing Up for Kindergarten?
- What do you like most about the program?

Parents were able to respond to each question and share their thoughts, experiences, and feelings related to their participation in the program with their child. The first question allowed parents to share feedback on *outcomes from their experience as a parent in the program*. The second question allowed parents to share feedback on *outcomes for their child as a result of participation in the program*. Finally, the third question allowed parents to describe *most useful or helpful elements of the program that were important to them*.

Qualitative feedback provides a different kind of view of how participants reacted to and experienced the Gearing Up for Kindergarten program. The responses are more descriptive, personal and wide-ranging. We conducted a brief thematic analysis of the main response categories that were shared by participants and have selected a variety of responses for each question that highlight the responses of participants. Not all participant comments are selected here for purposes of brevity; however, it is interesting to note that of all the written comments there was nothing negative written about the program or its influence. The responses included here come from the 2009-10 program year.

Qualitative Feedback from Parents about Gearing Up for Kindergarten

As we examined the difference that Gearing Up for Kindergarten has made for participants and their children, we asked parents a number of response questions. Some of their answers are shared below to highlight key categories that emerged in the analysis of their responses.

What have you been led to do differently as a parent as a result of Gearing Up for Kindergarten?

More Time and Active Involvement with Children

- This was a very good experience for myself and my child. More time for parent interaction.
- I have begun to take more “one-on-one” time with my children.
- The program has helped me to better interact with my kids.
- We are limiting TV time and trying to do more activities that help with learning.
- More at-home activities with my child.
- We are trying to turn off the TV at dinner time and spend more “quality time” together.
- I am certainly more aware of the fact that every moment can be a teaching and learning moment for a young mind, and I am much more conscious in what I choose to do.

Improved Parenting Efforts in Specific Areas

- How to parent better – how to work on the child’s behavior and attitudes, and how my child would react to school situations and other children.
- I learned more positive discipline approaches and teaching/learning techniques to apply than I ever have before.
- This class has increased my confidence as a single parent and made me more comfortable that the choices I make for us are the best for all of us. I am more relaxed as a parent – less “loud talking” and more discussion about their decisions.
- I really tried to learn to avoid the negative responses, such as “no,” “don’t,” “stop that,” or “quit it.” Once it was brought to my attention, it was amazing how much I had used them.
- We always read to our son every night, but since the program I try to really make sure we read at least 20 minutes every night. Also, thinking of him more and understanding his emotions has been helpful.
- I have learned how to better discipline my children. I have also learned about the different learning styles and am more able to help my child learn in a manner more effective for him.
- I feel that I have learned many things, such as safety and school readiness, that have led me to change some things about the way I parent. Much of the information I received was new to me since this is my first child entering school.
- I have been led to be more exploratory and investigative in my parenting. I have tried to improve in areas where I wasn’t doing too well (like sleep routines), because I didn’t know the information I know now.
- I am initiating more learning activities and reading more.
- I have focused more on our TV exposure and discipline.
- I have learned parenting skills that are very important to me and handouts that help me as a single parent.
- We do less TV watching.
- I try to set a specific bedtime and now realize how important sleep is (for children).
- I feel more empowered as a parent to make certain changes that were needed at my house, such as, more reading time, giving kids jobs, different discipline and more enforced bedtimes.
- The discipline section was very beneficial for us. We’ve implemented what we have learned and it has worked.

- My husband and I have taken turns coming to these classes, and the information we have received each week has been extremely beneficial to us as individual parents, but also as a team in parenting.

Increased Awareness of Child's Specific Needs

- I found the information on speech and hearing issues to be very helpful.
- I have tried to listen a little more closely to my child and work through the issue before getting upset.
- The idea that a child needs to learn to do things for themselves (i.e., make own bed) was a point driven home for me during Gearing Up. I used to do stuff for my kids because that was easier, but I've gotten better at letting my child do it.
- A lot of the topics opened our eyes about learning styles and what is/is not typical for a child this age.
- I have realized my daughter was wanting to make more decisions on her own. I have given her more opportunities to make more decisions, and there have been less power struggles.
- I learned to listen to her more, that she is a "hands-on" learner, and also to take the time to learn how to do things herself.
- I take more time to listen to him and ask more questions.
- We are talking more, discussing emotions and getting at the root of emotional issues.
- We have focused on preparing our child for kindergarten with activities suggested by this program that we may not have known he should know prior to starting school (zipping coat, writing name, etc.).
- We are more patient about explaining things and preparing him for new experiences.
- I have learned to be more patient with my child and let him make some of his own decisions.
- I have learned to be more patient and try to see things at my child's level.
- I have been much more concerned with kindergarten readiness. I have definitely been more focused on skills needed for next year.
- I have received some great information on what my daughter should be able to do by the time she starts kindergarten, and also discipline techniques that can be effective.

