

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

September 11, 2001

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education
From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools
Subject: Update on the Kindergarten Program

Purpose

This memorandum provides the Board of Education with an update on the revised kindergarten program and its implementation in half-day and full-day kindergarten classrooms in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). This update also provides a summary of students' end-of-year reading progress and an overview of the current status of the kindergarten initiative.

First-Year Findings

To adequately evaluate the long-term effects of the school system's investment in our early childhood efforts and determine whether students demonstrated improved achievement, the Office of Shared Accountability staff designed and began the implementation of a longitudinal study of the Comprehensive Kindergarten Initiative in February 2001. The Kindergarten Initiative includes multiple components to be phased in over several years.

One of the most far-reaching components of the revised kindergarten program was the development and systemwide implementation of the kindergarten version of the local MCPS Early Childhood Assessment Program (ECAP) in reading. These research-based early literacy assessment tools constitute an integral part of the revised curriculum and hold great promise for improving reading instruction in kindergarten. First-year examination of student progress confirms the value of placing these assessment tools in the hands of teachers for supporting literacy learning among all students.

The end-of-year kindergarten reading skill results clearly demonstrated significant gains in students' mastery of the beginning, foundational reading skills that are critical to successful text reading in first grade (Attachment 1). The four foundational skills examined for this report were

letter knowledge, knowledge about print concepts (e.g., text is read from left to right, punctuation marks have different meanings, etc.), sight word knowledge, and knowledge of letter-sound relationships. The first-year findings are listed below:

- More than 80 percent of students systemwide had achieved “reading-ready” levels of knowledge by the end of kindergarten, and 69 percent had demonstrated the more advanced task of reading text material.
- The majority of students in the high-risk groups (poverty and English Language Learning (ELL)) completed kindergarten, demonstrating “reading-ready foundational skills.” Within each of the four foundational skill areas, more than 80 percent of the students without risk factors achieved “reading-ready scores”; close to 75 percent of the poverty/not second language needs students achieved readiness scores; and, within three of the four skill areas, more than 66 percent of the highest-risk students achieved readiness scores. These findings revealed a reduction in the discrepancy between the performances of the three groups over the kindergarten year, whereby the rate of progress of the students in the two higher-risk groups was generally greater than the rate of progress of the group of students without risk factors. This finding did not bear out for the knowledge of print concepts skill area.
- Results in the four foundational reading skill areas demonstrated significant benefits of the full-day program for the highest-risk students, but were also significant for the groups of lower-risk students as well.
- Maximum benefits were realized for Head Start graduates who participated in a full-day compared with half-day, kindergarten program.
- The findings clearly demonstrated that students who are 4 years old at the time they enter kindergarten lag behind comparable 5-year-old students at both the beginning and end of kindergarten on all measures of reading skills.

Kindergarten Program Update

In an effort to establish and implement a consistent, rigorous, and accelerated kindergarten program in all classrooms, the following were accomplished:

Curriculum and Instruction

- Incorporated increased blocks of time for reading, writing, and mathematics that include opportunities for students to reflect and set goals
- Developed distinctive half-day and full-day kindergarten schedules

- Equipped all classrooms with the following reading/language arts and mathematics materials: (MONDO Stage 1 Deluxe, Rigby PM Starters (Red Level), and Scott-Foresman Addison Wesley MATH Kindergarten System, Delta Education Digi-Blocks, Scott-Foresman Addison Wesley *Investigations in Mathematics*)
- Designed a written instructional planning guide (Attachment 2)

Assessment

- Created a comprehensive reading/language arts assessment component (following Marie Clay's *Observation Survey*) that allows teachers to gather language and literacy performance data to determine student progress and group students for instructional purposes
- Provided teachers with a kindergarten ECAP Handbook that contained assessment tools to acquire in-depth and continuous information about their students' progress in literacy development
- Created a systemwide assessment profile for each student
- Implemented a systemwide revised kindergarten report card to inform parents of students' progress in the seven dimensions of development and learning
- Implemented the Maryland Model for School Readiness Screening that assessed the entry-level skills of all kindergarten students
- Completed preparation for school-based kindergarten to first grade transition meetings that occurred in June 2001 to review student progress and create preliminary instructional groupings

Professional Development

- Designed a multiyear staff development plan for approximately 360 teachers to strengthen their classroom practices and increase their knowledge of balanced literacy and mathematics assessment and instruction
- Conducted training sessions for all elementary principals, reading specialists, staff development teachers, and instructional assistants on the effective implementation of reading/language arts, mathematics, and assessments of the revised curriculum
- Developed an e-mail system of communication with kindergarten teachers and principals that provided them with up-to-date information related to this initiative as well as vehicles for timely response to questions and concerns

- Facilitated voluntary kindergarten teacher meetings and work sessions to address aspects of the revised curriculum and program
- Held a full-day culmination activity for school teams of principals, staff developers, reading specialists, and kindergarten teacher representatives

Full-day Kindergarten

The revision of the kindergarten program is a part of the *Early Success* Trend Bender that also included organizational changes in full-day kindergarten classrooms. Full-day kindergarten schools serve greater percentages of children and families who face challenges associated with poverty and second-language learning. These programs provide the following:

- Increased classroom time (Extensions in Literacy and Mathematics-ELM) for children to engage in extended, in-depth, literacy-based, and mathematics learning opportunities
- Reduced student-staff ratios of 15 to 1 so that teachers can maximize the productivity of children's engagement in literacy-based learning through increased time and attention with individual students and small groups

Parent Information

In order to provide all kindergarten parents with information about the development and implementation of the revised Kindergarten Curriculum, the following documents were prepared and disseminated to elementary schools:

1. Kindergarten Program Outcomes booklets
2. Kindergarten Instructional Program trifold brochures
3. Kindergarten Program transparencies for use at Back to School Nights
4. Drafts of translated letters to parents describing the new kindergarten program, the report card, and the assessment component

Program Implications

While pleased with the first-year reading progress of kindergarten students, the Kindergarten Curriculum planning committee utilized teacher feedback and literacy assessment data to revise program components and procedures.

Text-Reading Progress

One program enhancement that will promote an increase in student text reading by the end of kindergarten is the use of an updated Kindergarten Decision Tree that will guide teachers to identify and administer appropriate assessments for individual students (Attachment 3).

Assessment instructions were modified, wording of running record book introductions were adjusted for 5 year olds, and running record texts were re-leveled after a new Level 1 text was added.

The Kindergarten Instructional Program Planning Guide was developed to aid teachers in their formulation of flexible reading instructional groups. This new program feature holds promise as a gap-closing strategy because each student's foundational reading scores generate an individual literacy profile for which teachers can match explicit instructional prescriptions. This personalized approach to reading instruction promotes students' continuous progress and acceleration.

