

UNIVERSITY
OF MIAMI
DEPARTMENT of PSYCHOLOGY



**Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and
Visually Impaired: Lighthouse
Learning Center for Children™ (Miami
Lighthouse Academy, LLC)
Early Childhood Research
Demonstration Project
Descriptive Report - Year 4
2020-2021**

A research collaboration between
Miami Lighthouse Academy™ and the University of Miami

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Year 4 Miami Lighthouse Academy Inclusion Model Early Childhood Research Demonstration Project

Study Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the effects of implementing the Miami Lighthouse Academy inclusion model (50% with visual impairment (VI) and 50% without visual impairment (non-VI) children) on participating children, parents, and teachers. University of Miami (UM) and Miami Lighthouse for the Blind (MLB) teams conducted the evaluation collaboratively through funding from The Children's Trust. This report provides findings from Year 4 (2020-21).

In Year 4, the Academy enrolled 42 children. The evaluation design entailed a short-term, longitudinal, pre/post evaluation of a total of 34 children out of 38 who were consented and completed measures for the project. Children were enrolled in 4 classrooms: 6 infants/toddlers across 1 classroom (1-2 year olds), and 32 preschoolers across 3 classrooms (3-5 year olds) [see details below]. Participants included children with vision impairment and those without, their teachers, and their families. Procedures, measures, and preliminary results for Year 4 are described below.

The evaluation had four primary research questions, described below. These questions focused on change in (1) fidelity of implementation of high quality classroom practices and the inclusion model, (2) teacher professional development, (3) child developmental outcomes, and (4) parent outcomes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person data collection and observations were not possible for UM during the 2020-2021 school year. However, UM and MLB teams were able to coordinate remote observations for individual child-level and classroom-level measures. The UM team collected direct observations of teacher-child interactions (CLASS) through Zoom, and the MLB team video-recorded direct observations of children's classroom engagement (inCLASS) for the UM team to code remotely. Additionally, the Fidelity Checklist and Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) were not collected during Year 4 due to the UM's team inability to conduct in-person data collection (and in part because not all children attended in person).

Participants

Children. During the 2020-2021 year (Year 4 of the study), the program enrolled 42 children in the Academy. A total of 38 children consented to participate in the research study. Pre/post evaluation measures were collected for 34 children. The differences in the number of children who participated in our study are due to differing times of enrollment and dropout during the school year. During the school year, 4 additional children enrolled in and 0 children left the Academy, resulting in post data being collected on 38 children. The non-VI children were siblings of the VI children, children enrolled in the VPK program and/or school readiness program who were living in the surrounding community, or who were employees' children.

Children were enrolled in one toddler classroom and three preschool classrooms at the Academy. Children ranged in age from 9 to 64 months old ($M = 43.5$ months, $SD = 11.4$) and 50% female. Children were identified by parents as 52.6% Hispanic White/Caucasian, 18.4%

Non-Hispanic Black, 7.9% Hispanic mixed race, 2.7% Hispanic Native American, and 18.4% identified as Hispanic other. Out of the sample, 58% of children were visually impaired.

Teaching team. Among the MLB instructional team members, 12 teachers participated in the evaluation. The teacher team consisted of 4 Florida certified classroom teachers, 5 teacher assistants, and 3 Florida certified teachers of the visually impaired. Participating teachers were 100% female, 16.7% African American, 58.3% Caucasian, 8.3% identified as other, and 16.7% was unreported. Forty-two percent of teachers were Hispanic. Three Early Childhood Teachers had a Bachelor's degree and one had a Master's degree. One assistant teacher held a Bachelor's degree and two held an Associate's degree (two were unknown). Three teachers held a specialized degree in visual impairment, all with Master's degrees.

Research Question 1: High Quality Program Implementation

To examine changes over time in teacher implementation of high quality instructional practices, the following measures were collected: (*note that because of the COVID pandemic, the ICP was not collected this year).

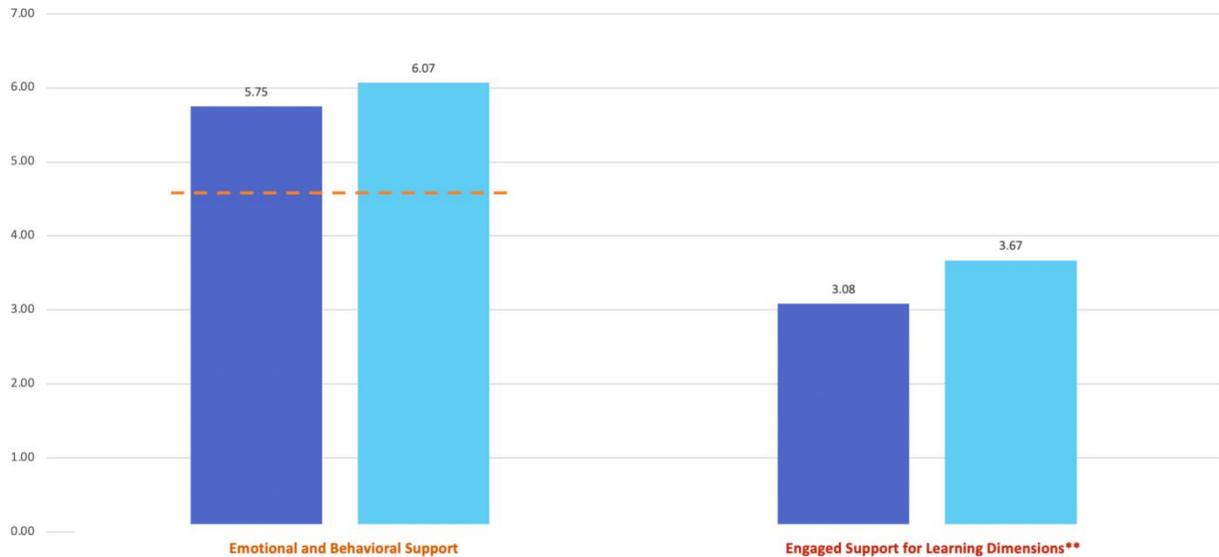
Measures

Classroom Assessment Scoring System. The Toddler version of the CLASS was used to observe the toddler classroom (CLASS-Toddler; La Paro, Hamre, & Pianta, 2012). It consists of two domains (1) Emotional and Behavioral Support, which is comprised of five dimensions: Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Regard for Child Perspectives, Behavior Guidance; and (2) Engaged Support for Learning, which is comprised of three dimensions: Facilitation of Learning and Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling. Both domains have demonstrated high internal consistency in national samples that have included children with disabilities, with Cronbach's alphas of .92 and .86, respectively (La Paro et al., 2012).

The Pre-K version of the CLASS was used to observe the Pre-K classrooms (CLASS-Pre-K; Pianta et al., 2008). It consists of three domains (1) Emotional Support, which is comprised of four dimensions: Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Regard for Child Perspectives; (2) Classroom Organization, which is comprised of three dimensions: Behavior Management, Productivity, Instructional Learning Formats; and (3) Instructional Support, which is comprised of three dimensions: Concept Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling. All three domains have demonstrated high internal consistency in national samples that have included children with disabilities, with Cronbach's alphas of .89, .77, and .83, respectively (La Paro et al., 2004).

