



RESEARCH BRIEF LAUP Parent Experiences

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This evaluation set out to examine and describe the effects of LAUP preschool programs on children and their families during preschool and beyond. The following brief summarizes findings and recommendations based on analyses of parent focus groups and interview data, and highlights key elements of child and family outcomes that resulted from attending LAUP preschool programs. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups with parents, conducted in 2013 and 2014, we learned that parents consider their children’s growth and learning to be among the biggest advantages conferred by attendance at an LAUP preschool. Through an analysis of the benefits consistently attributed by parents to LAUP preschools, four main themes emerged:

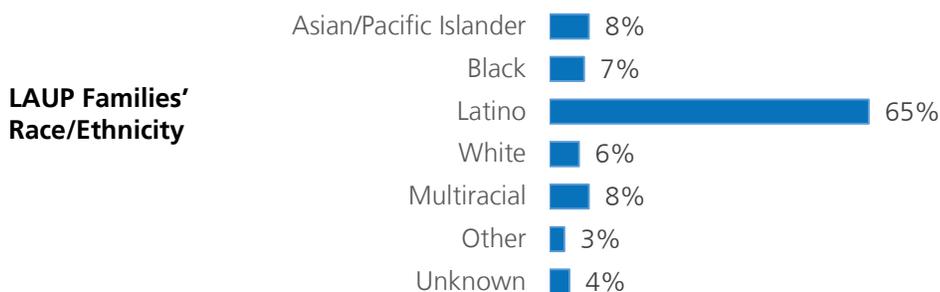
- Enhanced school readiness: easier transition to kindergarten
- Social-emotional development: increased social skills, emotional regulation, and well-being
- Home-school connection: facilitation of at-home learning
- Parent engagement: on-site activities at preschool, and participation in children’s education

These four themes are analyzed in detail, and their relevance to the LAUP model is discussed.

There is great diversity among LAUP families and the programs that serve them.

About 24% of LAUP’s programs are in family child care homes, and 76% are in centers. The center-based programs may be either publicly owned (mostly within school districts) or privately owned programs. Families typically had two children.

The average family is Latino.

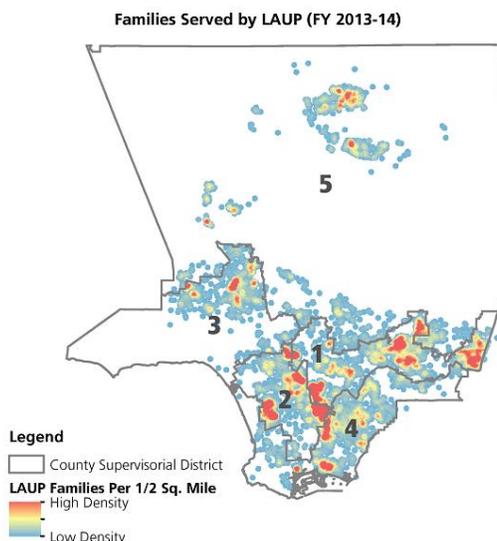


The average family has a household income of \$10,000 to \$29,999. With the federal poverty guideline for a family of four set at \$23,550, at least a third of family incomes are likely to be at poverty level (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2013). In reality, this number may be higher, because almost a third of families declined to report their annual income.



The map of Los Angeles County, below, displays the areas in which these families primarily live.

Families of LAUP students live in many different regions throughout Los Angeles County, with high density in Central and South Los Angeles. Areas with higher concentrations of LAUP families are marked in red.



Parent focus groups identified four major outcomes from family’s engagement in their children’s schooling and development.

