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REPORT

Hawai'i P–3 Initiative

Findings from the First Year of the Evaluation

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Sponsored by the University of Hawai'i

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Summary

Background

Over the past decade, efforts to improve K–12 educational outcomes have had mixed success at best. One reason often cited by K–12 educators is that many students entering kindergarten lack the basic skills necessary to succeed in school. Differences in language, social, and pre-mathematics skills are apparent when children enter kindergarten, and children who start school behind tend to stay behind (Cannon and Karoly, 2007). In response to these concerns, education reform efforts have increasingly moved "upstream," focusing on ways to improve the readiness of students entering the K–12 system and encouraging the PreK and K–12 systems to better integrate their efforts to promote student learning. The growing "preschool through third-grade," or P–3, movement (Graves, 2006; Rice and McLaughlin, 2007; Takanishi and Kauerz, 2008) reflects this trend. While P–3 initiatives across the country take different forms, at a minimum, they generally include enriched preschool that is strongly aligned with a high-quality K–3 program. Common features of P–3 initiatives include the following:

- alignment of standards, curriculum, and assessment across PreK through third grade
- voluntary PreK offered to three- and four-year-olds
- PreK–3 teachers with at least a bachelor's degree and with specialized training in early education
- both child-centered and teacher-directed instructional approaches in both PreK and K–3 settings.

In 2007, a partnership representing the early childhood, K–12, and higher-education sectors launched a P–3 initiative in Hawai'i with support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This partnership, officially known as the P–20 Partnerships for Education, or P–20, is housed at the University of Hawai'i. The goal of the Hawai'i P–3 initiative is for every child in the state to read at grade level by third grade.

Study Aims and Research Questions

This report presents findings from the first year of RAND's multiyear evaluation of Hawai'i's P–3 initiative, a multilevel effort focused on local demonstration sites and work on broader policy and data issues. A key part of the effort involves implementing a P–3 framework in selected communities to help inform policy and advance the field in professional development, early childhood education coursework, classroom observation, data sharing, and other focus

areas. The Hawai'i initiative also includes broader work at the P–20 partnership level. This report includes an assessment of this P–20 work and that of the two original demonstration sites, the Farrington and Nānākuli-Wai'anae (N-W) complex areas.[1]

The primary goals of the initial year of the evaluation were as follows:

- Clearly document plans for P–20 work and work at the two demonstration sites.
- Develop measures to assess the degree to which the two demonstration sites and the P–20 partnership are executing their plans.
- Identify the strengths of the systems supporting these change efforts and identify opportunities to improve and encourage system-level change.

In addition, the P–20 partnership explicitly asked RAND to help the demonstration sites and the P–20 team develop logic models to describe their work, the purpose of which was to help them articulate their goals and identify measures for assessing progress.

Methods

Key Analytic Tasks

The first year of the evaluation work included two analytic tasks: assessment of plan implementation and examination of the work from a systems-change perspective. To carry out these tasks, the RAND team relied primarily on interviews, focus groups, and document reviews. In addition, we worked with the two sites and the P–20 team to refine logic models that each developed using a template that we provided. Using the plans as a foundation, we worked with each site to develop measures that could be collected over time to assess plan implementation. To understand the information that we collected and to provide input into midcourse corrections, we assessed initiative plans and activities to date from a systems-change perspective. To do so, we relied on a framework developed at RAND that draws from previous work on accountability systems in public agencies (e.g., Stecher et al., 2010; Gormley and Weimer, 1999) and in the private sector (e.g., Welch, 2001; Pande, Neuman, and Cavanagh 2000). It also draws from work on standards-based accountability in education (e.g., Armstrong, 2002; Hill and Bonan, 1991; Adams and Kirst, 1999; McLaughlin and Shepard, 1995) and education reform work more generally (e.g., Lieberman, 2005). It directs attention to the system components and processes that collectively define social systems focused on producing specified outcomes, which generally include expectations, responsibilities, and rewards and specify who is accountable, to whom, and for what, as well as the consequences for meeting or failing to meet specified responsibilities (e.g., Hill and Bonan, 1991; O'Day, 2002; Rothman, 1995). The framework includes five components: (1) setting explicit goals, expectations, and standards for the system; (2) clarifying the responsibilities of key system actors; (3) establishing incentives for participation and appropriate consequences for meeting (or failing to meet) expectations and standards; (4) monitoring and evaluating the performance of key system actors and entities and reporting on progress in a transparent way; and (5) ensuring that key actors have the capacity to carry out their respective responsibilities (Zellman, Ryan, et al., 2009; Ryan