Results

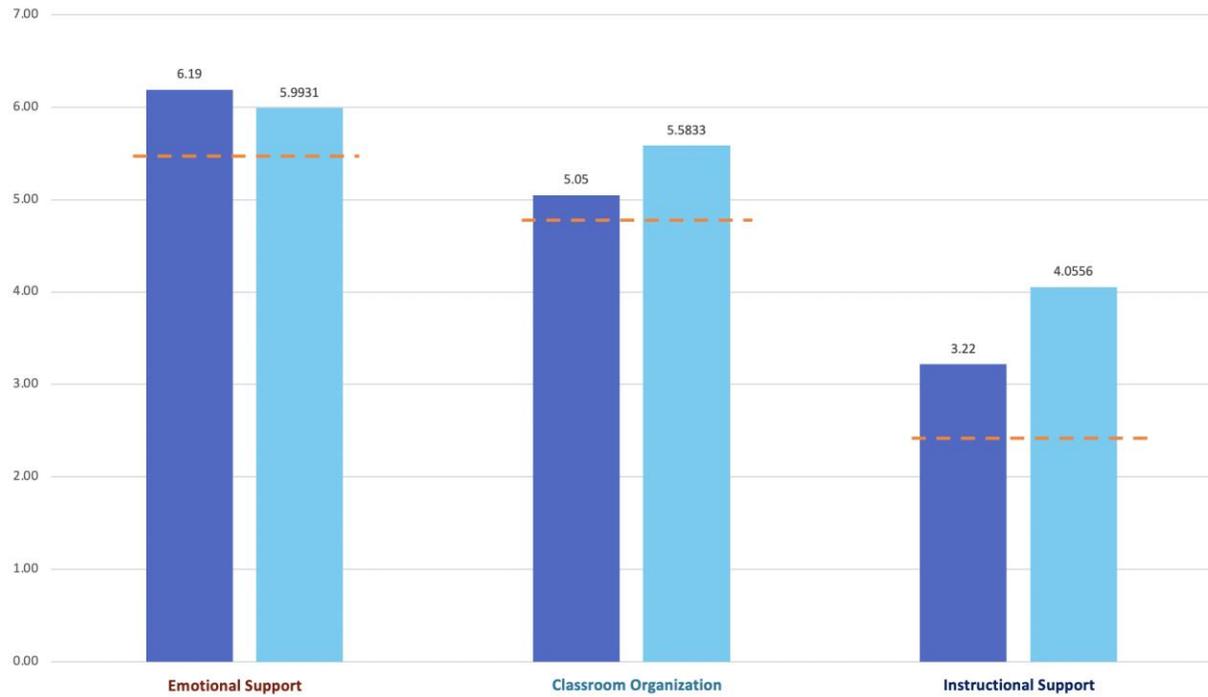
CLASS-Toddler Mean Score Changes from Fall 2020 to Spring 2021



— — National averages (Bandel, Aikens, Vogel, Boller & Murphy, 2014)

The Toddler CLASS was used to observe the quality of teacher-child interactions in the toddler classroom. In the fall and spring semesters, the toddler CLASS scores of 5.75 (fall) and 6.07 (spring) in the Emotional and Behavioral Support domain exceeded that of the national average of 4.62. Note that there are currently no national averages for the Engaged Support for Learning Domain, so this comparison cannot be made.

CLASS Pre-K Mean Score Changes from Fall 2020 to Spring 2021



— — National averages (Aikens, Bush, Gleason, Malone & Tarullo, 2016)

The Pre-K Class was used to observe the quality of teacher-child interactions in all three preschool classrooms. Pre-K CLASS scores exceeded or met the national average in all three domains of Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.

Research Question 2: Teacher Professional Development Outcomes

Two teacher focus groups were conducted during the 2020-2021 school year (one in the fall 2020 and the second in the spring 2021). Procedures and summary of responses are presented below. On Monday, September 29th, 2020, the UM team led the first focus group through Zoom with lead teachers, teacher assistants, and the assistant director. During this focus group, we asked teachers to share about their hopes, expectations, and goals for themselves as professionals, their classroom, the children, and the families. On Wednesday, May 26th, 2021, the UM team led the second focus group through Zoom with lead teachers, teacher assistants, and the assistant director. During this focus group, we asked teachers to share changes and improvements they observed in their students over the year and how they felt about their collaboration with the students' parents. Additionally, we asked teachers to share the challenges they faced when teaching remotely, how they engaged their students, platforms they used to teach and their overall experience of online teaching.

Fall 2020 Teacher Focus Group Summary

- Teachers shared that they hoped to grow professionally, learn to advocate for their students with visual impairments and help their students understand and follow social distancing norms. One teacher shared they used a hula hoop to teach a child how to follow social distancing norms, adding that "it was like a physical guideline that she could feel and see."
- Teachers expressed their concerns with COVID-19 guidelines and how it might hinder students' social interactions. One teacher added "I hope COVID-19 does not affect our students enough to think that human interaction is not important and that we do not need it."
- Teachers shared their fears regarding students' development, adding they might see a regression in students' learning due to learning remotely for four months of the past academic year.
- Pre-K teachers shared that they wanted to prepare students as much as possible for moving to kindergarten at the end of the school year. They wanted them to learn not only the required academic curriculum, but also learn how to socially interact with others.
- Regarding family involvement, teachers shared they communicate with families through calls, texts and notes. Teachers emphasized the importance of this relationship with families because learning does not only happen at school. Parents are partners with teachers and need to learn the routine and activities their children have at school so they can reinforce them at their home.
- Teachers expressed their thoughts about remote learning since some of their students remained at home for the school year. They shared that they felt that students did not learn in their homes as much as in school, sharing that it was hard for them to focus and look at a screen for long periods of time.

Spring 2021 Teacher Focus Group Summary

- Teachers shared how they considered this year to be a year of growth and learning, not only for their students, but also for themselves. Teachers had to adapt to not having physical contact with their students, as well as having students follow this social distancing rule. They expressed their knowledge regarding what is developmentally appropriate for students with visual impairment and the techniques they use to adapt certain materials to be accessible for every student with visual impairment.
- Teachers expressed their satisfaction with students' learning and developmental skills. They also shared how important it was for their remote students to have an adult present during classes with them to stay focused and learning. Teachers shared that they felt that children who stayed at home for the year met their academic goals, but their social interactions might have been hindered.
- Throughout the year, teachers worked on building social-emotional relationships between students with and without visual impairments. One teacher said "compared from the beginning of the year to now, our students are so compassionate towards each other, patient, and understanding." Teachers expressed their desire to engage remote students as much as possible during different activities throughout the day.
- Regarding students transitioning to kindergarten, teachers shared students' improvement in social and academic skills; they observed overall growth. However, teachers expressed remaining concern for some of their Pre-K students since they feel some of them might struggle with the transition.
- Teachers shared they developed strategies adapted to each of their student's individual needs and levels. They developed a "buddy system" to pair up students with and without visual impairment to help each other walk to the playground. They shared that student, with and without visual impairment, cheered for each other during the morning circle.
- A toddler teacher added her thoughts about inclusive classrooms, sharing that "exposure [to children different from themselves] is great," since children are sensitized through being in the same classroom as students with visual impairments.
- Teachers expressed their desire to receive training for classroom behavioral management and to address students' challenging behaviors. They also shared their need for training on how to manage the transition to Kindergarten for those students continuing in Pre-K for the following academic year.
- As for teacher-parent interaction, parent involvement for the remote students was a key factor in their learning experience. Teachers expressed how important it was for them to build relationships with parents and took every opportunity they had to communicate with parents. Teachers sent daily notes to parents to keep them updated on their child's learning process. Parents also received pictures of the activities done throughout the week.
- Teachers shared their thoughts and experience with remote learning. Students were engaged depending on the activities that teachers had planned for the day; they tried to do as many hands-on activities as possible to keep students interested, active and learning.