Through analysis of parent focus group and interview data, nine major themes relevant to child and family outcomes were identified: 1) Physical Development, 2) Parent Satisfaction with LAUP Teachers, 3) Parent Professional/Educational Development, 4) Program Practice, 5) Diversity and Cultural Sensitivity, 6) Social-Emotional Development, 7) School Readiness and Outcomes, 8) Home-School Connections, and 9) Parent Engagement. Major themes were created based on initial themes that were drawn from parent data, and descriptions were then supplemented with LAUP programmatic components. Of these nine major themes, four were particularly prevalent in parent reports: 1) School Readiness, 2) Social-Emotional Development, 3) Home-School Connections, and 4) Parent Engagement. The benefits and outcomes associated with each of these four themes are summarized in Table 1, and discussed in detail below.

Theme	Outcome for Families	Importance
School Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kids played and did hands-on activities Language, literacy, and math Smooth transition to kindergarten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play improves motor development Early language skills improve educational outcomes
Social-Emotional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social awareness Emotional regulation Positive social skills Articulation of needs and wants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning happens in social interaction Decreases risk of behavior problems Communication is central in relationship-building
Home-to-School Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased family togetherness Newly developed structure and routine Parents gained free time to pursue personal, educational, or career goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves communication Routines build consistency and behavioral organization Goal attainment may lead to higher salaries, happiness, or satisfaction
Parent Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents felt respected by teachers Learned discipline models, teaching strategies through modeling Cultural connections, community togetherness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents become empowered agents of their children’s education Family engagement is linked to empathy, warmth, and respect in children

School Readiness

LAUP implements multiple strategies to encourage academic growth and development in young children. Central components of the LAUP model include an emphasis on learning through play and other hands-on activities; the development of language, literacy, and math skills; and preparing children and their families for kindergarten. These components are all related to positive long-term academic achievement (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005; Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008; Clements & Sarama, 2011; Patton & Wang, 2012). Virtually all parents reported improved learning outcomes as one of the biggest advantages of LAUP. Specifically, parents noted improvements in children's ability to read, articulate, and communicate in the home environment. Parents felt confident in their children's ability to thrive in kindergarten, and consistently reported a belief that this outcome was achieved by the LAUP model.

"The first month of kindergarten she got 'student of the month.' I mean, they didn't learn it from the kindergarten, they left from [preschool] already prepared. The teacher was amazed, and she was like, she's not my student. She's my TA."

- LAUP Parent

Socio-Emotional Development

Young children's social-emotional development is deeply tied to their future academic success (Gormley et al., 2011). Teachers are important figures in preschoolers' social and emotional development, and are responsible for facilitating an environment that supports development opportunities. At LAUP, providers are coached by trained staff on the importance of high-quality engagement, positive climate, peer interactions, and other domains that support the healthy social-emotional development of preschool children. LAUP also conducts quality assessments of LAUP-funded preschool programs using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008) to measure teacher-child interactions. The results of these assessments drive the goals set by LAUP coaches, which are designed to create gains in children's social-emotional development.

Parents reported higher levels of social awareness in their children's interpersonal relationships, and discussed their children's abilities to regulate emotion, verbalize wants and needs, and initiate pro-social behavior in the home. Parents also commonly mentioned that their children had gained "stability" in their emotions – that is, relative balance in their expressions of feelings and needs. Overall, LAUP parents reported that their children gained positive social skills which translated into multiple environments.

"...[My daughter] is now looking after the other kids and she's a lot less selfish. She's an only child so she didn't learn how to share, but now she's taking care of other kids and showing those kinds of changes in her personality."

- LAUP Parent

Home-School Connections

LAUP preschool providers share strategies to promote at-home learning. These strategies enable parents to help their children with homework and other activities, continuing the learning process at home while involving the family. A majority of parents reported that, as a result of their child bringing their preschool experience home, they established a learning-friendly home environment and participated in home learning activities with their children. Structure and routine were particularly noted as a benefit of LAUP preschools. The perceived benefits of preschool extended beyond the students, to their parents, families, and homes. For example, parents reported that their preschoolers' learning experience helped to prepare younger siblings for preschool, and that the home-school connections had a positive impact on fathers' involvement. Having a child in preschool also allowed parents a chance to carry out household duties, tend to other children, spend time with friends, continue with their own education and professional development, or just take a moment to relax.