Concepts About Print Lessons

Knowledge of print concepts, a skill area that is essential to learning to read, must be emphasized during shared reading activities, particularly with English language learners in the classroom. Parent education activities should highlight the importance of this skill and provide parents with demonstrations of how to develop and reinforce their children's print awareness. While the kindergarten professional development plan will provide teachers with opportunities to learn effective strategies for teaching the writing process and mathematics in half-day and full-day kindergarten classrooms, ways to explicitly develop students' print awareness also will be addressed.

Head Start Graduates in Half-day Kindergarten Programs

The first-year findings provide compelling evidence of the significant benefits of a full-day kindergarten program for Head Start students' literacy achievement. As a result of the expansion of full-day kindergarten in 17 additional schools, we are delighted that approximately 370 additional Head Start students will participate in a full-day kindergarten program this fall.

To address the language and literacy achievement of Head Start students whose home schools offer half-day kindergarten programs, staff proposes that Individual Transition Plan meetings be held at the end of the school year in order to establish literacy goals for kindergarten. This activity mirrors the school-based kindergarten to first grade transition meetings held in all elementary schools in June 2001 that provided kindergarten and first-grade teachers with meaningful conversations about student strengths and needs and served as a vehicle for program planning for individuals and groups of students. Staff, in collaboration with the county's early childhood initiative, will explore ways to provide extended-day, high-quality program experiences through child care partnerships for these students.

Recognizing the importance of engaging students in activities that promote the development of beginning foundational reading skills, explicit print awareness and letter-identification indicators have been added to the preschool Early Childhood Observation Record (ECOR) as end-of-year expected student accomplishments.

Oral Language and Literacy Development of Preschoolers

The assessment results also verified what scientists know about young children's oral language development. Children who know and use lots of words are more likely to become good readers. Developing the oral language skills of children prior to school entry is key to their future reading fluency and comprehension rates. The county's Early Childhood Initiative, a collaboration among county agencies and private providers to improve services and reach out to families with young children, will be instrumental in promoting the importance of young children's oral language development.

One strategy that will be implemented to achieve this goal is a *Learning Party*. A trained team will demonstrate to parents a concise set of interactive parent/child activities that promote early literacy skill and basic mathematics concept development. These parties will occur at schools, churches, housing complexes, and the Judy Center, a comprehensive service center for young children and their families located in Silver Spring.

Summary

The new kindergarten program embraces research-based literacy best practices, incorporates child development theory, considers early brain research, and addresses what young children need to be nurtured yet appropriately stimulated intellectually. The first year of implementation has proven to be quite challenging, yet rewarding. The hard work and commitment of the kindergarten teachers to this comprehensive initiative and their ability to be reflective and attempt change has been instrumental to the success of the kindergarten revision. The first-year findings of the Comprehensive Kindergarten Initiative study provide our school system evidence needed to stay the course in an effort to "raise the bar and close the gap" for all students.

At the table for today's discussion are Mrs. Judie Muntner, associate superintendent, Office of Instruction and Program Development; Ms. Pamela Prue, director, Division of Early Childhood Programs and Services; Dr. Fran Bridges-Cline, evaluation specialist, Office of Shared Accountability; Mr. Vincent Fazzalare, instructional specialist, Division of Early Childhood Programs and Services; and Dr. Joanne Smith, principal, Glen Haven Elementary School.

JDW:JM:std

Attachments

Office of Shared Accountability
Montgomery County Public Schools
Rockville, Maryland

**Kindergarten Student Progress: Acquisition of Reading Skills Year 1 of the
MCPS Kindergarten Initiative 2000-2001**

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August 2001

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Executive Summary

Kindergarten Student Progress: Acquisition of Reading Skills Year 1 of the MCPS Kindergarten Initiative 2000-2001

This report is the third in a series of reports summarizing the results of reading assessments conducted in fall, winter, and spring with the 2000-2001 cohort of kindergarten students in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). This third report examines students' end-of-year progress in mastering kindergarten reading skill accomplishments that are widely acknowledged in the reading research literature as essential for students to become successful readers and writers.

The 2000-2001 school year saw many changes in the kindergarten classrooms of MCPS. One of the most far-reaching components of the revised kindergarten curriculum this year was the development and systemwide implementation of the kindergarten version of the local MCPS Early Childhood Assessment Program (ECAP) in reading. These research-based early literacy assessment tools constitute an integral part of the revised curriculum and hold great promise for improving reading instruction in kindergarten. First-year examination of student progress, as summarized in this report, confirms the value of placing these assessment tools in the hands of teachers for supporting literacy learning among all students.

Systemwide Kindergarten Student Progress: Achievement of Foundational Reading Skills

A primary goal of the kindergarten program is to support students' acquisition of the beginning, foundational reading skills

In this study, systemwide student progress was evaluated with respect to a developmental continuum in learning to read. A primary goal of the kindergarten program is to support students' acquisition of the beginning, foundational reading skills that will ensure rapid transition into successful text reading as students articulate to first grade. Four¹ of

these foundational skills are

- letter knowledge,
- knowledge about print concepts (e.g., text is read from left to right, punctuation marks have different meanings, etc.),
- sight word knowledge, and
- knowledge of letter-sound relationships.

¹ Two additional assessments of early reading behaviors, Phonemic Awareness and Record of Oral Language are included in the assessment program. Needed revisions to these assessments, made between the fall and winter assessment periods, do not allow comparisons of fall and spring results.

The reading research literature is clear that all of these skill areas are critical to learning to read, but is not clear as to specific proficiency levels that must be achieved before learning to read. This is because individual children will have different profiles of skills in these areas when they begin to read; however, all children will need substantial proficiency in each skill area. For purposes of evaluating kindergarten students' progress toward successful reading, score ranges that are indicative of "substantial proficiency" were empirically established. These scores are based on the scores in these foundational skill areas that were achieved by our MCPS kindergarten students who had moved forward into real reading and are referred to as "reading-ready" scores. "Reading-ready" scores for each of the 4 foundational skill areas are

- letter knowledge (can identify 45 or more upper-and lower-case letters),
- knowledge of print concepts (knows 13 or more of 16 concepts assessed),
- sight word knowledge (recognizes 8 or more of 22 words that occur frequently in books for early readers), and
- knowledge of letter-sound relationships (can write letters that correspond to eight or more sounds in words of a dictated sentence).

Eighty percent of students had achieved "reading-ready" levels of knowledge by the end of kindergarten.

Analyses of systemwide kindergarten student progress toward substantial proficiency for reading indicate that, in each of these foundational skill areas, over 80 percent of students had achieved "reading-ready" levels of knowledge by the end of

kindergarten.