Research Question 3: Changes in Child Developmental Skills

To examine changes in children's developmental skills, a comprehensive set of social-emotional, cognitive, and daily living skills important to school readiness were assessed. Specifically, these skills included peer interactions, friendships, empathy, social-emotional skills, language/literacy, daily living and self-help skills. The following measures were collected:

Measures

Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS) (Teacher and Parent Report). Peer play relationships were assessed using The Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS- Teacher report; Fantuzzo, Coolahan, Mendez, McDermott, & Sutton-Smith, 1998; PIPPS- Parent report; Fantuzzo, Mendez, & Tighe, 1998). The PIPPS measures peer play interactions within the classroom and in the home/neighborhood contexts. It is a 32-item rating scale that has 3 validated scales: Play Interaction, Play Disruption, and Play Disconnection. Interactive peer play skills are creative, cooperative, and prosocial behaviors that aid in successful peer interactions, disruptive play includes aggressive and antisocial behaviors that interfere with peer interactions, and disconnected play includes avoidant behaviors that inhibit the initiation of peer interactions. Each demonstrates high reliability.

The Empathy Scale of My Child (Teacher and Parent Report). The Empathy scale of My Child (Kochanska, DeVet, Goldman, Murray, & Putnam, 1994) assessed children's empathy. My Child is rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (extremely untrue) to 7 (extremely true) of characteristics of the child. The Empathy scale includes 13 items that measure children's empathic and prosocial responses to others' distress. Published reports of the parent rating provide evidence that the Empathy scale is internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .76. The higher a child scores on the Empathy Scale, the more empathic teachers and parents rate that child.

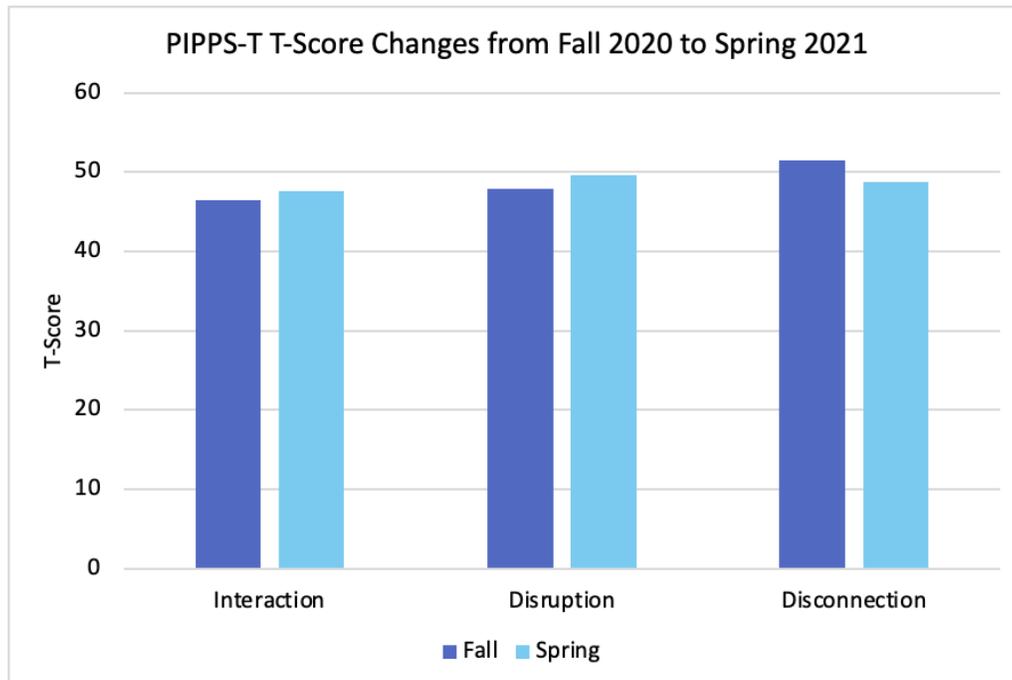
Child Observation Record – Advantage (COR-Advantage; High Scope, 2014). COR is an observation-based tool based on teachers' anecdotal records of children's skills throughout the day. It is designed for use with children ages birth to 6 years in early childhood settings. It measures eight domains of development: Approaches to Learning, Emotional Development, Physical Development and Health, Language, Literacy, and Communication, Mathematics, Creative Arts, Science and Technology, and Social Studies. The scales are validated for use with low-income children and children with disabilities. Miami Lighthouse Academy Director shared the COR scores that teachers recorded over the course of the 2020-21 year with the UM team.

The Individualized Classroom Assessment Scoring System (inCLASS). The Individualized Classroom Assessment Scoring System (inCLASS; Downer, Booren, Lima, Luckner, & Pianta, 2010) is an observational assessment that assesses individual children's classroom engagement with peers, teachers, and tasks. Although the main focus of this evaluation was positive engagement with peers, all three domains were coded and evaluated in the fall. Positive engagement with peers consists of the dimensions of sociability, assertiveness, and communication with peers. Each dimension is coded on a seven-point scale that ranges from low, medium, and high, with higher scores showing interactions that are more positive and engagement for most scales. Construct validity studies established high validity and reliability (0.92) for Positive Peer Engagement.

Results

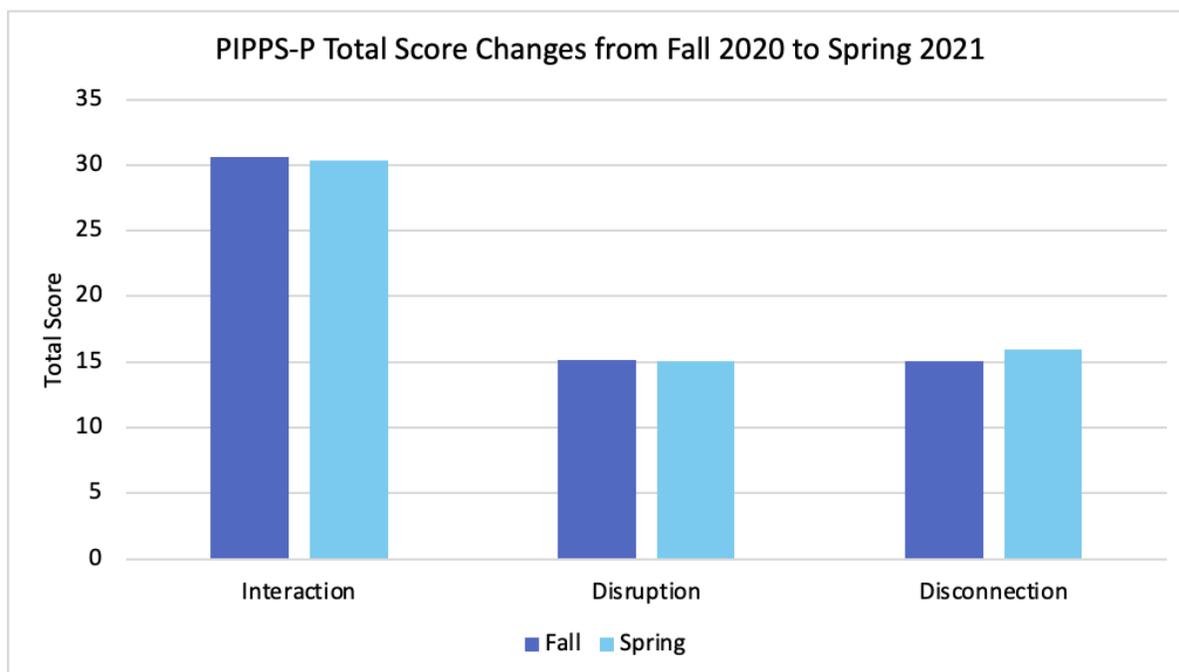
Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale – Teacher (PIPPS-T; $N = 34$)