"They learn the songs with motions and my daughter would come home and make her sister and me do it together, so just the environment at home is more, 'Let's sing together. Let's do the motions together.' So overall the environment at home has been the family doing it together."

- LAUP Parent

Parent Engagement

Parents reported that their child's LAUP preschool provider and teaching staff encouraged them to participate in activities at the school, home, and community levels. While a major benefit of parent engagement is improved student achievement, LAUP parents noted additional benefits to their families. These included the opportunity to observe their children within the classroom setting, which enabled them to learn more about their own children, and also increased their understanding of child development and parenting in general. Parents also reported that modeling – the ability to observe teaching staff and other engaged parents – was an effective and useful learning tool, and provided parents with the necessary information to best support their child in the home learning setting.

The creation of community was another benefit mentioned during focus groups. Many parents felt supported by community and cultural connections developed through their involvement with their child's preschool program. Interestingly, the new communities that developed as a result of parent engagement in their child's preschool also provided unexpected benefits to children and their families; for example, communities provided parents with a social network that supported child attendance.

"I just really appreciate the parent support and giving us a pat on the back. For graduation they actually gave us all certificates for participating. You don't get that anywhere. You really get acknowledged being here, being a participant, so it makes you feel good as a parent. We're not really recognized at all at other schools, it's all about the children, and here they really recognize the family."

- LAUP Parent

Recommendations

Ultimately, LAUP's most important goal is to prepare young children for success in school. This study highlighted a crucial piece of the complex network of support for this goal: the parents who are the heart of this support network. Parents believe LAUP has prepared their children for kindergarten, and list numerous benefits to the children, to themselves, and to their families. However, there are several suggestions for improvement. Due to constraints on parents' time, there is a need for more home- and community-based, as opposed to school-based, engagement opportunities. Parents also suggested more community-specific advertising of LAUP preschools, to target local families. Other recommendations included additional professional development among LAUP staff in the area of special needs and disabilities; creation of services and materials in languages beyond English and Spanish, to support an array of cultural and linguistic needs; and an extended (full-day) program. The extended program would be particularly helpful to parents who are working, single, in school, or who have other children; it would also help children who experience difficulty in their transition to kindergarten because they are not quite prepared for a full-day program. Despite these recommendations, LAUP parents reported experiencing numerous benefits and positive outcomes as a result of their child's preschool attendance, and felt that preschool providers successfully engaged families in their children's education.

References

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Appendix - Methodology

This research evaluation occurred during the 2013-14 program year and relied upon qualitative methods. Data were obtained from five parent focus groups with a total of 32 parents, and from case study interviews with three LAUP “power families” – families with three or more children who have attended an LAUP preschool. In each of the five supervisorial districts, focus groups were conducted with parents of children who attended an LAUP preschool during the 2012-13 program year. Parents who were willing to participate were identified with the help of LAUP providers. The purpose of the focus groups was to examine how families have been involved with their children’s preschool programs, how they have supported their children’s educational development, which aspects of their LAUP experience they most valued, and which areas they recommended for improvement of our programs. To build on the issues raised by these focus groups, case study interviews were carried out with three LAUP “power families,” who were also identified with the help of LAUP providers. Interviews were held in the homes of these families (with the exception of one interview, which was held at a coffee shop); these interviews serve as in-depth, longitudinal accounts of families, capturing their experiences, types of participation, and levels of satisfaction with LAUP.

Data analysis included transcribing and translating recorded field notes from observations and focus groups, while noting recurring themes and common responses to questions. Then, a more formalized content analysis was performed using the ATLAS.ti program, which included a search for words and themes. Themes were sorted into coded categories, in order to identify associations, patterns, or themes that repeated across participants. These results were used to examine relationships between themes and to explore similarities and differences among participants.

For more information about this evaluation please contact researchmail@laup.net.