

**Children's National Medical Center and Rosemount Center
Monitoring and Assessing Rosemount Services (MAARS) Evaluation**

MAARS Evaluation: Summary of Final Report August, 2010

The Monitoring and Assessing Rosemount Services (MAARS) evaluation, including planning and data analysis, was conducted from 2007-2010, with data collection occurring at the beginning and end of the 2008-9 school year. The aim of the MAARS project was to conduct a rigorous evaluation of Rosemount Center program services, focused on the preschool classes, to assess program impact on both child and family development.

Some key findings included:

- Children in the study who were not native English speakers scored near national averages on measures of cognitive skills related to kindergarten readiness, indicating that these children are not falling behind their native English-speaking peers in these areas, which one might expect to be harder for them.
- Rosemount children were rated quite high by their parents and teachers on social skills, an important developmental task for preschool children. Their social interaction and social independence skills were particularly strong. This is of particular significance when one considers Rosemount's diverse socioeconomic mix of children and families. Social skills are a critical element when setting the stage for future school success, and strong skills developed at this age can put children on a positive trajectory for successful behavior in school.
- Parent and teacher ratings of behavior problems were quite low among Rosemount's children. Problematic behaviors such as turning inward, displaying anxious or sad behavior, impulsivity, inattention, and aggression were assessed. Research has consistently found higher rates of behavior problems among children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. No relationship was found between parent income or education and behavior problems among the Rosemount children. This finding is important because behavior problems seen in the preschool years have been shown to be persistent and predictive of more serious behavior problems in later childhood and adolescence.
- Parents of Rosemount children reported doing many activities at home to support learning. Such activities include working with the child at home on learning concepts, taking the child places in the community to learn new things, and maintaining clear rules at home. This is an important form of parents' involvement in their children's education. Other studies have found lower school involvement among lower-income parents. At Rosemount, the analysis of differences among parents indicates that socioeconomic or language factors do not differentiate parents who are more or less likely to participate in structured school roles.
- Parents overall had very high scores on the measure of self-esteem and empowerment. Parents reported that they feel able to control the choices they make for their children and feel confident in their ability to make those choices in their children's best interest.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research questions addressed by the MAARS evaluation focused on both child and family outcomes and specifically examined:

1. kindergarten readiness skills for pre-kindergarten children
2. bilingual fluency of both native English and native Spanish speaking children
3. social-emotional development of the children
4. self-confidence and empowerment of parents
5. parents' educational and career attainment
6. parents' involvement in their children's education

Methods: Data obtained for the MAARS evaluation was collected from parents, children, and teachers at the Rosemount Center during the fall of 2008, and again during the summer of 2009. Baseline and follow-up data collection for the preschool and pre-kindergarten group included an in-person interview with the parent, an assessment of the child's bilingual language abilities and kindergarten readiness (for pre-kindergarteners only) conducted in the classroom, and self-administered questionnaires completed by the teachers. Two waves of data collection were used to assess the progress made by children and parents during the child's school year. Additional qualitative data were collected from parents in order to enrich interpretation and conclusions drawn from quantitative data, as well as describe additional aspects of program experiences.

All preschool-aged participants enrolled in the evaluation were classified as either "preschoolers" or "pre-kindergarteners", based on the child's academic level at the Center. Preschool participants were defined as children in preschool at the Rosemount Center in the 2008-2009 school year who would not advance to kindergarten in the upcoming (2009-2010) school year. Pre-kindergarten participants were defined as children in preschool at the Rosemount Center in the 2008-2009 school year who would be advancing to kindergarten in the upcoming (2009-2010) school year.

All eligible families with children attending the preschool program at the Rosemount Center during the 2008-2009 school year were invited to participate in the MAARS evaluation. Parents of preschoolers and pre-kindergarteners were eligible to participate if they did not have any personal involvement in the MAARS study, and their English or Spanish comprehension was sufficient enough to provide informed consent and complete the interview. During the wave 1 enrollment period, there were 88 preschool and pre-kindergarten children enrolled at the Rosemount Center, and 85 of those were eligible to participate in the study. Out of the 85 eligible children, 67 parents agreed to participate and were interviewed in their preferred language (English or Spanish) by the Research Assistant.