How has your child benefited from Countdown to Kindergarten?

Increased Social Confidence and Positive Peer Interactions

- He has grown so much and I believe he is now ready! Thank you! Please continue to offer this program for others to enjoy and learn!
- Yes, very helpful, I believe he has become better socially.
- She has become more social and has become more excited about learning and school.
- She loves coming and her socialization has gotten better. She's proud of her accomplishments.
- She is more excited for kindergarten to start and not as nervous as before.
- Making friends.
- Loves the social interaction with children and teachers.
- Social discipline.
- Yes, I believe she has much better self-esteem. She is so interested in learning and learns quickly. Thank you! Please continue this program. It was good to go for our whole family.
- He has learned to be more comfortable in a school setting and meeting new people.
- He has much more confidence now. He is very excited to start "real" kindergarten in the fall. He is calmer and can talk about things now.
- He seems more confident in himself, talking to other kids and able to handle his emotions better.
- He is more secure in being alone without me.
- She is more confident, less fearful, and more excited about kindergarten.
- He is more cooperative and tries harder to follow directions.
- He's learned to try more things and complete them even if he doesn't like how it's going. He has learned that he needs to be more independent without worrying about failing, or getting something not exactly right.
- He has become more comfortable interacting and following instructions.
- She has learned new activities and gained more social skills. She loves meeting new friends.
- It has been good for her to socialize with other kids her age, as well as to practice following a structured school routine with a teacher. She has had a great time socializing with other kids.
- It has given her exposure to more kids and improved her social skills. She really enjoyed it and looked forward to it each week.
- She is more excited about kindergarten and it's helped with her social skills.
- She is interacting with kids her own age better than when the program started and is going to bed earlier.
- Friendships and playing with other children her age.
- More confidence in interacting with other children, also speaking up in a classroom setting.
- She has made friends, developed social skills, and learned educational etiquette.
- My child gained more confidence, socializes a little better, and looks forward to "checking out" a book.
- It happily has helped him overcome separation anxiety, especially interaction with kids he didn't know.

Improved Pre-Academic Skills in Reading, Math and Other Subjects

- She is more prepared for kindergarten – she has experiences now with science, math, literacy, and being in a class setting.
- Doing the activities – some were just fun like drawing and other crafts, and some really shaved off all that he knows already and challenged him on what he has yet to learn like sequences, math, and letters.
- I have seen a lot of improvement in following through with tasks and her attention span.
- More confident with letters, numbers, etc.

- He has become more interested in science.
- She has shown more interest in spending time reading, and writing her numbers and the alphabet letters.

Greater Awareness and Comfort with School Routines and Expectations

- She has become excited about kindergarten and more comfortable in a school setting.
- I feel that my daughter has greatly benefitted from this program. She has met many kids her age and several of the teachers. The activities were something she very much enjoyed. Also, being in the school setting has made her feel much more comfortable and excited about starting school in the fall.
- The experience of what a kindergarten experience is going to be like for him. He learned how he has to behave and listen. More experiences in different settings and situations and with other children.
- They are excited now and talking about kindergarten.
- She feels more confident about going to kindergarten.
- He has developed a positive attitude and excitement to start kindergarten.
- She got the feeling of how school is going to be and how to listen to a teacher.
- I think being in the building and getting to know a teacher here will help her so much in adjusting to coming here for school.
- Just getting an idea of what it is going to be like – from play time and learning to being away from mom at the school setting.
- My child has been exposed to the classroom environment and knows what to expect when school starts. He has learned how to play and interact with other kids and teachers. He is definitely ready to start kindergarten.
- He loved the activities and it gave him a chance to be involved in a school setting with myself there. He also got experience using the materials that will be used in kindergarten.
- She has learned about how school will be and what things she can expect.
- She has learned many new songs and heard new stories. She also had to raise her hand and be called on, which she hadn't learned till this class.
- He has thoroughly enjoyed going to an actual school and has now told me he is ready to start kindergarten. He is more excited to demonstrate self-care skills.
- She has learned to listen and pay attention to her teachers.
- This program has definitely helped my child be ready for the transition to kindergarten. It has been great for developing social skills. Also, it helps him get familiar with the environment.
- She has become more comfortable sharing things with her class and has become more aware of following directions.
- Becoming more familiar with the school environment and sharing with his peers makes him more confident.