Systemwide Kindergarten Student Progress: Achievement of Text Reading Skills

Sixty-nine percent of the kindergarten students had moved beyond the foundational skills and were already capable of the more advanced task of reading text material by the end of kindergarten.

Once students acquire firm control of the foundational reading skills, a second step in the developmental continuum is early text reading, which requires that students integrate their knowledge and skills in the foundational skill areas and apply these to text. Some students, especially those who enter kindergarten with greater control of the foundational reading skills, will be ready to move into early text reading during their kindergarten year. For this reason, the kindergarten assessments include increasingly difficult texts so that teachers can monitor the progress of students as they approach first grade readiness. Sixty-nine percent of the kindergarten students had moved beyond the

foundational skills and were already capable of the more advanced task of reading text material by the end of kindergarten.

Progress of Kindergarten Students From Poverty-level Families and with Second Language Learning Needs (High-risk Groups of Students)

Disparities were most evident between students coming to school from poverty-level families who also had second language learning needs and those who enter without either of these challenges.

Disparities of literacy skills across different groups of students at entry to kindergarten were reported earlier (March 2001). Disparities were most evident between students coming to school from poverty-level families who also had second language learning needs and those who entered school without either of these challenges. Students from poverty-level families, but without second language learning needs, fell between these groups in literacy skills at entry to kindergarten.

Findings indicate that although disparities continue to exist at the end of kindergarten, the majority of students in the high-risk groups (poverty and second language learning) are, in fact, moving to first grade in fall 2001 with “reading-ready” foundational skills. Analyses of fall to spring progress indicate that within each of the four foundational skill areas, over 80 percent of the students without risk factors achieved at “reading-ready” score ranges in the spring; close to 75 percent of the poverty/not second language students achieved at the readiness level in the four skill areas; and in three of the four skill areas, over 66 percent of the highest-risk (poverty and second language needs) students achieved at the readiness level by the end of kindergarten.

Over 66 percent of the highest-risk (poverty and second language needs) students achieved at the readiness level in three of four foundational skill areas.

Analyses of fall to spring progress indicate that within each of the four foundational skill areas, over 80 percent of the students without risk factors achieved at “reading-ready” score ranges in the spring; close to 75 percent of the poverty/not second language students achieved at the readiness level in the four skill areas; and in three of the four skill areas, over 66 percent of the highest-risk (poverty and second language needs) students achieved at the readiness level by the end of kindergarten.

These findings also reveal a reduction in the discrepancy between the performances of the three groups by the end of the kindergarten year. In other words, the rate of progress¹ of students in the two high-risk groups was generally greater than the rate of progress of the students without risk factors. It also is important to note that among students from poverty-level families who also have second language learning needs, very few began the school year with “reading-ready” skill levels (a range of 2 percent to 10 percent over the four skill areas). Thus, this group of students, in particular, exhibited major strides in the acquisition of foundational reading skills by the end of kindergarten (a range of 51 percent to 74 percent “reading-ready” over the four skill areas).

The one skill area in which progress was more limited for this high-risk group of students in particular is knowledge of print concepts, a skill area that is essential to learning to read and that is highly responsive to shared reading between adults and children.

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¹ Rate of progress here refers to the increase, from fall 2000 to spring 2001 in the percentage of students who had achieved “reading-ready” scores in a skill area.

concepts, a skill area that is essential to learning to read and that is highly responsive to shared reading between adults and children. These findings suggest the importance of ensuring that the kindergarten, as well as the first grade, instructional program target these skills explicitly through shared reading activities, particularly with English language learners in the classroom.

Kindergarten Student Progress in Full-day and Half-day Programs

Two critical additions to the kindergarten program this year were the expansion of full-day kindergarten and reduction of class size in these full-day classrooms. These components of the kindergarten initiative were strategically placed in schools that serve the highest concentrations of students with learning needs associated with poverty and second language learning. We examined the benefits of these additional resources for supporting student achievement in general and of the higher-need students in particular.

All analyses of student progress provided consistent evidence of the significant benefits of the full-day, reduced-class-size kindergarten program for student learning. Controlling for differences in entry skills of students in each of the foundational reading skill areas, kindergarten students attending full-day

Kindergarten students attending full-day programs made significantly greater gains in the acquisition of reading skills.

programs made significantly greater gains in the acquisition of reading skills. With respect to the highest-risk students (poverty and second language needs), the magnitude of achievement differences in the full-day versus half-day classrooms is striking: 81 percent versus 62 percent “reading-ready” in letter knowledge; 58 percent versus 39 percent in knowledge of print concepts; 73 percent versus 60 percent in sight word knowledge; and 73 percent versus 54 percent in knowledge of letter-sound

relationships. These added benefits of the full-day program were the greatest among the highest-risk students, but also were significant for lower-risk students as well.

Progress of Head Start Graduates in Full-day and Half-day Kindergarten Programs

The achievement of Head Start graduates who attended full-day kindergarten programs far exceeded that of their Head Start peers who attended half-day kindergarten programs.

This study followed up on earlier findings regarding the benefits of the MCPS Head Start program to students’ reading readiness skills at entry to kindergarten. At the end of kindergarten, the achievement of Head Start graduates who attended full-day kindergarten programs far exceeded that of their Head Start peers who attended half-day kindergarten programs. Moreover, whereas in fall 2000, MCPS Head Start graduates entered kindergarten with stronger letter and print knowledge skills than comparable non-Head Start students, those Head Start graduates who attended half-day kindergarten had, by the end of

kindergarten, fallen behind their non-Head Start similar peers in these skills. At

the same time, the Head Start graduates in full-day kindergarten maintained their advantage over non-Head Start similar peers. This pattern of achievement results clearly indicates that, for students who transition from our MCPS Head Start programs, participation in a full-day, as compared to a half-day, kindergarten program is essential for maintaining and further developing the literacy learning gains made in Head Start.

Progress of Students Entering Kindergarten at 4-years-old versus 5-years-old

The findings are clear: 4-year-olds lag behind comparable 5-year-olds at both the beginning and end of kindergarten on all measures of reading skills.

One further policy issue was examined in this study, namely the early entry into kindergarten of 4-year-olds. The findings are clear: 4-year-olds lag behind comparable 5-year-olds at both the beginning and end of kindergarten on all measures of reading skills. It also was found that a greater percentage of the higher-need students are entering kindergarten at the younger ages. In light of the major advantage accruing to the higher-need students in full-day kindergarten who also had attended Head Start, it is

likely that many of the younger children would maximally benefit from attendance at a high-quality pre-kindergarten program, such as Head Start, for a year before entering kindergarten as 5-year-olds.

