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## Pre-K students more prepared, report finds

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Lafayette Parish students enrolled in a public school pre-kindergarten program are more prepared for kindergarten and overall school success, according to a report released Tuesday.

The Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development report noted that 4-year-old students at Lafayette Parish schools scored at or above the national average at the end of the 2008-09 school year.

"We were very pleased with them," said Christine Duay, the early childhood supervisor for the Lafayette Parish School System. She added that the school system continues to scrutinize scores and grow.

Every year new pre-kindergarten students are given a pretest and at the end of the year given a posttest.

Lafayette Parish pre-K students' scores improved from the seventh percentile in the pretest to the 59th percentile in the posttest in language in the 2008-09 school year.

That means although Lafayette Parish pre-kindergarten students were performing far below level before prekindergarten, at the end of their year, their language score was equal to or higher than that of about 59 percent of the nation's prekindergarten children students that spring.

Print scores, meanwhile, improved from the 11th percentile to the 70th percentile, and math scores

improved from the fifth percentile to the 58th percentile. The national average is the 50th percentile.

"Our research shows that these children are performing at or above the national average prior to kindergarten entry, and this is a testament to the high-quality instruction provided in the pre-K classrooms, expertise of instructors, and dedication of the administration," Picard Center Director Billy Stokes said in a news release.

Lafayette Parish schools served about 770 4-year-old students in the 2008-09 school year through Head Start, 8(g) student enhancement block grant program and the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 program.

Across all funding types, scores were equivalent to or above the national average on the posttests, with the exception of print and math in Head Start. The school system no longer uses Head Start funding, Early Childhood Education supervisor Christine Duay said.

The vast majority of students in the program receive free or reduced lunch, an indicator of poverty.

"The fact that the Lafayette Parish School System has chosen to look at their results across all pre-K programs is also commendable as part of their goal to serve 100 percent of at-risk children and close the achievement gap in its parish." Stokes said.

The first students to participate in an LA 4 class are now eighth-graders, and their test scores are traditionally higher than their peers, Duay said.

The report also lists a number of recommendations for further success, including continuing expansion of pre-K to 3-year-old children and collaborating with high-quality child care centers to maximize

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early intervention from birth.

Duay also hopes to have students' needs and scores follow them to kindergarten in a way that teachers can continue work that started in pre-kindergarten.

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