What did you like most about the program?

Time Spent Together in Learning Activities with Child

- This is an excellent program. We have gained so much. It is nice to have dedicated learning time together.
- I have greatly appreciated the new opportunities for learning provided each week. Very fun!
- Parent-child play time.
- The hands-on learning that the children get with parents.
- It was good for us to spend time together one-one-one. I liked the child care too, it made it possible for us to participate.
- The ability to interact in activities with my child.
- Activities with my child.
- I liked the classroom activities for my child.
- Getting to do activities with my child.
- I love the activities. They were very effective in stirring my son's curiosity. They taught me that we can do very interesting and educational things with normal household items.
- I liked the "play time" – doing interesting experiments that I would never think of. It gave us some special time for just the two of us.
- The time I get to spend doing constructive activities with my child has been very enjoyable.
- I like the learning games and science experiments we did together. I enjoyed the one-on-one time with my son.
- Getting to spend one-on-one time with my child. Doing activities in class with my child and watching her enjoy it.
- I appreciated that she and I had the time to do projects with each other.
- The learning activities for the children are great – so many fresh and exciting activities we have not tried at home.
- The one-on-one time with my pre-kindergarten child has been great.
- I have enjoyed watching my child grow and interact with other children, and also have time for me to be there and do activities with him.
- I liked that it encouraged parent-child interaction and it gave kids an additional opportunity to learn and experience age-appropriate things.
- I like the exposure to the classroom and being able to have dedicated time with my child in helping her learn.
- The time to interact with my child – being able to focus on her and do activities together.
- The parent-child activities at the beginning of each class are great. They are age-appropriate, educational, and often messier than things we do at home.

Preparation of Parent and Child for Kindergarten Experience

- I have a better understanding of expectations for my child and will work harder to prepare my child.
- I became much more aware of what is expected in kindergarten and have been working on my child's readiness.
- Learning what you need to know for your child before he or she goes to kindergarten. Also, to read a lot more to my children so they can catch on better and like to read books.
- Everything about this program has helped my daughter and myself prepare for next year.
- That it got our child excited about kindergarten and gave him more confidence about what school would be like.
- I like that we are in a school setting, getting used to it and interacting with teachers and other parents. This class helped me become more relaxed about kindergarten and helped our child as well.

- This is the second time I have attended this program. I love how it prepares the child for the kindergarten experience. I went through it 2 years ago with my daughter. It really helped her becoming familiar and comfortable with the environment. Going through it now with my son has been excellent. He has really gotten used to the kindergarten center and is always very excited to come.
- Getting children comfortable with school, teachers and other kids.
- What I really like is how it helps get the children comfortable with the school, teacher, and the school atmosphere. In the fall the anxiety of going to a new place that is unfamiliar will not be there – very helpful. This is the second child that I've had to go through this program and I am very pleased.
- It is great to have the opportunity to bring my child to the school she will attend. She is much more excited about kindergarten.
- I got to see him in a school setting and see how much he is really going to enjoy school, which helped me feel confident that he will have a positive school experience.
- Seeing the interaction with the teacher and the kids has helped us at home to read better, and know what words and phrases to use to help her learn. We also like that it is at the school where our child will be attending kindergarten.
- Information given about what a child is expected to achieve before entering kindergarten.
- I like that my child is really getting a sense of what to expect and what is expected of her in kindergarten. Learning is fun. There are so many different activities that they do, and sometimes I don't think the kids actually know they are learning something.
- My child has loved coming. The experience is definitely preparing him for being in a classroom next year. It has allowed him to give little homework presentations and learn about what happens at school and some of the expectations.
- I like that my child is able to get familiar with a classroom setting, other children his age, teachers and the school he will be attending.