The Research Assistant, who is bilingual in Spanish and English, briefly described the purpose and the methods of the evaluation and asked if parents were interested in participating. She then scheduled an in-person appointment with interested parents to conduct the informed consent process in greater detail. During the informed consent process, she explained the purpose of the evaluation, any potential risks, discomforts, or benefits of participation, the study procedures, voluntary participation information, and confidentiality of the study. By providing informed consent, a parent gives authorization to the research team to conduct interviews and assessments with the parent, their child, and the child's teacher

throughout the course of the evaluation. Once informed consent was obtained, the Research Assistant began data collection.

Between June and August of 2009, the Research Assistant completed wave 2 interviews with all parents enrolled in the MAARS evaluation. To schedule the interviews, she made follow-up calls to the parents, and also spent time in the classrooms at the Center during pick-up and drop-off periods. For wave 2, parents were given the option to complete the interview in-person, either at the Rosemount Center, in a public area, or in the participant's home, or over the telephone. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, and were administered in the parent's preferred language (English or Spanish). Upon completion of the wave 2 interview, parents were given a \$30 gift card to Target as compensation for their time and participation. Of the 67 preschool and pre-kindergarten parents who completed wave 1 interviews, 55 were interviewed for wave 2. The Research Assistant was unable to complete wave 2 interviews with twelve of the parents who completed baseline interviews for the following reasons: ten of the parents moved out of the area or their children relocated to a new school and we did not have access to current contact information; one parent refused to participate due to time constraints; and one parent refused for other reasons.

Description of the Participating Families

The average or mean age of the 50 preschool children at the time of the wave 1 parent interview was 3.71 years, and the average age of the 17 pre-kindergarten children was 4.37 years. Preschoolers were 62% male and pre-kindergarteners were 41% male. Fifty-six percent of preschool families had been at Rosemount for 1-2 years, 32% had been at Rosemount for 3-4 years, and the remaining 12% had been there for 5 years or longer. Among families of pre-kindergarteners, 53% had been at Rosemount for 1-2 years, 29% had been there 3-4 years, and 18% had been there for 5 or more years.

Among preschool families, 40% spoke English at home, 36% spoke Spanish at home, 6% spoke English and Spanish equally, and 18% spoke another language. Among pre-kindergarten families, 35% spoke English at home, 41% spoke Spanish at home, 12% spoke both Spanish and English equally, and 12% spoke another language (Amharic).

Two percent of preschool children lived in a home with a single parent, 56% lived in a home with two parents, and 42% lived in a multigenerational home. There were no pre-kindergarten children who lived with a single parent, 75% of pre-kindergarteners lived with two parents and 25% lived in multigenerational households.

Thirty-two percent of preschool families and 35% of pre-kindergarten families were tuition-paying. Sixty-eight percent of preschool families and 65% of pre-kindergarten families were receiving Head Start services. Approximately half of preschool (52%) and pre-kindergarten (53%) families reported receiving some form of public assistance. Among preschool families, 32% reported an annual household income under \$25,000, 34% reported annual incomes between \$25,000 and \$50,000, 8% reported annual incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 22% reported annual incomes above \$100,000. The remaining families did not answer this question. Among pre-kindergarten families, 24% reported an annual household income under \$25,000, 29% reported annual incomes between \$25,000 and \$50,000, 18% reported annual incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 20% reported annual incomes above \$100,000.