Kindergarten Student Progress: Acquisition of Reading Skills 2000-2001

The Instructional Context for Student Progress: Year 1 of the MCPS Kindergarten Initiative

This report is the third in a series of reports summarizing the results of reading assessments conducted in fall, winter, and spring with the 2000-2001 cohort of kindergarten students in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). The first report, issued in March 2001, described the wide range of early literacy skills among MCPS kindergarten students at entry to kindergarten, and documented the challenge for kindergarten teachers to successfully address the striking diversity of literacy learning needs of students in their classrooms. In June 2001, a second report was issued that examined mid-year progress of kindergarten students and provided evidence that, by midyear, major strides had been made by all students in the acquisition of reading skills that are foundational, preparatory skills for reading.

With the availability of end-of-year, spring 2001 reading assessment results, this third report examines the progress that students made over the course of the full kindergarten year in acquiring reading skills essential to becoming successful readers. Interpretation of the resulting picture of progress requires some knowledge of the kindergarten program and the MCPS curriculum context in which these reading assessments were embedded during this school year.

The 2000-2001 school year saw many changes in the kindergarten classrooms of MCPS. In 17 of the highest-need schools in the County, the number of classrooms in which a full-day kindergarten program was offered more than doubled from the prior year, and, at the same time, the number of students in each full-day classroom was reduced to attain a student-staff ratio of 15:1. Moreover, instructional activities in all kindergarten classrooms were affected by systemwide revisions to the kindergarten curriculum and ongoing staff development in strategies for implementing the revised curriculum.

One of the most significant and far-reaching of all the changes to the kindergarten program this school year was the implementation of the kindergarten version of the local, MCPS Early Childhood Assessment Program (ECAP) in reading. The reading skill areas selected for inclusion in these assessments were those that the reading research literature has identified as the primary, essential building blocks for successful reading. MCPS program planners of the new kindergarten curriculum reasoned that if kindergarten teachers were to be successful in supporting children's acquisition of these skills, then they must have the tools to provide them with in-depth knowledge of their students' skills in these areas. Therefore, kindergarten teachers were given training in the administration of these assessments and in the application of this information to instructional decision-making. Moreover, teachers were asked to gather this assessment information three times a year (fall, winter, and spring) so that they could monitor the progress of their students in these specific skill areas.

The information yielded by these assessments has served, and will continue in subsequent years to serve, the dual purpose of informing instruction and curriculum decision-making in the kindergarten classroom, and of informing the school system about the benefits of resources directed to specific components of the kindergarten initiative.

It is critical to note that this report constitutes an interim summary of student reading achievement outcomes associated with the first-year implementation of components of the kindergarten initiative in MCPS. The report summarizes the short-term effects of the first implementation year of the kindergarten initiative. The major costs of this initiative are those supporting the full-day, reduced-class-size component. It is essential, for both budget and policy decisions, that this investment be evaluated not just with respect to short-term effects, but far more importantly, with respect to the longer-term, cumulative effects on student success. This examination of effects must occur across subsequent cohorts of kindergarten students as the program matures, and for each cohort of kindergarten students as these students progress into the first, second, and third grades.

Questions Addressed in This Report

Systemwide Student Progress in the Acquisition of Reading Skills

1. To what extent has the 2000-2001 kindergarten program been effective in ensuring that kindergarten students, overall, acquire the foundational skills in reading that will prepare them for successful reading?
2. To what extent has the 2000-2001 kindergarten program supported kindergarten students' progress, overall, in moving beyond the foundational skills and into successful reading of text?

Progress of Students with Different Characteristics

3. To what extent has the 2000-2001 kindergarten program been successful in supporting comparable progress among students who entered kindergarten with different levels of literacy skills?
 - Students from poverty-level families (FARMS)
 - Students with second language learning needs (ESOL)
 - Students who are younger (4-years-old) at entry to kindergarten

Progress of Students in Full-day versus Half-day Kindergarten Programs

4. How has the full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten program, as compared to the half-day kindergarten program, contributed to the progress of students overall, and to the progress of students who entered kindergarten with different risk factors for literacy learning?
5. How has the full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten program, as compared to the half-day kindergarten program, contributed to the progress of students from high-risk groups who have attended MCPS' Head Start program?

The Kindergarten Reading Assessments Used to Monitor Student Progress

Foundational Reading Skills

In the course of successful preparation for independent reading, students must acquire and integrate knowledge and skills in several foundational skill areas. The kindergarten Early Childhood Assessment Program (ECAP) in reading is designed to yield information about students' early reading behaviors that are critical for preparing students to read. Four of the assessments and the skills and knowledge measured by each include the following:

1. Letter Identification: assesses the range of upper- and lower-case letters that a student knows.
2. Concepts About Print: assesses what a student knows about how language is printed (e.g., identifying the front of the book, directionality, one-to-one matching of spoken words to printed words, recognizing that there are letters, and clusters of letters called words, that there are first and last letters in words, that you can choose upper- and lower-case letters, that spaces are there for a reason, and that different punctuation marks have meaning) (Clay, 1993).
3. Word Recognition: assesses the extent to which a student is accumulating a reading vocabulary of the most frequently occurring words in texts read by young children.
4. Hearing and Recording Sounds: assesses a student's knowledge of sound-to-letter links, as indicated by how well the student can hear sounds in words and find ways to record those sounds.

Text Reading Skills

Although a primary goal of the kindergarten year is to ensure that all students leave with solid control of the foundational skills for learning to read, there are some students who enter kindergarten with many of these skills already in place, and other students for whom these skills will fall into place by midyear. These students will be ready to begin text reading, and for purposes of assessing students' text reading, the kindergarten ECAP includes

- running records, which are used to assess a student's oral reading behaviors and use of reading strategies.

Within the kindergarten ECAP, five books are available for use in doing a running record with a student. These books are leveled 1 through 5 and include increasingly difficult text to be read at each level. For those students who move beyond the kindergarten book level 5, books from the first grade ECAP are available for assessing the student's fluency level. In this report, the first grade books are referred to as "book levels above 5".

A Frame of Reference for Evaluating Progress

The research literature on early literacy learning confirms the importance of the skill areas assessed by the kindergarten ECAP to a student's development as a successful, independent reader. However, the literature is less clear about the level of proficiency in these skill areas that is required for a student to be ready to move into text reading.

Without baseline information on progress that previous cohorts of MCPS kindergarten students made on these reading assessments, it is not possible to evaluate the significance of students' progress against the standard of an earlier cohort's performance. However, at this time, it is less important to evaluate progress against a previous cohort's benchmarks than it is to evaluate progress in terms of instructionally meaningful benchmarks, as these are now aligned with the focus of the revised kindergarten curriculum framework.