[1] Complex areas are small groupings of schools within the state district that are generally composed of a high school and the middle and elementary schools that feed into it.

and Martínez, 2008). We collected data that were relevant to the system components over the course of our interviews and focus groups. We examined the data in terms of these five components, first assessing the degree to which each component had been addressed formally in the set of current policies and activities in place. Then, we analyzed the ways in which the different components were aligned with each other, focusing particularly on the extent to which the components appeared to work together to promote system goals.

Data Sources

The analyses described in this report drew from several sources, including in-person and telephone interviews and document reviews. Interviews and focus groups were conducted at the P–20 level and in the two P–3 demonstration sites. Interviewees included high-level administrators at the University of Hawai'i, P–20 staff, demonstration site team members, staff from other early childhood organizations, and other key stakeholders. A total of 35 people participated in data collection during our February 2010 visit; 25 were involved in our August 2010 data-collection effort.

Study Limitations

This study had a number of limitations. A key one was constrained resources, which reduced the onsite presence of the RAND team. It was for this reason that we worked to identify measures of progress that could be collected and monitored remotely. Another limitation was the self-selection of the funded demonstration sites, which had to apply for P–3 funds. Hence, the experience of these P–3 "early adopters" cannot be assumed to be generalizable to other school complexes. Another design weakness is the lack of a child-level assessment of kindergarten readiness, which forces us to wait until children exposed to P–3 reach third grade to assess reading scores that are routinely collected at that time. In the interim, we can assess only population-level effects, and this reduces the likelihood of finding effects.

Current P–3 Operations and Activities

In this section, we describe the P–3 activities and the work we did with P–3 participants during the first evaluation year. Our findings are reported separately for the P–20-level work and for the work of each of the two demonstration sites.

P–20 Activities

At the P–20 level, P–3 currently supports a diverse set of activities separate from those in the demonstration sites. These activities are designed to be the "glue" that supports an early learning system that has suffered in recent years from political neglect and fiscal limitations. The work focuses on improving literacy instruction, promoting teacher professional development, and building common data systems from early childhood education through K–20. We identified a number of specific measures that can be used to monitor the initiative's progress toward its objectives; these measures focus on expanding the use of the Classroom Learning Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for PreK–3, developing courses for teachers and incentives for course completion, increasing the number of demonstration sites, and improving data systems.

Farrington Demonstration Site

This site is led by a Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) staff member. As in all the P–3 demonstration sites, the goal is to implement activities in support of the P–3 framework and goals. The idea is to test new approaches that, if demonstrated to be effective, could be disseminated to other local communities. Farrington's first site coordinator, a dynamic supporter of P–3, was promoted out of the position, and the site had no coordinator for some time. DOE agreed to provide in-kind staffing for the effort, but staff were assigned P–3 responsibilities without concomitant reductions in their other work. To support the P–3 leadership, P–20 staff have stepped in to perform some of the administrative work. The site's work is directed toward continuing its early P–3 work and devising ways to provide children with quality early education experiences from PreK through third grade. CLASS is a unifying construct for the Farrington P–3 work because it focuses on improving instruction and supporting quality teachers, two key site goals. A primary thrust of the site's work is to bring together people who rarely talk to each other but share the goal of all children reading at grade level by third grade. Site partners hope to encourage early childhood and K–3 teachers and administrators to jointly review standards, identify gaps, and align educational expectations and curricula. Ultimately, the goal is the adoption of a common curriculum and assessments across PreK–3. The site has set measurable goals for assessing PreK–3 teachers, providing coaching and other professional development, assessing student progress, and coordinating its work.

