



RESEARCH BRIEF

Academic and Social Outcomes for LAUP's Inaugural Cohort

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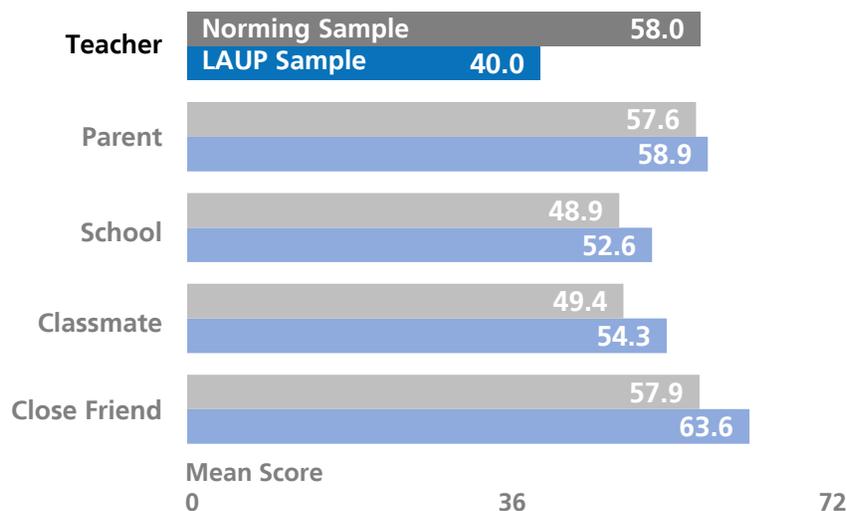
Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) provides high-quality preschool to children of all income levels throughout Los Angeles County. Many of the children served by LAUP are from low-income families or disadvantaged neighborhoods, and one of LAUP's goals is to enable these students to succeed in preschool and beyond. In 2004-2005, LAUP's first cohort of students attended and graduated from preschool; in 2013-2014, these students were in 8th grade. In order to investigate the long-term effects of attending a high-quality preschool, LAUP contacted members of this group of students, and conducted a follow-up evaluation. Through surveys and focus groups, LAUP asked students about their recent social and academic experiences, and about their memories of preschool. Findings indicate that despite their disadvantaged backgrounds, LAUP students are performing well academically, feel supported socially, and have positive memories of their preschool experiences.

LAUP graduates reported similar levels of social support in the 8th grade as the norming sample for the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale.

Research has shown that overall social support is an important predictor of academic outcomes in childhood and adolescence (Richman, Rosenfeld, & Bowen, 1998), and that high-quality preschool programs can lead to stronger social skills later in life, especially for at-risk students (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). To measure the frequency with which LAUP graduates received social support in middle school, as well as the types and perceived importance of the social support they received, LAUP administered the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS; Malecki, Demaray, & Elliott, 2000) to a group of 20 8th-graders who had attended an LAUP preschool.

The LAUP sample experienced similar levels of perceived social support as the norming sample, both in frequency and in importance they assigned to the various sources of support (see figure below and detailed table in Appendix). Parents, classmates, close friends, and schools all received similar ratings for frequency and importance of support. Ratings of teachers were the exception to this rule. Although students in both samples indicated that support from teachers was important to them, the LAUP 8th grade sample reported receiving support from their teachers significantly less frequently ($M=39.95$, $SD=5.59$) than did the norming sample ($M=58.03$, $SD=12.31$; $t(501)=6.5356$, $p<.001$).

The LAUP sample and the norming sample rated frequency of support and importance of support similarly. The one exception was LAUP graduates reported that middle school teachers provided less frequent support than the norming sample.



This finding is interesting, especially given that the LAUP sample rated support from their schools as slightly (though not significantly) higher in frequency than the norming sample. Aside from the difference in ratings of teachers, the two samples' ratings of frequency and importance of support did not statistically differ from one another.

Overall, students reported positive attitudes towards school.

Fifty percent of students surveyed responded that they "always" or "almost always" liked school. An additional 39% of students reported that they liked school "some of the time." Only 11% said they "almost never" liked school, and none of the students reported that they "never" liked school. These results are encouraging, as the vast majority of students seem to be happy with their current school experience, and students reported limited negative affect surrounding school.

Nearly all students planned to complete high school and pursue a higher education.

All but 5% of students reported a desire to continue their education beyond high school. Many students planned to complete a college degree (32%), or at least to complete some college (21%). Finally, an impressive 42% of students indicated plans to continue their education all the way to a graduate degree (including M.A., M.S., Ph.D., law school, or medical school). These results speak to the motivation felt by this group of students, and to their positive attitudes toward education.

Most students had considered their future career goals.

Admittedly, eighth-grade students may have a difficult time answering questions about their future job or career plans. However, responses indicated that students had spent time considering their options. Only 11% reported that they were "undecided" about their future career path. Choices of career included "doctor" (26%), "lawyer" (11%), "engineer" (11%), and "other" (52%). Having yet to enter high school, these students are already weighing their future education and career options, and are motivated to enter professions requiring advanced degrees.

Students recalled positive memories of their LAUP preschool.

When prompted by the interviewer leading the focus group, children recalled details of their LAUP preschool experiences.

Preschool Memories

Many of these memories centered on the physical characteristics of the school – for example, children recalled "small bathrooms," "blocks," "the playground," and "little bikes." Other memories were of activities, such as "building towers," "singing songs," "arts and crafts," "coloring and cutting," and "playing and getting along with everybody." When students were asked what they had learned from preschool and how it had helped prepare them for school, several mentioned language development as a theme. While some students reported only speaking Spanish in preschool, others remembered acquiring the basics of English with help from their teachers. One student recalled, "You have to speak to everybody so you have to learn how to pronounce things, how to say them, how to use them," while another said, "They helped you to pronounce the ABCs so when you have to start reading you already know."