- Across all classrooms (toddler and Pre-K), PIPPS-T scores for the Play Interaction dimension in the fall ranged from 29 to 65 ($M = 46.47$, $SD = 10.49$) and from 10 to 66 ($M = 47.62$, $SD = 14.82$) in the spring. Play Disruption scores ranged from 10 to 62 ($M = 47.91$, $SD = 9.63$) in the fall and from 26 to 68 ($M = 49.68$, $SD = 9.48$) in the spring. Play Disconnection scores ranged from 35 to 68 ($M = 51.47$, $SD = 9.02$) in the fall and ranged from 29 to 70 ($M = 48.76$, $SD = 12.29$) in the spring.
- As rated by teachers, peer play skills did not differ significantly from fall to spring.



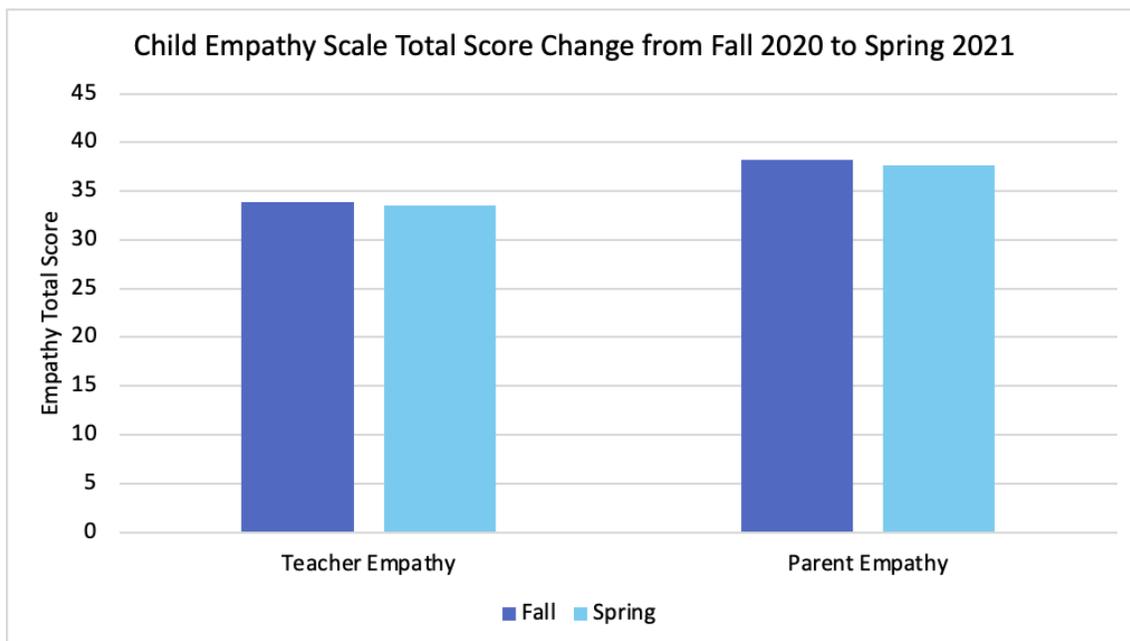
Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale – Parent (PIPPS-P; N = 13)

- Across all classrooms (toddler and Pre-K), PIPPS-P scores for the Play Interaction dimension in the fall ranged from 17 to 44 ($M = 30.61$, $SD = 6.92$) and from 16 to 41 ($M = 30.33$, $SD = 7.77$) in the spring. Play Disruption scores ranged from 9 to 28 ($M = 15.14$, $SD = 5.00$) in the fall and from 9 to 21 ($M = 15.05$, $SD = 3.76$) in the spring. Play Disconnection scores ranged from 9 to 27 ($M = 15.07$, $SD = 4.59$) in the fall and ranged from 9 to 25 ($M = 15.91$, $SD = 5.05$) in the spring.
- As rated by parents, peer play skills did not differ significantly from fall to spring.



The Empathy Scale of My Child (Teacher, $N = 34$; Parent, $N = 15$)

- Teacher-reported and parent-reported total empathy scores for children did not significantly change from fall to spring. Therefore, children's empathy levels were relatively the same across the 2020-2021 school year.
- Examples include more empathic helping behavior when a peer shows distress of crying, or more empathic concern for a character in a story book, at school and at home.



Child Observation Record – Advantage (Toddler)

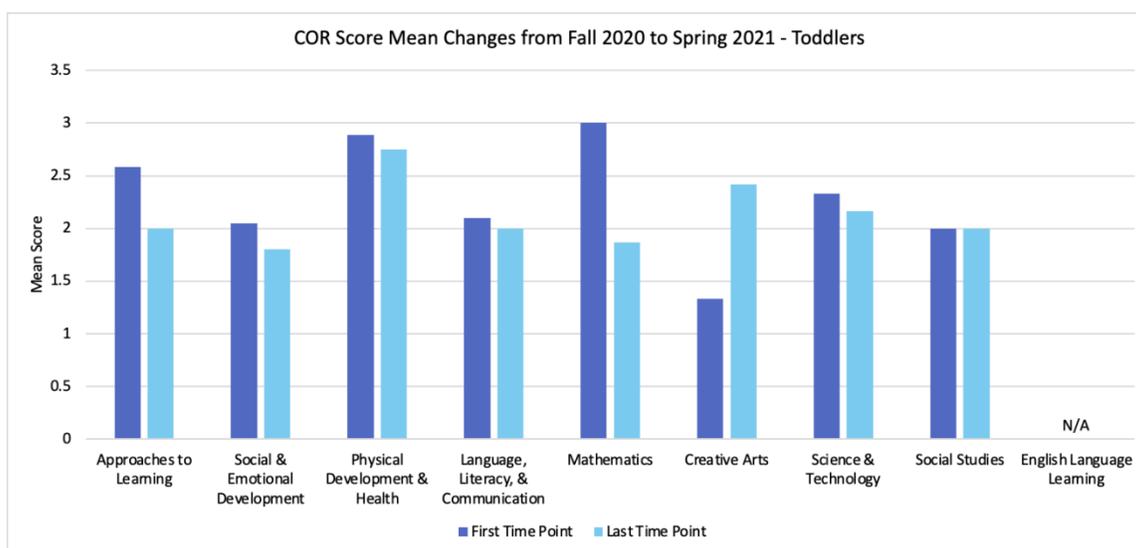
- There were no significant changes within Toddler classrooms in any of the COR domains. However, pre- and post-data was only available for more than 2 children in 3 domains (Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, and Literacy, Language, and Communication). Therefore, it is not possible to compare change across time points for these domains. Additionally, data may not be representative of all Toddler children in the program given the small sample sizes.