For this purpose, one of the benchmarks used for evaluating progress is

- locally-derived "reading-ready" cut-off scores for the four foundational reading skill assessments. The group of students who were reading text at the winter assessment period,¹ and who, therefore, could justifiably be considered "reading-ready," was used to determine "reading-ready" cut-off scores for four early reading skill assessments². These scores can be considered those that indicate students are potentially ready to move into early text reading.³ Assessing progress in terms of these "reading-ready" scores is a reasonable procedure, given that a primary goal of kindergarten is to build students' skills in these early reading areas to prepare them to launch rapidly into successful early text reading as they transition to first grade. The cut-off scores established for each of the four assessments are presented below.

Locally Derived "Reading-ready" Scores for Kindergarten Assessments

	Assessment Scale Range		"Reading-ready" Score Range
	Minimum	Maximum	
Letter Identification	0	54	45+ Letters Correct
Concepts About Print	0	16	13+ Concepts Correct
Word Recognition	0	22	8+ Words Correct
Hearing & Recording Sounds	0	14	8+ Letter/Sounds Correct

¹ Students reading text at the earliest (early emergent) book levels 1 or 2, which included 1,997 students.

² These scores were further validated with spring assessment results for students reading text at book levels 1 or 2.

³ It is important to acknowledge that, despite the large sample size, these score ranges are based on only one cohort of MCPS kindergarten students, and on the text level difficulty of specific texts selected for this assessment. As additional assessment data become available for future cohorts, or texts included in the assessment are expanded, these score ranges can be established with greater precision.

Student Sample

A comparison of the characteristics of students included in the analyses for this report with those of the larger group of all 2000-2001 kindergarten students enrolled in regular MCPS schools is presented in the table below. The sample of students included in this report is clearly representative of the kindergarten student enrollment for the 2000-01 school year.

The primary criteria for inclusion in the analytic sample for this report were: 1) complete data were available for fall, winter, and spring assessments of both Letter Identification and Concepts About Print; and 2) students had not missed more than one month of school during the kindergarten year. Students receiving more than 15 hours of special education services for the majority of the school year also were excluded because very limited assessment data were available for these students.

	All Kindergarten Students Enrolled in Regular MCPS Schools 2000-2001* (N=9287)	Sample of 2000-01 Kindergarten Students Included in Report Analyses (N=7849)
Gender		
Males	52%	51%
Females	48%	49%
Age at Entry to Kindergarten		
4 years	26%	27%
5 years	71%	73%
6+ years	3%	1%
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian	<1%	<1%
African American	20%	20%
Asian American	12%	13%
Hispanic	19%	19%
White	49%	48%
FARMS Participant	23%	24%
ESOL Participant	13%	14%
Special Education Services		
More than 15 hrs. service	3%	--
Less/equal to 15 hrs. service	5%	5%
Other levels of service	1%	1%
Attend Half-day Kindergarten	82%	82%
Attend Full-day Kindergarten	18%	18%

* Excludes students who missed more than one month of school

Exhibit 1 Findings

- Exhibit 1 presents the overall picture of kindergarten student progress in reading skill acquisition. This picture describes the progress that students made in acquiring these skills from fall to winter and winter to spring of their kindergarten year. At each assessment time (fall, winter, and spring) student performance is summarized in terms of score ranges that reflect meaningful skill differences with respect to student learning needs. This view of student performance and progress parallels, at the systemwide level, what these assessment tools enabled kindergarten teachers to see at the classroom level for purposes of informing their instructional decisions.
- Student progress, assessed in terms of achievement of “reading-ready” scores for these skill areas, indicates that the vast majority of students have, by spring, acquired solid control of the foundational skills for successful reading. For each of the four reading skill areas, over 80 percent of kindergarten students were performing at or above the “reading-ready” skill levels by spring. For each skill area these percentages are as follows:
 - Letter Identification: 90 percent of the students knew 45 or more letters.
 - Concepts About Print: 82 percent knew 13 or more of the 16 concepts Assessed.
 - Word Recognition: 85 percent knew 8 or more of the 22 sight words Assessed.
 - Hearing and Recording Sounds: 82 percent correctly wrote 8 or more of the 14 letter-sounds in words of a dictated sentence.

Exhibit 2 Findings

- Exhibit 2 presents kindergarten student progress in developing skills that go beyond those of acquiring skills in the foundational reading skill areas. For a student to move into text reading requires not only a solid grasp of the foundational skills for learning to read, but also the ability to integrate these more isolated skills and successfully apply this knowledge to encounters with text. When a student demonstrates accurate text reading, even of the earliest levels of text difficulty, this provides evidence that the student is taking this next step of putting together skills and applying strategies for attacking text reading.
- Running record assessment results indicate that over two-thirds of the students had taken the next step of integrating and applying these skills to successful text reading by the end of kindergarten. That is, 69 percent of kindergarten students were reading books at level 1 or higher with a 90 percent or better accuracy rate. Level 1 corresponds to the easiest text to read; as book levels increase, so does the text difficulty.
- The spring distribution of students' text reading skills across books with increasingly difficult text (Exhibit 2a) also provides evidence of students' continuous growth over the year. Using winter assessment data (summarized in an earlier report), it is clear that many of the students who were reading text in the spring had made great strides in their text reading from winter to spring. For example:
 - Of the students reading text at book levels 1-2 in the spring, 47 percent were not ready to attempt text reading in the winter, and another 32 percent had attempted to read a level 1 book, but found it too difficult in the winter.
 - Of the students reading at book level 5 in the spring, 30 percent were not ready to attempt text reading or had found a level 1 text too difficult in the winter, and 50 percent were reading text at level 1 in the winter.
- The shape of the spring distribution of students across text levels highlights two primary groups:
 1. Students who are just beginning text reading by spring (33 percent at book level 1).
 2. Students who began text reading earlier in the school year and rapidly developed more advanced text reading skills (32 percent at book levels above 5).