Among preschool families, 20% of respondent parents did not complete high school, 16% completed high school or obtained a GED, 10% completed some college, 34% graduated from college, and 20% completed post-college graduate education. Among pre-kindergarten

families, 18% of parent respondents did not complete high school, 24% completed high school or obtained a GED, 18% completed some college, 29% graduated from college, and 12% completed post-college graduate education. At wave 1, 10 preschool parents were in school: 2 were in “regular” school, 3 were in trade/tech schools, 2 were in GED classes, and 5 were in other classes. No pre-kindergarten parents were in school.

Results

In sum, pre-kindergartners scored close to national averages in kindergarten readiness skills. Specifically, as a group their mean score was slightly below average for auditory processing skills, but essentially at the average in the areas of verbal and perceptual processing. It is important to note several points about this finding: (1) the Rosemount children, as a group, scored close to an average that is based on a sample designed to approximate the 2000 census data. That means that as a group their kindergarten readiness is comparable to children in the nation as a whole, across race/ethnicity, parent education, and other demographic categories. (2) Rosemount children from tuition-paying families did score higher in kindergarten readiness skills than did children from Head Start families. This finding is consistent with numerous studies, which have found that parents’ socioeconomic status (income, education) strongly predicts children’s academic performance. (3) The average score for Rosemount pre-kindergartners on the auditory processing subscale is still within one standard deviation of the national mean. This means that, as a group, Rosemount pre-kindergartners are below national averages on their ability to differentiate sounds, and order and remember things that they hear but do not see. However, they are not extremely low on this skill, but rather within the 68% of children in the middle of the range.

Rosemount pre-kindergartners were more proficient in English than in Spanish, although more children are native Spanish speakers than native English speakers. Thus, native Spanish speakers were more likely to become proficient in English than native English speakers were to become proficient in Spanish. Roughly one quarter of the pre-kindergartners were bilingual. Rosemount preschoolers were also more likely to be proficient in English than in Spanish. Only slightly less than one-fifth of the preschoolers were bilingual.

Both pre-kindergartners and preschoolers at Rosemount exhibited social skills that were well above average when compared to a national sample of children of similar age, and their social interaction and independence were particularly high. Teachers perceived children’s social skills as slightly higher than parents did, and both parent and teacher reports of social skills increased slightly from the beginning to the end of the year. We are not able to determine the extent to which this was due to maturity versus skills learned specifically at Rosemount. However, given the fact that both teacher and parent report of both preschoolers and pre-kindergartners were very high suggests that supporting social skills is a strong component of what Rosemount provides for children. While not measured in the kindergarten readiness scale in this evaluation, social skills are considered an important component of school readiness. Consistent with research on behavior in preschool aged children, we found that parents’ socioeconomic status (income, education) was associated with their children’s social skills. Specifically, social skills were higher among children of parents who graduated from college and who did not receive public assistance. We also found that parents of children who were native English speakers reported greater social independence in their children than did parents who are native Spanish speakers. This may be a cultural difference.

As a group, both preschoolers and pre-kindergarteners exhibited slightly fewer internalizing and externalizing behavior problems than is average for children of their age. Teachers perceived fewer behavior problems for both groups of children than did parents, and both parents and teachers rated preschoolers higher for behavior problems than pre-kindergarteners. Finally, both parent and teacher ratings of behavior problems decreased slightly over the course of the school year. The lower ratings for pre-kindergarteners compared to preschoolers suggests that maturity is at least a component of this improvement over time. The fact that teachers' ratings were consistently lower than parents suggests that the school setting was helpful to children in controlling problematic behavior. The fact that both parent and teacher ratings of both groups are below national averages is important to note. Research has consistently found higher rates of behavior problems in this age group among children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. The fact that no relationship was found between parent income or education and behavior problems among the Rosemount students is striking.