Toddler COR Mean Scores by Domain

Domain	First Time Point	Last Time Point
Approaches to Learning ($N = 2$)	2.585	2
Social & Emotional Development ($N = 3$)	2.05	1.8
Physical Development & Health ($N = 1$)	2.89	2.75
Language, Literacy, & Communication ($N = 2$)	2.0967	2
Mathematics ($N = 1$)	3	1.8667
Creative Arts ($N = 1$)	1.3333	2.4167
Science & Technology ($N = 1$)	2.3333	2.1667
Social Studies ($N = 1$)	2	2
English Language Learning ($N = 0$) ^a	-	-

* $p < .05$

^aThere were no children who had scores for both Fall and Spring in the English Language Learning domain.



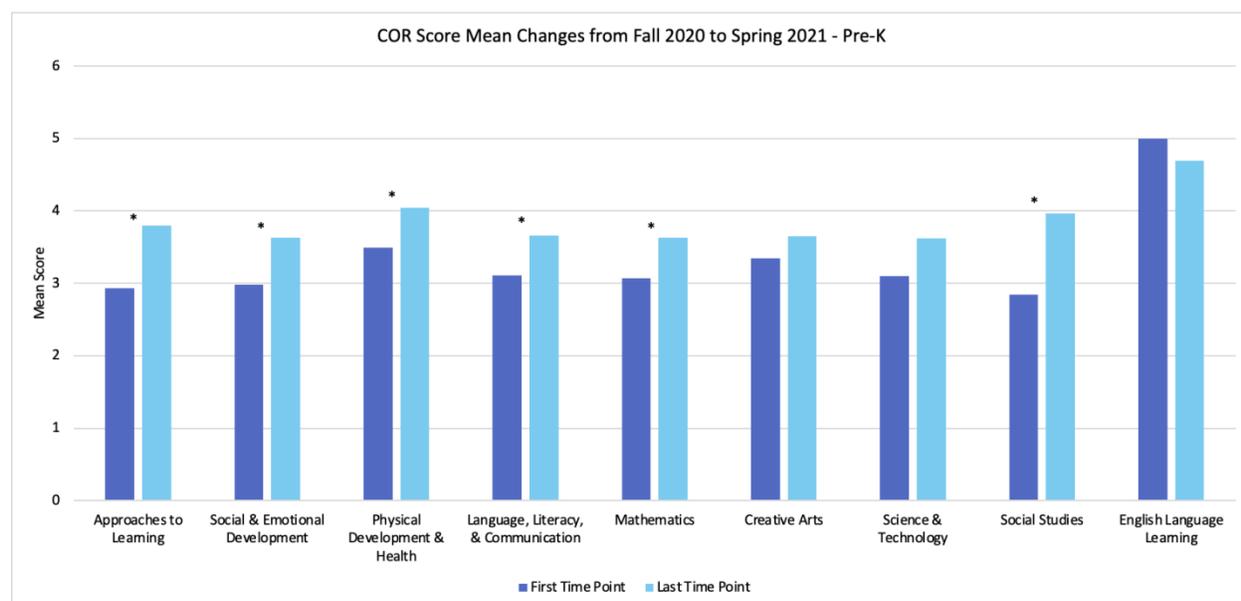
Child Observation Record – Advantage (Pre-K)

- Within the Pre-K classrooms, all children demonstrated significant gains in almost all domains, excluding the Creative Arts, Science and Technology, English Language Learning domain.

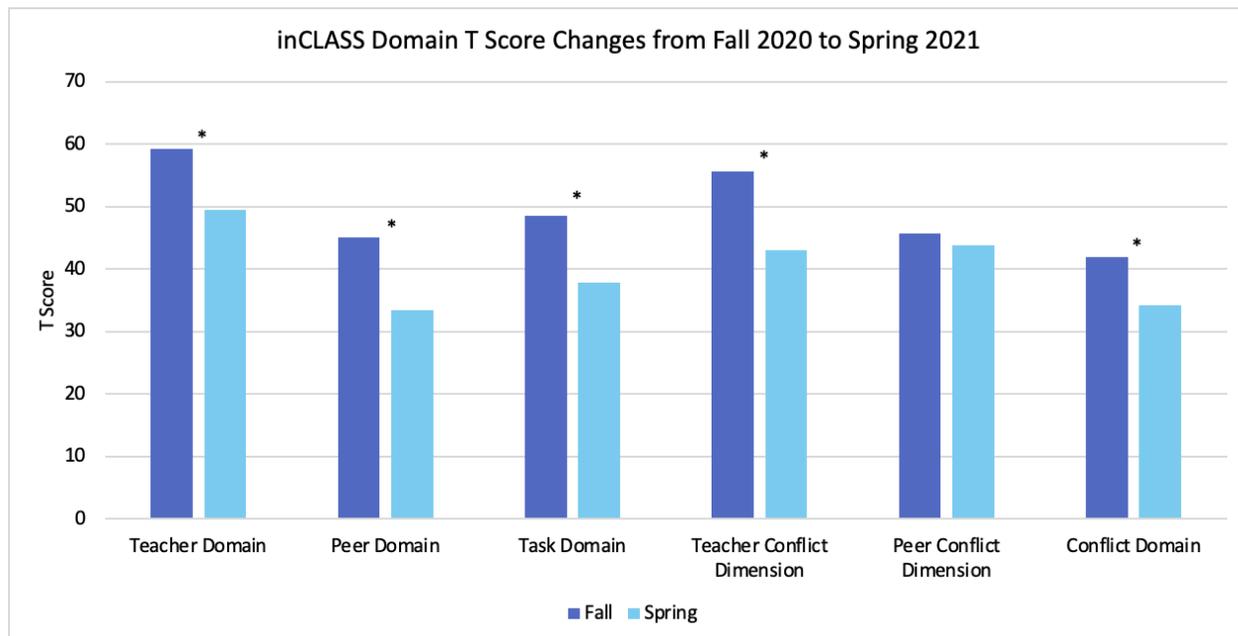
Pre-K COR Mean Scores by Domain

Domain	First Time Point	Last Time Point
Approaches to Learning (<i>N</i> = 23)	2.93*	3.80*
Social & Emotional Development (<i>N</i> = 26)	2.98*	3.63*
Physical Development & Health (<i>N</i> = 27)	3.49*	4.04*
Language, Literacy, & Communication (<i>N</i> = 28)	3.11*	3.66*
Mathematics (<i>N</i> = 27)	3.07*	3.63*
Creative Arts (<i>N</i> = 24)	3.34	3.65
Science & Technology (<i>N</i> = 25)	3.10	3.62
Social Studies (<i>N</i> = 18)	2.84*	3.97*
English Language Learning (<i>N</i> = 6)	5.00	4.69