Friendships

Many former LAUP students had positive associations with the social aspects of preschool, and recalled the social-emotional development that forms a critical aspect of a high-quality preschool experience. Students remembered "making friends," and many mentioned that preschool had helped them prepare for school socially – as one student put it, "I used to be a really shy little kid." Another student reported, "They taught you how to get along with people so you can manage to make a friend.... They would introduce you to the person. They would tell you to go play with them." Overall, students had fond memories of preschool, and attributed some of their cognitive and social growth to the effects of their preschool experiences; as one student said, "[Preschool] helped because when you start growing up you're used to helping people and getting along with them."

When asked about their current friendships, multiple students reported that they still had friends from preschool who attended the same middle school, or with whom they still kept in touch. One student mentioned that she had had trouble with a previous set of friends, but that she had been able to make new friends: "I'm

getting good grades now, and that's what I couldn't do before... because I got distracted easily with my friends and stuff. I got new friends and they helped me a lot." Strong and supportive friendships were seen as important. As a student noted, "I know how to choose my friends now and I still have fun with them."

Academics

Former LAUP students reported that they were doing well or fairly well in school, and that they were earning "A's and B's." The average GPA reported on the student surveys was a 2.8. Subjects that were nominated as favorites by various students included Math, Social Studies, Art, Science, and Physical Education (P.E.), indicating a broad range of skills and interests. Some students were also enrolled in AP or pre-AP classes. Of course, like all middle-school students, LAUP students also reported getting "distracted" or "bored" in class sometimes, and had certain classes that were harder than others. One student volunteered: "I really don't like math... It's not difficult but it's sort of confusing because my teacher she teaches us a lesson and then if she forgets steps she goes back and confuses me." However, students also had stories of success to share. One student reported receiving a scholarship, and added, "...only 15 of us got the scholarship and I've been visiting San Francisco and different places.... That's why I have to maintain a 3.0." Although former LAUP students are not exempt from the struggles of middle school, they are performing well and receiving recognition for their efforts.

Conclusion

Almost 10 years after their graduation from preschool, LAUP students reported academic success; strong, long-lasting friendships; positive school attitudes; and good memories of their preschool experiences. These findings may be indicative of the long-term effects of high-quality preschool. It is important to note that 2004-2005 was LAUP's first year of operation; since that time, LAUP classrooms and curriculum have been improved and refined. Examining more recent cohorts and their development may lead to stronger effects. Additionally, this evaluation did not include a comparison group. Future research will compare LAUP students to non-LAUP students in the hope of isolating the effects of early education.

References

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- Malecki, C. K., Demaray, M. K., & Elliott, S. N. (2004). *A working manual on the development of the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale*. DeKalb, IL: Author.
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Appendix

Methodology

Former LAUP students were asked to complete the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS), and their ratings of social support frequency and importance were compared to the ratings given for the same items by the CASSS's norming sample. The CASSS measures the perceived social support of children and adolescents, and uses sets of Likert-type scales to obtain ratings of the perceived support given by multiple social partners and structures. Students rated their agreement with a variety of CASSS statements pertaining to their parents, friends, teachers, classmates, or school. For example, one item was "My parents give me good advice," another was "My teacher treats me fairly." For each statement, students were asked to indicate how frequently the described type of support occurred (on a scale from 1 to 6; 12 statements for each social partner, for a maximum frequency rating of 72 for each social partner), and to rate how important they considered that type of support (on a scale from 1 to 3; 12 statements for each social partner, for a maximum frequency rating of 36 for each social partner).

The CASSS was normed on a sample of urban middle-school students, who were largely low-income and Hispanic. Due to the nature of this sample, norming results should not be considered a representative sample of all students of this age; however, these demographics match quite well with the demographics of LAUP

students, who also attend urban schools, and many of whom are also low-income and Hispanic. Thus, our experimental population is comparable to the norming sample.

Early educational experiences may affect later academic motivation and achievement (e.g., Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010). In order to measure former LAUP students’ attitudes toward school and continuing education, we analyzed their responses to multiple-choice questions on a written survey.

In addition to collecting the quantitative data discussed above, LAUP believed it was also important to provide students with an opportunity to speak at more length about their experiences. Thus, two focus groups were conducted, each containing several former LAUP students. In these groups, students were prompted to discuss their memories of preschool, as well as their current interests, friendships, and academic pursuits.

Detailed Tables

The table below shows detailed results from the CASSS comparing the norming sample and LAUP sample’s reported frequency of support and importance assigned to each source of support.

Table 1. Perceived emotional support in middle school

Source of Support	Norming Sample			LAUP Sample		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Frequency						
Parent	57.6	13.3	493	59.0	11.12	20
Teacher	58.0*	12.3	483	40.0*	5.59	20
Classmate	49.4	14.9	472	54.3	11.49	20
Close Friend	58.0	14.4	456	63.6	8.73	20
School	48.9	16.4	422	52.6	11.30	20
Total	272.4	55.3	412	269.3	48.23	20
Importance						
Parent	29.9	5.3	427	27.55	9.04	20
Teacher	29.1	6.1	422	27.26	9.50	20
Classmate	26.6	6.5	414	25.75	8.74	19
Close Friend	29.2	6.5	405	30.00	8.63	19
School	26.2	7.3	377	26.2	7.57	20
Total	140.9	26.2	358	136.76	43.48	20

* Denotes statistical significance of $p < 0.05$.

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