Parenting Discussion and Support

- It was very helpful just talking with other parents.
- This program has been a great source of information and support.
- There was a reassuring support to our current parenting – just knowing we were doing things the way they should have been done.
- The discussions between the parents were very useful.
- Parent time.
- Talking with other parents and my child making new friends.
- Interacting with other parents.
- I like the group discussions and interactions with others in similar situations.
- Group discussions and knowing that I am not the only one with certain problems.
- Interacting with other parents and the staff, having the program in a school environment.
- Interaction with other parents – it was nice to have so many other parents who are in the “same boat.”
- Visiting with other parents, asking questions and getting another parent's point of view.
- Being with other parents who have kids the same age.
- The useful information in the handouts and the discussions with other parents.
- I like the knowledge of child development to help bridge the gap in awareness between what my child does and why.
- The worksheets with information on them and also the take-home activities.
- Getting information from the instructor and parents with older children was very nice and helpful.
- It's a short education in so many aspects of child development and parenting. It's like a crash course touching on all you need to know to help your child excel in so many different areas.

- I have really enjoyed networking with other parents.
- Meeting other parents with the same direction as me and receiving materials I can use for future reference.
- Having other parents there who have a child the same age – it is nice to relate to others in the same situation.
- Being able to share our stories with other parents, as well as lots of good shared information.
- It was a great opportunity to learn and share with other parents.
- I think the small group discussions are helpful – they help to understand what other parents are dealing with also.

Quality of the Program Experience

- Thank you! I appreciated the enthusiasm and dedication of all the teachers and helpers. I have learned more here than any book that is available.
- It is a useful program – glad it is offered. It has helped me to stop and think about my actions more.
- Since our child did not attend preschool this was very helpful – thank you!
- The teachers were great, loved the information, and the social experience for us was awesome!
- I loved the fact that you have great professionals coming in with age-appropriate information.
- The class was helpful to see my child in a social and educational setting with peers. Being able to do the activities and letting my child experience new activities was a great experience. The teachers were very friendly and knew what they were talking about.
- The activities we did together and the tips on parenting were very good. Very good program, I recommend this to everyone.
- I liked every aspect of this program. This is the second child I have sent through it, and it has been extremely beneficial.

APPENDIX A

FEEDBACK REPORT PROVIDED TO PARENTS ON CHILD SCHOOL READINESS

An example of the PPASR Report Sheet that was created for feedback from the program to parents concerning their children is included on the next two pages. It highlights the specific indicator for school readiness, the child's rating by the parent in either the fall or spring, the child's perceived level of performance, and the comparison score of the entire Gearing Up for Kindergarten group as a whole.

CHILD'S IDENTIFYING CODE AND NAME

Head Start, Fargo

ITEMS	CHILD'S PERCEIVED LEVEL	INDIVIDUAL SCORE	GROUP SCORE
LEARNING AND EXPLORATION: My child			
is curious and asks questions to learn more about a topic	Proficient	4	4.29
works with hands in putting together puzzles or building with blocks	Proficient	4	4.41
explores the environment and participates in new opportunities	Proficient	4	4.09
learns and recites familiar songs, nursery rhymes, finger plays or stories	Proficient	4	4.54
enjoys participating in small groups to play games or do learning activities	Proficient	4	4.18
draws and uses art to express ideas or feelings	Developing	2	3.66
is able to work independently on a task (painting, picking up clothes)	Proficient	4	4.07
likes to work at solving problems	Partly Proficient	3	3.53
is persistent when solving problems	Partly Proficient	3	3.26
PHYSICAL SKILLS AND ABILITIES: My child			
holds a pencil or crayon with fingers (not fist)	Proficient	4	4.44
can button, snap or zip pants or coat	Partly Proficient	3	4.18
moves easily from place to place when walking	Advanced	5	4.88
creates things using hands and paper, crayons, scissors, etc.	Proficient	4	4.47
is able to cut with scissors	Proficient	4	4.63
can catch or pick a rolled or thrown soft ball	Advanced	5	4.59
shows large motor skills, such as hopping, skipping, running, jumping or throwing	Advanced	5	4.84
FRIENDS AND SOCIAL INTERACTION: My child			
shares with other children (such as toys, crayons, etc.)	Partly Proficient	3	4.07
works or plays cooperatively with friends	Proficient	4	4.19
listens in a group situation	Partly Proficient	3	4.12
takes turns with others	Proficient	4	4.00
remembers and follows simple directions in playing games	Proficient	4	4.09
enjoys talking to or playing with other kids	Proficient	4	4.49
gets along without quarreling or fighting	Proficient	4	3.97
understands and follows rules that are explained	Partly Proficient	3	3.99
understands how to enter into talking or to play with other kids	Proficient	4	3.84
tries to solve problems with friends	Partly Proficient	3	3.29
KNOWING THE BASICS: My child			
is familiar with books and enjoys having others read to him or her	Proficient	4	4.82
tries to learn and use new words	Partly Proficient	3	4.46
is able to speak and communicate thoughts, needs and feelings in a way others understand	Proficient	4	4.65
is familiar with (or able to recognize) letters of the alphabet	Proficient	4	4.24
is familiar with (or able to recognize) numbers between 1 and 10 (or higher)	Proficient	4	4.50
is able to do counting, understand basic numbers (adding items together, etc.)	Partly Proficient	3	4.15
can sort things into basic groups (such as by color, shape, things that match, etc.)	Advanced	5	4.75
is creative in asking questions or trying to solve problems	Proficient	4	4.07
FEELINGS AND FAMILIES: My child			
feels loved and supported from family members at home	Advanced	5	4.91
spends time away from me in a variety of settings(child care, friend's house) without too much anxiety	Proficient	4	4.37