* $p < .05$

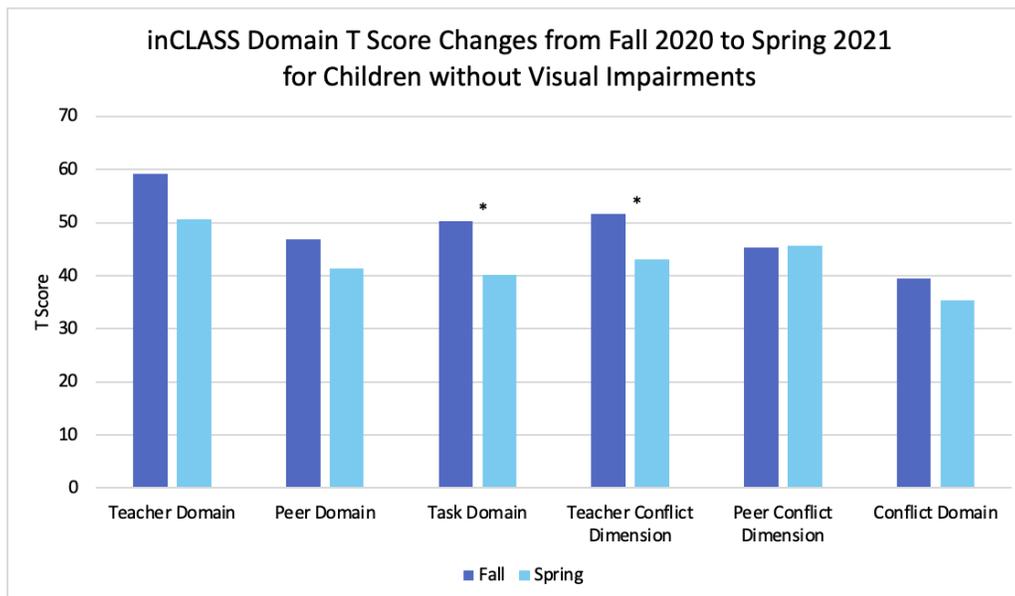


inCLASS Scores: Pre-K Classrooms
N = 10 Non-VI Children, 9 VI Children

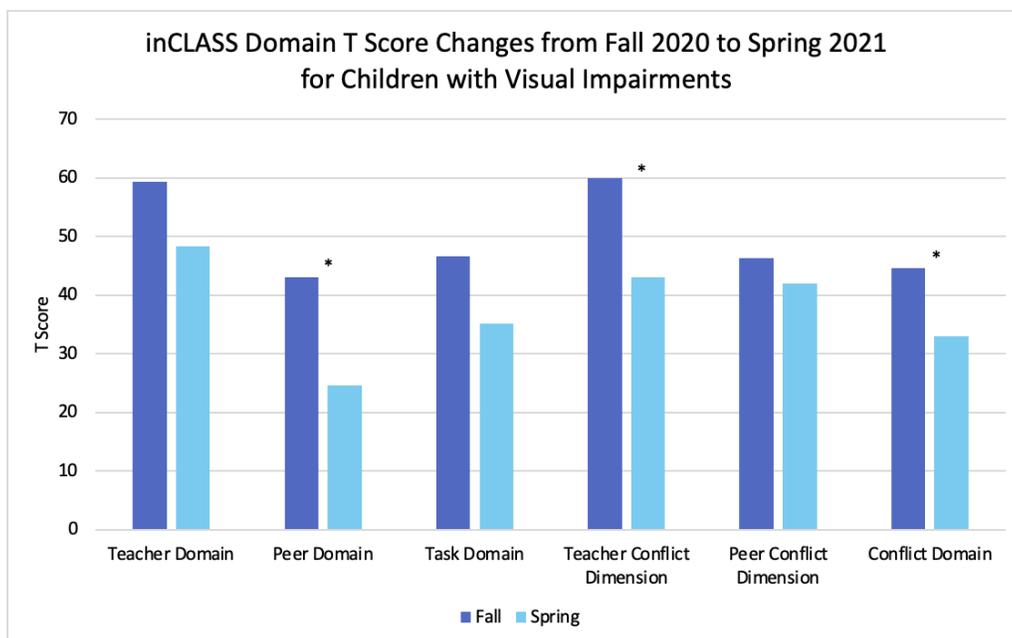


The graph above indicates the means for participating preschoolers in the fall and spring of the 2020-2021 school year. There were significant changes across the year in almost all domains, with the exception of the Peer Conflict dimension. Notably, the scores in the Teacher Conflict dimension and overall Conflict domain decreased from fall 2020 to spring 2021. While the scores in the Teacher, Peer, and Task engagement domains decreased from fall 2020 to spring 2021, there may be several reasons why these scores decreased, which should not be attributed to the program. First, children underwent many changes in routine over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and should not be expected to exhibit the same behavior as they did pre-pandemic. Second, guidelines for social distancing and masks could have decreased opportunities for us to observe children interacting, especially with their peers. Third, the scores were derived based on video recordings of children in the classroom typically during the morning; there may have been variability in the opportunities present for children to demonstrate positive engagement, especially if some children were observed for less than 3 cycles. Lastly, attendance was a challenge throughout the school year, and all classrooms were required to quarantine at least once during the 2020-2021 school year. Inconsistent attendance can make adapting to the classroom routine difficult for children.

inCLASS Scores for Children with and without Visual Impairment

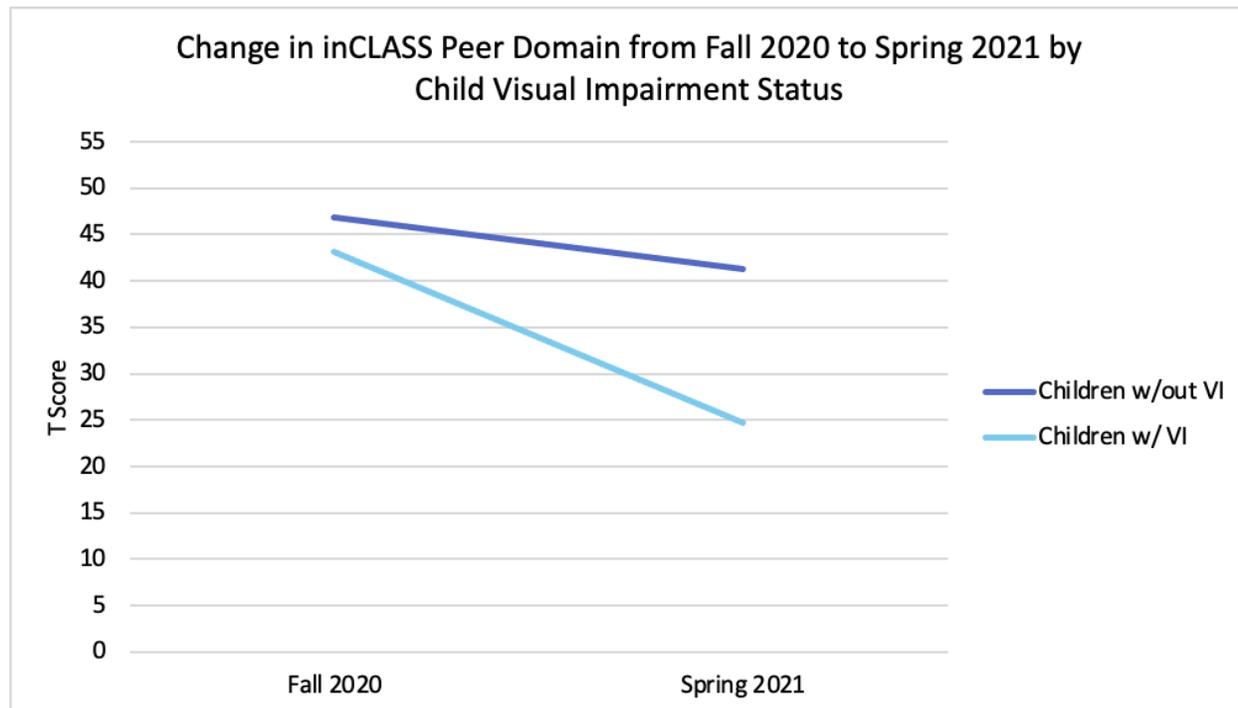


The graph above indicates the differences between inCLASS domains scores for fall 2020 and spring 2021 for children without visual impairment. For children without visual impairment, scores in the Task domain and Teacher Conflict dimension significantly changed from fall 2020 to spring 2021. ($N = 10$).