Parents of both preschool and pre-kindergarten children were most involved in their child's education by supporting their learning at home, and less involved at school and in home-school conferencing. Preschool parents scored slightly lower on all forms of school involvement compared to pre-kindergarten parents, which might indicate that involvement increases with time at Rosemount. However, we also found that parents who had been at Rosemount for three or more years scored slightly higher only on the measure of school-based involvement, but lower on home-based and home-school conferencing when compared to parents who had been at Rosemount only 1-2 years. It is important to note that no differences in parent involvement were found based on parent socioeconomic status. Numerous studies have found lower school involvement among lower-income parents. The fact that this evaluation did not find that difference suggests that Rosemount is doing a good job of reaching out to parents across the socioeconomic spectrum. The fact that Spanish-speaking parents also reported high levels of involvement suggests that Rosemount is particularly able to include these parents who have been traditionally harder to engage in mainstream school environments.

Parents of both preschoolers and pre-kindergarteners overall had very high scores on the measure of self-esteem and empowerment. Parents in both groups indicated that they felt able to control the choices they make for their children and confident in their ability to make those choices in their children's best interest. Parents in both groups scored lowest on the subscale of formal participatory behavior, meaning they were less likely to participate in structured ways in the school setting. However, the large variability of scores on this subscale suggests that some parents are very likely to participate in this way whereas as others are not at all likely. Analysis of differences among parents indicates that socioeconomic or language factors did not differentiate parents who were more or less likely to participate in structured school roles. However, we did find that parents in two parent households and parents not receiving public assistance were more likely to feel that they have the skills to communicate, advocate, and make decisions for their children.

In terms of education and career planning, no notable patterns emerged. Not surprisingly, tuition-paying parents were more likely to be at the stage where they have achieved their education and career goals, and parents of children in the Head Start program were more likely to be actively working toward those goals.

When putting all of the collected data together, several themes emerge. First, Rosemount does an excellent job of supporting children's social and behavioral development. Overall we see high social skills, little problem behavior, and parents who are happy with the program's attention to the social-emotional development of the child. Social-emotional development is a critical, and sometimes overlooked, component of school readiness, and one which is particularly amenable to positive influence during the preschool years.

Second, parents' socioeconomic status (SES) does have some effect on outcomes for Rosemount children, particularly in the areas of cognitive development and social skills. However, this association was not seen across all child or parent outcomes. The fact that parent SES was not associated with parent involvement in school indicates Rosemount's ability to engage parents from all backgrounds. The diversity of family backgrounds at Rosemount is clearly something embraced both by the school staff and by the many parents who cited it as a strength of the program.

Third, the fact that children who are not native English speakers score near national averages on measures of cognitive skills related to kindergarten readiness indicates that these children have largely caught up with their native English-speaking peers in these areas, which one might expect to be harder for them.

Fourth, children at Rosemount seem to be doing a better job of learning English than learning Spanish. This finding echoes a concern voiced by some parents who expressed a wish for more of a truly bilingual education, particularly for the older children.

Fifth, there were slight improvements in almost every outcome over the course of the school year. It is impossible to definitively attribute this to any one cause. The consistency and the positive direction of the change over time, coupled with the consistent finding of slightly better outcomes for pre-kindergartners compared to preschoolers likely is a reflection of the fact that both children and parents tend to improve as children get older and both children and parents gain more experience. However, it is also plausible that positive experiences at Rosemount facilitate that positive growth. One can certainly say that experiences at Rosemount do not hinder growth in any parent or child domain.

Finally, parents are generally very happy with their experiences at Rosemount. While some parents have specific areas they would like to see improved, the sum of comments about the program was overall quite positive. Areas that parents most commonly wanted to see improved are greater communication between administration, teachers and parents; a greater focus on use of both English and Spanish, particularly for older children; an expanded or enhanced curriculum; and more opportunities for parent participation, both formally and in terms of an informal parent/family community. The need for more of a bilingual education and greater opportunities for parent participation were both supported as well by findings from the quantitative data.

For more information about the MAARS study and Rosemount Center's program, please contact: Martha Johnson at 202.265.9885 ext. 116 or at Martha.Johnson@rosemountcenter.com. For more information about Rosemount, please visit www.rosemountcenter.com