Exhibit 3 Findings

- Exhibit 3 portrays the fall-to-spring progress of kindergarten students in different demographic groups defined by the FARMS and ESOL status of students. Progress in this exhibit is examined by comparing the fall and spring percentages of students achieving “reading-ready” scores in the four foundational reading skill areas.
- Although disparities continue to exist in the spring between the groups of students with risk factors of poverty and second language learning and the group of students without these risk factors, students in all groups made substantial progress over the kindergarten year in acquiring “reading-ready” skills.
- Within all four foundational skill areas, close to three-quarters of the FARMS Only students (a range of 73 percent to 86 percent) are moving into first grade with “reading-ready” skills. Within three of the four foundational skill areas, over 66 percent (a range of 67 percent to 74 percent) of students with the additional challenge of second language learning (ESOL plus FARMS) are moving into first grade with “reading-ready” skills.
- Comparing the rate of student progress from fall to spring (the percentage of students who moved from not-ready to “reading-ready” score ranges) for the higher- and lower-risk groups of students, the findings vary by demographic group and by reading skill area. Specifically, as follows:
 - The progress made by students in the FARMS Only group in the areas of letter knowledge, print knowledge, and knowledge of letter-sound relationships slightly exceeds that of the Non-ESOL/FARMS students; in the area of sight word knowledge, progress is comparable to that of the non-ESOL/FARMS students. Clearly, in the three reading skill areas in which a greater percentage of the higher-risk students (FARMS Only) had moved into “reading-ready” performance, the initial literacy skill disparity between these students and their lower-risk peers is reduced by the end of kindergarten.
 - Progress of the highest-risk group of students (ESOL plus FARMS) exceeded that of the low-risk students (non-ESOL/FARMS) in two critical reading skill areas—letter identification skills and knowledge of letter-sound relationships. Thus, by the end of kindergarten the disparity between these groups at entry to kindergarten is reduced in these literacy learning areas.
 - In the area of sight word knowledge and, most importantly, in the area of print concept awareness, the progress of students in the highest-risk group (ESOL plus FARMS) did not keep pace with that of the non-ESOL/FARMS students. This finding suggests the importance of ensuring that the instructional program is targeting these skills explicitly, particularly with English language learners, in the kindergarten classroom.

Exhibit 4 Findings

- The kindergarten entry age comparisons summarized in Exhibit 4 update earlier findings (fall 2000) that revealed early literacy skill differences in letter and print knowledge between younger (4-years-old) and older (5-years-old) students at entry to kindergarten. These earlier findings also noted greater percentages of younger students in the groups with challenges to early learning opportunities (poverty and second language learning needs).
- The results displayed in Exhibit 4 confirm a continuing lag in achievement of literacy skills by 4-year-old students. Comparisons of the mean scores of students on each of the four foundational reading skill areas indicate significant differences in favor of 5-year-old students both at entry to kindergarten and at the end of the kindergarten year.
- Assessment of differences between the younger and older students indicate a greater percentage of 5-year-olds who are “ready” at each of the three assessment times as well as for each of the four foundational reading skill assessments.
- The gap between younger and older students is relatively constant over time; younger and older students are maintaining comparable rates of progress. Nevertheless, being young at entry to kindergarten clearly represents another challenge, along with those of poverty and second language learning, to achieving the important literacy skill accomplishments of the kindergarten year.
- The entry age differences observed may persist in subsequent grades. We will continue to monitor this through the first grade during the 2001-2002 school year.

Exhibits 5 and 6 Findings

- Exhibits 5 and 6 present findings that address the question of the benefits of the full-day, reduced class size kindergarten program for different groups of students. In these exhibits, student progress is examined with respect to acquisition of “reading-ready” levels of skills in the four foundational reading skill areas.
- The four charts in Exhibit 5 correspond to each of the foundational reading skill areas of letter knowledge, knowledge of print concepts, sight word knowledge, and knowledge of letter-sound relationships. In each of the four charts, end-of-year differences in the percentage of students achieving “reading-ready” scores in full-day as compared to half-day programs are presented for each of the three demographic groups. Exhibit 6 summarizes the half-day and full-day differences with respect to the fall to spring student progress (increase in the percentage of students who are “reading-ready”).
- All analyses of student progress provide consistent evidence of the significant benefits of the full-day, reduced-class size kindergarten program for student learning. Controlling for differences in entry skills of students in each of the four reading skill areas, kindergarten students attending full-day programs made significantly greater gains in the acquisition of the foundational skills that are critically important to becoming successful readers and writers.
- A very striking pattern of findings emerges when the relative benefits of full-day /reduced-class-size kindergarten are examined for different groups of students. Although full-day programming in kindergarten is generally beneficial, it is clear that the benefits of the extended day and reduced class size are greatest for students from poverty level families and who also are learning English as a second language. This pattern is evident for achievement in each of the foundational skill areas, as pictured in Exhibit 5, and is summarized across all skill areas in Exhibit 6.
- For the students without the risk factors of poverty and second language learning (non-ESOL/FARMS), the added benefits of full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten are relatively small in regard to acquisition of the foundational reading skills. In contrast, the benefits to students with poverty and second language learning challenges are striking.
- As the risk factors for literacy learning increase, so too do the benefits of the full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten program. As summarized in Exhibit 6, the students who are participants in both ESOL plus FARMS are demonstrating the greatest differences in achievement in full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten classrooms as compared to half-day classrooms.

Exhibit 7 Findings

- Exhibit 7 portrays students' achievement of "reading-ready" skills across multiple skill areas. To prepare for reading, students must acquire skills in all of the foundational skill areas: none of the skill areas alone is sufficient. Thus, it is important to examine a student's profile across skill areas.
- The findings with respect to skill profiles are consistent with those summarized in Exhibits 5 and 6: the benefits of the full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten program are significant especially for the higher-need students. Differences are not only evident in regard to achievement of reading readiness, but also in respect to the percentage of students who have not achieved readiness in any of the four foundational skills by the end of the year. For example, among the highest-risk group of students (ESOL plus FARMS), 29 percent of those who attended half-day kindergarten were not ready in any skill area, as compared to only 13 percent of the students who attended full-day programs.
- A full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten program is clearly essential for the higher-risk students to begin to close the gap in early literacy skills.

Exhibit 8 Findings

- Exhibit 8 examines students' achievement of the next developmental step in reading—that of integrating foundational skills and applying these to the task of text reading.
- In this aspect of reading achievement as well, the benefits of the full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten for students from poverty-level families and with needs for second language learning are significant.
- Taken together, the pattern of findings about the value of the full-day/reduced-class-size program for all aspects of reading achievement indicates that this program is essential to reducing achievement disparities between the high-risk students and their kindergarten peers without these risk factors.