The graph above indicates the differences between inCLASS domains scores for fall 2020 and spring 2021 for children with visual impairment. For children with visual impairment, scores in the Peer domain, Conflict domain, Teacher Conflict dimension significantly changed from fall 2020 to spring 2021. ($N = 9$).

Differences in inCLASS Scores between Children with and without Visual Impairment



The graph above shows the differential changes in Peer Domain scores for children with and without visual impairment from fall 2020 to spring 2021. For children with visual impairment ($N = 9$), scores in the Peer domain decreased significantly more than children without visual impairment ($N = 10$) from fall 2020 to spring 2021. This change in peer engagement and assertiveness may be attributed to the vast differences in classroom experiences (i.e., social distancing) in the last year from the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, barriers due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have increased the challenges children with visual impairment face when learning to interact socially within the classroom. Furthermore, many children's attendance in the 2020-2021 school year was inconsistent due to children getting sick and classrooms needing to quarantine. Lastly, children's scores were coded from video recordings of their behavior, and these recordings may not have captured the child's full experience in the classroom.

Research Question 4: Changes in Parent Outcomes

To examine changes over time in parents' knowledge, awareness, skills, attitudes about inclusion/visual impairment, self-efficacy/advocacy for children, and family engagement in learning activities at home and school, and parents' feelings of their child transitioning out of the academy and into kindergarten, the following measures were collected:

Measures

Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC). Parent self-efficacy was assessed by The Efficacy scale of the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978; cited in Johnston & Mash 1989). The scale measures parents' feelings of competence, familiarity with the parenting role and problem-solving skills. The items are rated on a six point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with higher scores reflecting stronger parental self-efficacy and feelings of satisfaction as a parent. Example of an item on the Efficacy scale includes: "If anyone can find the answer to what is troubling my child, I am the one." An example item on the Satisfaction scale includes: "Even though being a parent could be rewarding, I am frustrated now while my child is at his/ her present age." The scale has high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.67. The higher a parent's scores, the higher parent-reported self-efficacy.

Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ). The FIQ-Short Form (Fantuzzo et al., 2013) was used to measure parent engagement. This consists of 21 Likert-type items indicating the nature and extent to which parents are involved in their children's education. There are three reliable dimensions of engagement: Home-based, School-based, and Home-school conferencing. Home-based Engagement describes ways in which families meet their children's basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, and safety), establish nurturing relationships, and engage with their children in positive learning experiences at home and in the community. School-based Engagement includes parents' involvement at school through active participation in activities in the school setting such as volunteering at school, participating in school events, and attending parent-teacher meetings. Home-School Conferencing describes communication between home and school, for example, with school personnel about a child's academic and school progress and/or difficulties (e.g., parent-teacher conferences).

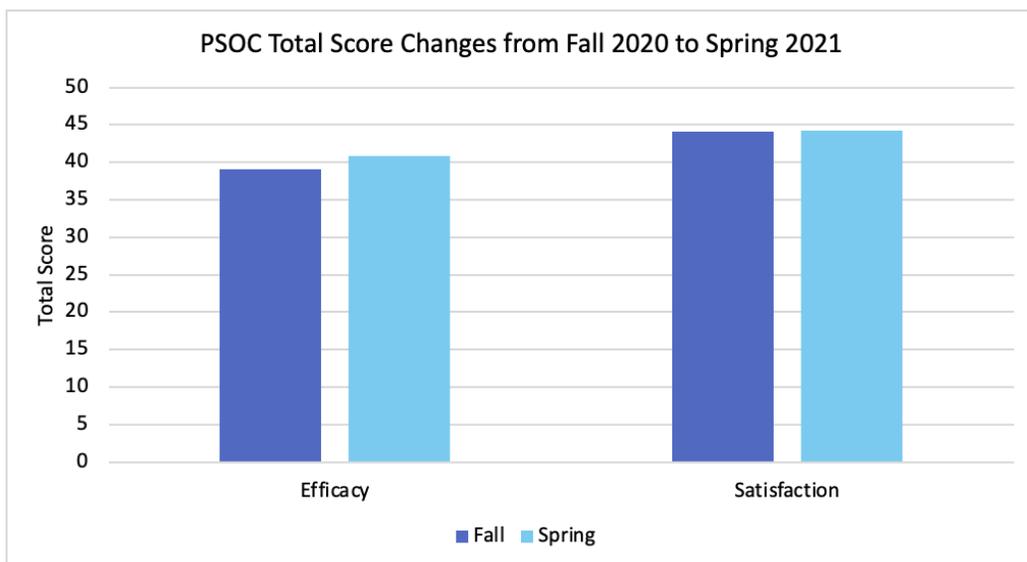
Parent survey and reflection. Parents filled out a two question survey at the beginning and at the end of the school year to provide qualitative information about parents' expectations for the upcoming school year as well as what their children learned throughout the school year.

Parent focus group. Parents participated in a remote focus group at the end of the school year, to provide qualitative information about parents' perspectives, experiences, challenges, perceptions and attitudes, and self-efficacy.

Results

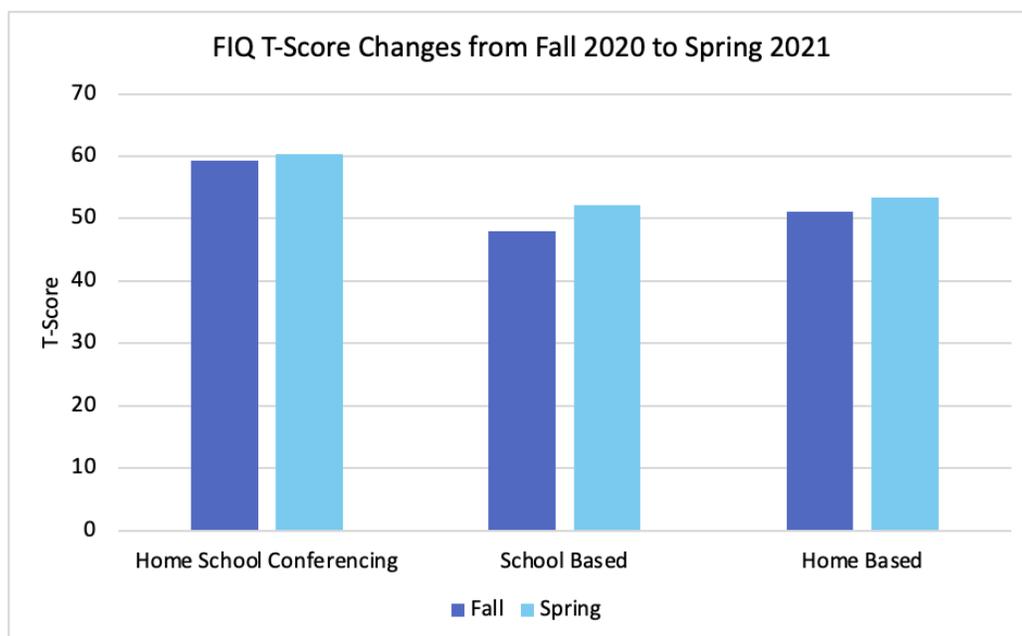
Parenting Sense of Competence Scale ($N = 14$)

- For parent-reported self-efficacy, scores ranged from 18 to 48 ($M = 39.11$, $SD = 6.78$) in the fall and ranged from 28 to 47 ($M = 40.82$, $SD = 5.22$) in the spring. For parent-reported satisfaction, scores ranged from 31 to 54 ($M = 44.07$, $SD = 6.12$) in the fall and ranged from 29 to 54 ($M = 44.22$, $SD = 6.08$) in the spring.
- On average, parents initially reported feeling moderately efficacious and highly satisfied with being a parent of a toddler or preschool student. Scores were not significantly different from fall to spring.