ITEMS	CHILD'S PERCEIVED LEVEL	INDIVIDUAL SCORE	GROUP SCORE
can identify his or her feelings (such as sad, angry, happy)	Proficient	4	4.56
can talk about how others might feel	Proficient	4	4.13
manages feelings, such as anger or frustration, without hurting or mean to others	Proficient	4	3.84
can adapt to new situations within a reasonable period and feel comfortable	Proficient	4	4.04
regularly shares how he or she is feeling with me or other caring adults	Proficient	4	4.22
appreciates getting to know new people or friends though time	Proficient	4	4.26
HEALTH, FITNESS AND PRACTICAL SKILLS: My child			
independently uses basic self-care skills, such as brushing teeth, using the toilet, washing hands, etc.	Proficient	4	4.54
eats a variety of snacks and foods	Advanced	5	4.38
is active and enjoys physical movement	Advanced	5	4.82
can recite his or her name, parents' names and contact information (address, phone number)	Partly Proficient	3	3.50
is able to understand location and get him or herself from one place to another (walk to a friend's house, ride a bike to the playground, etc.)	Advanced	5	3.85
has experience with following a routine at home, child care or preschool (such as bedtime routine, lunch routine, etc.)	Proficient	4	4.50
is aware of who to contact if he or she needs help	Developing	2	3.88
has experience using school-related supplies, such as pencils, paper, markers, backpack, etc.	Proficient	4	4.71
is able to put on clothes (coat, shoes, etc.) and take care of belongings (book, etc.)	Proficient	4	4.54
assist with simple household chores and is able to complete them with guidance	Partly Proficient	3	4.26
AS A PARENT, I			
give my child a variety of activities and learning experiences	Proficient	4	4.09
do arts and crafts, puzzles or other hands-on activities with my child	Proficient	4	4.18
get down and actively play with my child	Proficient	4	4.25
go walking, swimming or do other physical activities with my child	Proficient	4	4.28
provide my child with hands-on materials, such as crayons and paper, scissors, play dough, etc.	Advanced	5	4.63
give my child opportunities to be physically active (tumbling, playing at the park, dancing, playing ball, etc.)	Advanced	5	4.54
arrange for my child to play with other children his or her age	Partly Proficient	3	3.75
talk with my child how to get along with others even when they have a disagreement	Proficient	4	4.34
assist my child to begin play or interact with other children	Proficient	4	3.85
read with my child each day	Partly Proficient	3	4.56
discuss contents of a book or story with my child when we read	Partly Proficient	3	4.25
talk, laugh, sing and converse with my child	Proficient	4	4.71
respond quickly to my child's cues for attention (crying, questions)	Partly Proficient	3	4.38
help my child identify feelings such as sadness or fear	Proficient	4	4.37
discuss with my child how to handle feeling sad or upset	Proficient	4	4.26
teach my child self-care skills such as brushing teeth, using the toilet, etc.	Proficient	4	4.75
provide my child with regular routines at home	Proficient	4	4.46
work together on simple chores	Proficient	4	4.21
age of the participating parent		29	34.55
number of children in the family		1	2.34
age of child for this assessment		4	4.418