Nānākuli-Wai'anae Demonstration Site

The co-leader organization of the N-W P–3 site is the Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE), a long-established nonprofit community organization whose goals include the development of community partnerships that provide educational opportunities and promote self-sufficiency among native Hawaiians.[2] The N-W complex has the largest concentration of Native Hawaiian students in the state. INPEACE has resources to facilitate the P–3 effort. In particular, it has taken on a great deal of the P–3 administrative work and provided office space for P–3 staff. INPEACE also supports P–3 by allowing its staff to devote some portion of their time to P–3 work. The N-W P–3 site has a decidedly early childhood focus, in contrast to the greater emphasis on kindergarten and elementary school found in the Farrington site. The focus of N-W's work is carrying out its longstanding agenda to increase exposure to early childhood programs and help children prepare for kindergarten. Its leadership emphasizes the importance of strengthening community and family engagement in early childhood experiences as the best means for improving third-grade reading scores. Key areas of emphasis include ensuring that children's basic needs are met, by making parents aware of services, for example, and promoting the successful transition from PreK to kindergarten. Through work with its DOE partner, N-W is also trying to change DOE's teacher hiring policy in the complex as a means of increasing teacher retention and quality. The site also hopes to increase the number of elementary teachers with early childhood certification.

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[2] The term *Native Hawaiian* refers to residents of Hawai'i identified with native culture. When a lowercase *n* is used, the term applies to those with 50 percent or more blood quantum.

Findings

We relied on the five components of our systems-change framework to organize our analysis of the P–3 initiative and its work to date. In this section, we summarize some of the strengths and challenges that we identified in the P–3 initiative in the first year of the evaluation.

1. Establishing clear goals, expectations, and standards. A key strength of Hawai'i's P–3 initiative is the unanimity and clarity concerning the ultimate goal: all children reading at grade level by third grade. Another strength is the shared understanding among stakeholders of the general argument behind P–3 investments and the key components of P–3 work. Demonstration site autonomy has been a hallmark of the P–3 effort, but the P–20 initiative has increasingly recognized the value of common standards and measures. Consequently, the new sites have been required to include CLASS in their work; P–20 has been working with N-W to encourage the use of CLASS. This change has produced some uncertainty among demonstration site team members regarding site autonomy that should be resolved.

2. Clarifying the responsibilities of key system actors. P–20 staff need to clarify the expectations and roles of the various stakeholders, including demonstration sites and other partners. For example, we encountered considerable confusion among the individuals who believed that they had agreed to serve on the P–3 Advisory Committee outlined in the grant but then had not been asked to meet or provide input after an initial meeting. Another source of confusion concerned the role and relationship of various partners in the initiative, such as the Good Beginnings Alliance, the relatively new Early Learning Council that was established by the last legislature, Kamehameha Schools, and institutions of higher education other than the University of Hawai'i. While they are all key players in early childhood, the roles they are playing in P–3, if any, are not always clear. One reason for the lack of clarity is the reduced role of the Early Learning Council (ELC) in building and supporting an early learning system in the state; its absence reflects a reduced legislative charge and reduced funding.

At the site level, we also encountered considerable uncertainty about aspects of P–3 that should have been straightforward. For instance, the Farrington site did not have a clear understanding of the amount of money available for the planning year, the due date for the site plan, and whether P–3 funds could be used to cover the time that demonstration site staff spent working on P–3 at the Farrington site.

A perceived strength of the Hawai'i P–3 effort is the freedom that the current demonstration sites have been given to design and implement activities that each site believes will promote the shared P–3 goal. Certainly, it allows the sites to tailor plans to fill gaps that are unique to their communities and to build local capacity. At the same time, the P–3 effort would like to create common measures to facilitate cross-site monitoring and ensure shared standards in at least some areas; site autonomy stymies this goal. This issue has produced uncertainty among demonstration site team members regarding expectations and authority, as noted earlier.