Family Involvement Questionnaire (N = 13)

- Overall, parents reported similar levels of home-school conferencing, school-based involvement, and home-based involvement at the beginning and end of the school year. Scores were not significantly different between fall and spring for any of the family involvement dimensions. However, in both the beginning and the end of the school year, parents reported higher than average levels of home-school conferencing (1 Standard Deviation above the mean), consisting of communication between home and school, indicating parents feel involved with school personnel about their child's academic and school progress.



Summary of Parent Reflection

Parents were given two surveys throughout the year, one at the beginning of the school year and the second one was administered towards the end of the academic year. In the first survey, two questions were asked: (1) *What would you like your child to learn this year?* (2) *As a parent, what are you hoping to gain through your child's participation in the program?*

Fall 2020 Reflection Summary

In the toddler classroom, parents shared that they felt that being involved in their child(ren)'s education is a key to success. Parents hoped for their child(ren) to verbalize their emotions through English and Spanish. They also expressed an interest in their child(ren) learning the alphabet, numbers, and colors. Parents established they wanted their child(ren) to become more independent and to learn to share with fellow classmates.

Regarding Pre-K, parents shared they wanted to keep learning how to better support their child(ren) throughout the school year. They expressed the hope that their child(ren) would

practice the alphabet, numbers, colors and how to write their names. Overall, parents wanted their child(ren) to become more independent, and for parents of children with visual impairment, use different techniques such as braille and a cane during the school year.

A parent of a visually impaired student expressed their desire for their child to learn pre-braille and pre-cane skills at the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind. Another parent shared they wanted their child to be as prepared as possible for their transition to kindergarten. Parents expressed their desire to learn more about and to be advocates for children with visual impairment, sharing that “a child with a disability can be challenging, but once you have the help and support of teachers, therapists, and the community, it can be a little easier.”

Spring 2021 Reflection Summary

The second survey was distributed to parents in May 2021, and focused on the changes parents saw in their children’s behavior, as well as what they learned as parents through their participation in the program. Overall, parents expressed their gratitude towards the program and the Miami Lighthouse Academy for their excellent program with well trained teachers and exceptional staff.

Parents also mentioned that they appreciated how welcoming and interested the teachers were in their child(ren). A parent of a Pre-K student expressed how the children have adjusted to others that might be different from themselves and understood that “there are people with different disabilities, but with the same opportunity to get ahead.” Regarding skills learned, parents expressed how their child(ren) are able to recognize numbers, letters, colors, as well as write their name.

Parents also expressed that their child(ren) improved in their communication skills, how to express themselves, and how to control their emotions. A parent of a student with visual impairment shared that her child “learned to wait without getting aggressive.” A parent of a toddler student shared that their child learned how to relate to and play with fellow classmates. Parents also shared that their child(ren) have learned how to communicate their emotions better by constructing full sentences in both languages, English and Spanish.

Overall, parents shared how independent their children have become through learning how to feed and dress themselves. Regarding the program, parents shared that they are pleased with it and have gratitude towards the teachers. Parents shared that with the teachers’ help, “children with and without visual impairments learn how to develop and work on their cognitive and motor skills to improve in different areas.” Parents also expressed how important it is to build teacher-parent communication since it helps their child’s development.

Summary of Parent Focus Group

Two different focus groups were facilitated on zoom by the Lighthouse and UM, with parents in the spring 2021. One focus group included parents of children with visual impairment and the

second group included parents of children without visual impairment. The summary is presented below.

Summary of Focus Group for Parents of Children with Visual Impairment

Parents of children with visual impairment shared that remote learning was a challenge because it was difficult for their children to focus and understand that the teacher was teaching them through the screen. A parent also expressed their challenges with therapy for their children through the pandemic because they were not able to receive the services as they usually do. Therapies provided by Miami Lighthouse Academy were perceived as helpful because parents reported their children learned how to communicate through sign language. A parent shared that this was a positive experience since they felt it would help non-verbal children to communicate and express their needs to their caregivers. Children also learned how to regulate their emotions and develop patience.

Regarding the staff members, a parent was grateful because the staff were available at any time and “they are there to support you, guide you in the right direction.” There was an overall agreement that the program was excelling in all the services provided. A parent expressed that it is the best program for children with visual impairments because of the wide range of therapy and services provided. A parent also appreciated the workshops offered by the Academy because they learned new terms that helped them better understand the language used by doctors and therapists. Parents were eager to learn as much as possible regarding topics related to their children and how to better assist them throughout their learning process.

Summary of Focus Group for Parents of Children without Visual Impairment

Parents shared their children’s positive school experiences at Miami Lighthouse Academy. Regarding development, parents expressed the cognitive improvements in their child(ren) while attending school. Children learned how to use words correctly and how to relate the content they learned in the classroom to the outside world. A parent expressed that her son’s “choice of vocabulary words is not of a three-year-old,” it is beyond what she had expected. Another parent shared that his son’s vocabulary improved, and he learned how to better describe items and his feelings.

Regarding the teachers, parents expressed overall gratitude towards them. They expressed that teacher were able to create a special bond with each child and were there when the children needed them. Teachers taught children structure and discipline, which in turn, helped students’ engagement and learning experiences. Parents also expressed how grateful they were regarding their children’s empathy development throughout the school year. A parent shared that at first, they were not sure if Miami Lighthouse Academy was the right place to enroll their son. However, Miami Lighthouse Academy quickly alleviated that concern. The parent shared that, because of the design of inclusion classrooms, his son tried to relate to a child with visual impairment and view the world from the other child’s perspective, and this experience taught him how to have empathy towards others. As for training, parents expressed that they would benefit from learning how to handle their child’s emotions, as well as their own reactions to their child’s emotions. Furthermore, they would like to receive training on how to reinforce at

home what their child is learning in school. Parents of children without visual impairments perceived the program as helpful and believed their children achieved their developmental expectations.

Summary Year 4 Results

- Overall, the Miami Lighthouse Academy displayed high quality teacher-child interactions and instructional practices in their early childhood inclusion model, with instructional practices meeting and/or exceeding national averages.
- Due to COVID-19, teachers reported feeling challenged given the school year's changing circumstances in March 2020 and continuing through the 2020-2021 school year; however, they were grateful to be able to go back to in-person instruction this year despite some limitations (e.g., social distancing). While teachers felt challenged to engage children through in-person and remote learning simultaneously, they were able to develop techniques to meet the needs of all children.
- Generally, teachers reported stability in children's behavior throughout the school year. While teachers did not report any gains in children's interactive play and empathy skills, children went through significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's stability in social skills (i.e., interactive play and empathy) shows strength and resilience through a period that may have negatively affected their social development. Additionally, teachers observed that preschool children made gains across academic, social-emotional, and behavioral domains, as reflected in the Child Observation Record scores.
- Parents expressed their gratitude toward the Miami Lighthouse Academy and their exceptional teachers and staff. They felt their children gained many new skills while at the academy, including language, literacy, and communication skills. Parents also reported a positive change in children's patience, empathetic behaviors, and independence.
- Parents also highly valued parent-teacher communication, and recognized that this relationship was critical for their child's development. They noted they were given new strategies and practices that mirror classroom practices and best assist their children's academic and social-emotional development at home.