Exhibit 9 Findings

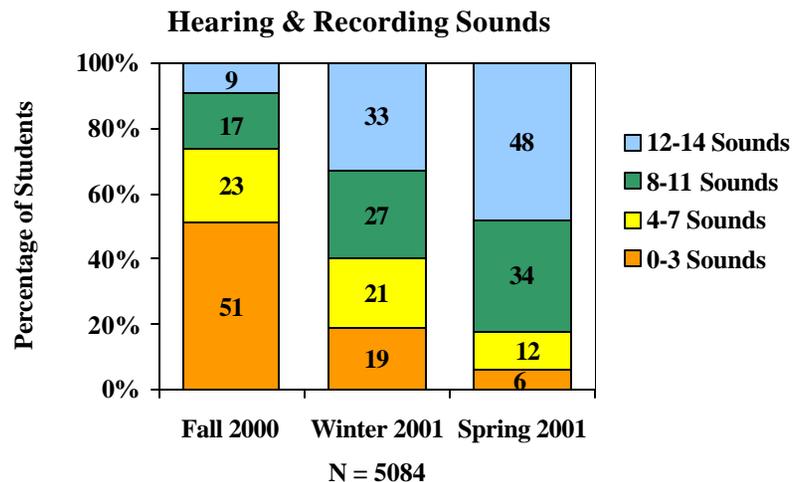
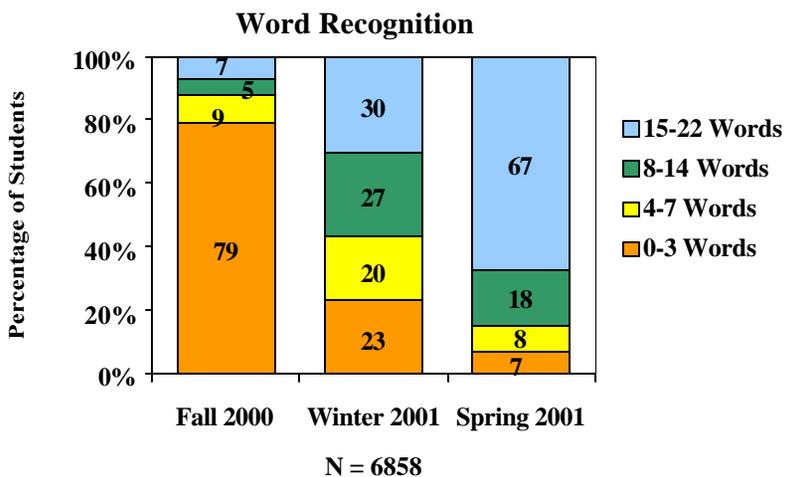
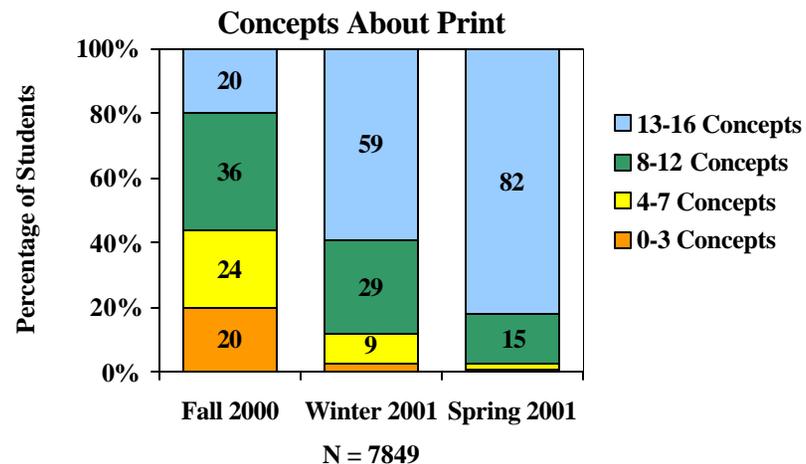
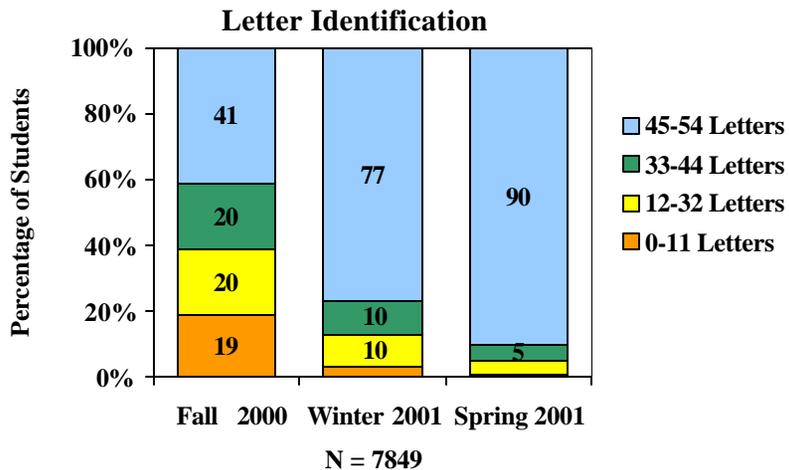
- Exhibit 9 summarizes for the FARMS Only students and then for the ESOL plus FARMS students the different effects of the full-day kindergarten for students who did, and did not, participate in MCPS' Head Start program prior to kindergarten. Program benefits are examined in terms of students' end-of-year achievement of "reading-ready" scores on three or four of the four foundational reading skills.
- The pattern of findings indicates that for both groups of students (FARMS Only and ESOL plus FARMS), the combination of Head Start and a full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten program are maximally beneficial for student achievement.
- Also, for both group of students (FARMS Only and ESOL plus FARMS), the benefit of attending a full-day, as compared to half-day, kindergarten program is greatest for the former MCPS Head Start students. The added benefits to Head Start students of participation in a full-day kindergarten program are striking.
 - For the former MCPS Head Start students from poverty-level families who also need second language learning opportunities, 70 percent who attended the full-day kindergarten achieved "reading-ready" profiles by the end of kindergarten, as compared to 35 percent who attended a half-day kindergarten program.
 - For the former Head Start students from poverty-level families who do not have second language learning needs, this percentage contrast of "reading-ready" students in the full-day versus half-day kindergarten was 82 percent versus 62%.
- Clearly, for students who transition from our MCPS Head Start programs, participation in a full-day, as compared to half-day MCPS kindergarten program is essential for maintaining and further developing the literacy learning gains made in Head Start.
 - This finding is demonstrated by the differences in the performance of Head Start, as compared to non-Head Start students, in the half-day kindergarten. Whereas, in fall 2000 MCPS Head Start graduates entered kindergarten with stronger letter and print knowledge skills than comparable non-Head Start students, the Head Start graduates who attended half-day kindergarten had, by the end of kindergarten, fallen behind their non-Head Start/ high-risk peers in these half-day classrooms.
 - Even greater disparities than those between the Head Start and non-Head Start students were evident between the Head Start graduates who attended half-day kindergarten and their Head Start peers who attended full-day programs.