3. Establishing incentives and appropriate consequences for meeting or failing to meet expectations and standards. Despite its considerable potential power to do so, the P–3 effort has done little to establish performance incentives at the P–20 or demonstration site level, yet these mechanisms are known to have considerable power to change behavior (e.g., Stecher et al., 2010; Gormley and Weimer, 1999). A notable exception is P–20 staff efforts to work with providers of professional development to create incentives for kindergarten and PreK teachers to attain more education and training. As more demonstration sites join the initiative and common measures are collected, an additional incentive is available to the P–20 team: compe-

tition among sites to administer the most CLASS assessments or improve CLASS scores. Such competition has been found to be a powerful motivator of effort (Brewer, Gates, and Goldman, 2004).

For example, demonstration sites could attain prestige by administering the most CLASS assessments or improving CLASS scores.

4. Monitoring and evaluating the performance of key actors and reporting on progress. One of the RAND team's major objectives for the first year of the evaluation was to develop measures that the demonstration sites, P–20 staff, and the outside evaluator could use to monitor P–3 performance. The team engaged with key P–3 stakeholders in a process that helped the sites and P–20 staff identify measures that they felt reflected the core objectives of their work, were fair, were available, and could be collected at a reasonable cost. Data on these measures will be collected throughout 2011; these measures will enable the RAND team to assess key aspects of P–3 performance in the second year of the evaluation. Establishing similar measures for monitoring performance in the three new sites will be a priority for the initiative in the next year. In addition to collecting and reporting the measures, a clear timetable and forum for discussing these assessments with the demonstration sites should be specified and scheduled. At the time of this writing, there was no specific plan in place for such discussions.

A laudable effort in the area of performance monitoring and data collection is the effort going forward to include PreK data in the state's longitudinal data set, which currently tracks all students in the state beginning in kindergarten. This will provide a powerful tool for determining which programs, levels of exposure, and age of exposure are the most critical to meeting key learning goals. The measures being collected for the demonstration sites could be used to assess whether sites are meeting objectives and where there may be needs for technical assistance or other support.

5. Building capacity. It is essential that key P–3 actors have the capacity to execute their respective responsibilities. Much attention has been focused on building the capacity of teachers by improving the professional development system to deliver higher-quality instruction and by developing ways to reward teachers for seeking and obtaining more education and training. By developing accessible online course sequences and attaching clear incentives to completion of training milestones, the capacity of early childhood educators is likely to grow. At the demonstration site level, the P–3 effort might promote capacity by providing more support for staff time. P–3-funded staff at these sites could more easily be held accountable for site-level progress and would have more time to focus on P–3 efforts. Capacity might also be enhanced by encouraging more cross-site sharing of ideas and best practices and regular convenings of stakeholders in P–3 work.

Conclusions

The Hawai'i P–3 initiative has created a set of activities and systems whose goals are to increase the reading skills of third graders by engaging PreK and K–3 teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in a number of activities that operationalize the seven focus areas on which the initiative is based. Local demonstration site activities and the broader activities being pursued by the P–20 effort are designed to improve the school readiness of incoming kindergartners, raise the quality of PreK–3 teachers, increase the analytic capacity of the state, and help the sites improve a range of activities, such as coordination, alignment, and instructional prac-

tices. There are already some indicators of success in this area. For example, at the demonstration sites, the requirement that PreK and DOE providers work together to propose a design and goals for the site's P–3 work has increased communication and created working relationships that did not exist before the P–3 initiative.

At least some of the components that make up well-functioning systems are already part of the P–3 initiative. For example, P–3 has set a clear, long-term goal for the initiative, and this goal is widely shared. It has also created participation incentives for the demonstration sites through its funding. Additionally, P–3 has signaled its intention to monitor the performance of the demonstration sites through support for an outside evaluation.

The P–3 initiative exhibits several key strengths that hold promise for significantly advancing the work and promoting its effectiveness. At the same time, several challenges have encumbered P–3 activities in the past year and threaten to undermine progress in the longer term. By recognizing some of these challenges at this early stage and making midcourse corrections, the P–20 partnership is more likely to be able to resolve some of these issues and move forward more effectively. It has already recognized some of these challenges, e.g., the need to afford sites sufficient autonomy to conduct the activities that are most crucial to their respective communities while ensuring that some common measures are collected so that the P–20 and RAND teams can assess the progress of the initiative across sites.