Exhibits 10 and 11 Findings

- Exhibit 10 portrays, for the highest-risk students (ESOL plus FARMS) who are Head Start graduates, the striking differences in achievement of reading skills when they attend a full-day, as compared to half-day, kindergarten.
- Exhibit 11 highlights the benefits of the Head Start and full-day/reduced-class-size kindergarten program combination with respect to closing the gap in literacy skill achievement between the highest-risk kindergarten students (ESOL plus FARMS) and their peers without the these risk factors (non-ESOL/FARMS).
- Findings summarized in Exhibit 11 demonstrate clearly that, when compared to similar peers who attended other programs, the ESOL plus FARMS students who attended Head Start and then enrolled in a full-day kindergarten were consistently more successful in closing the gap in reading achievements at the end of kindergarten.
 - Compared to the non-ESOL/FARMS students, an average of 39 percent fewer of the highest-risk students who did not attend either Head Start or full-day kindergarten were “reading-ready” across all four foundational reading skill areas. In contrast, this gap was 27 percent for the highest-risk students who attended only full-day kindergarten, and only 17 percent for the high-risk students who attended both Head Start and full-day kindergarten.
- A major finding of this report is that the combination of Head Start followed by full-day kindergarten seems to hold the key for maintaining the potential of the preschool experience and for continuing to close the gap in kindergarten between students with and without poverty and second language learning needs.

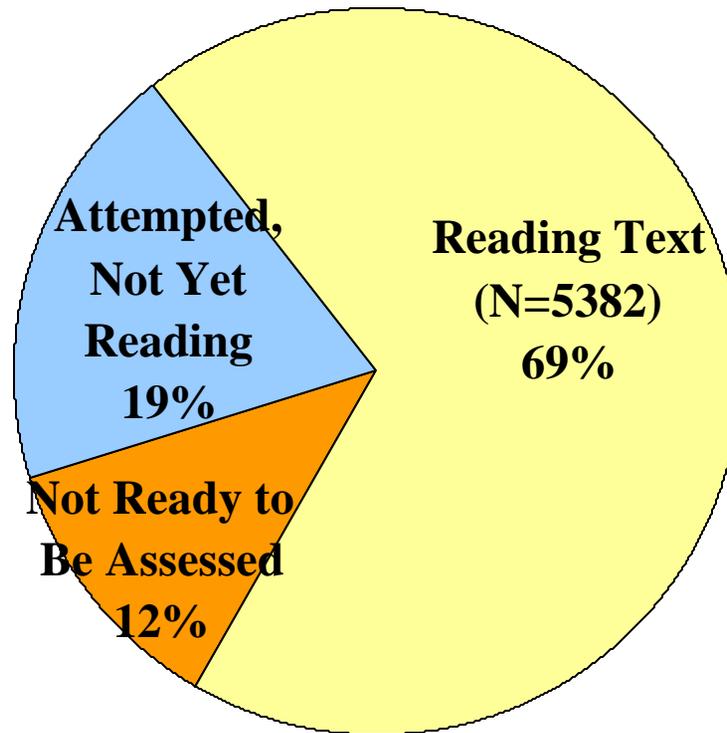
Exhibit 1

Kindergarten Student Progress in Acquiring Early Reading Skills 2000-2001



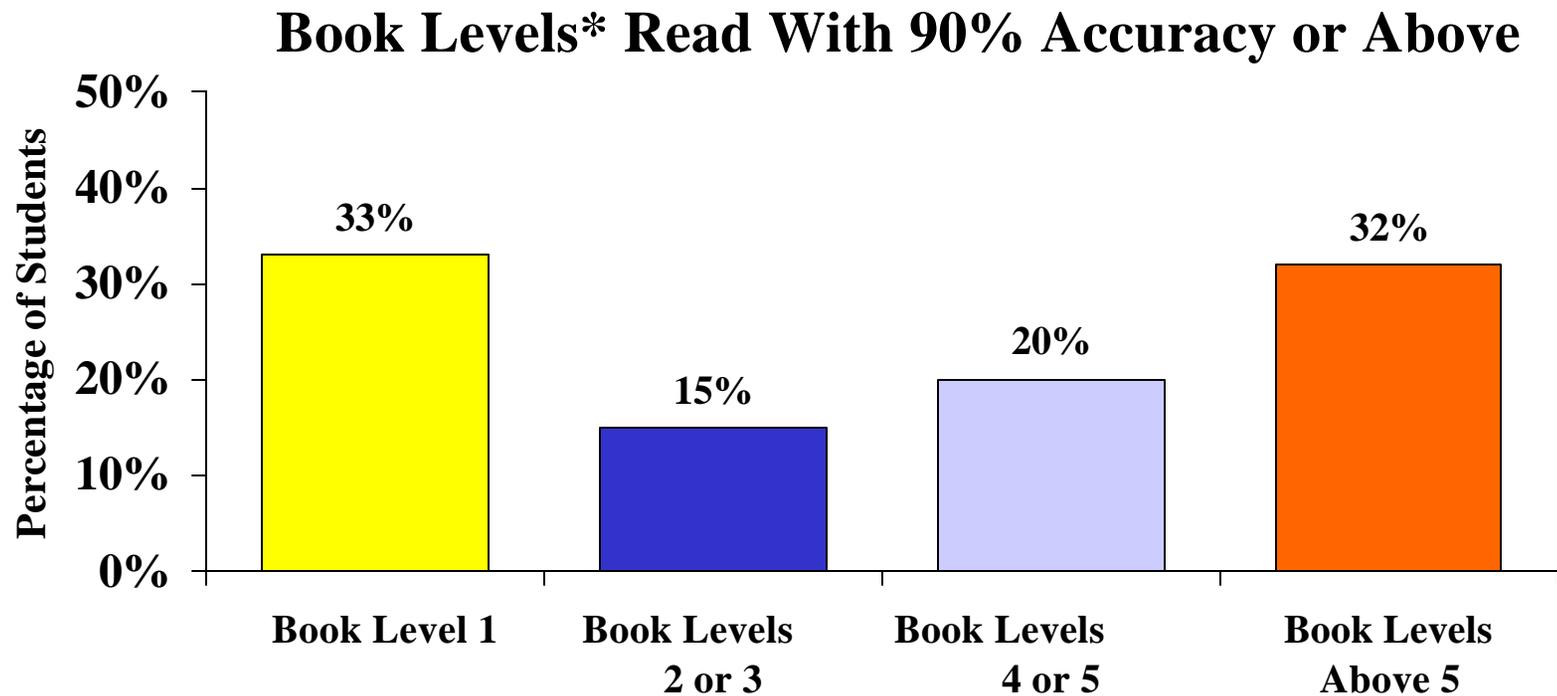
Note: Unrecorded percents are < 5%

Exhibit 2
End-of-year Text Reading Skills of Kindergarten Students
Spring 2001



N = 7849

Exhibit 2a
Book Levels At Which Kindergarten Students Were Reading by Spring 2001
(N=5382)

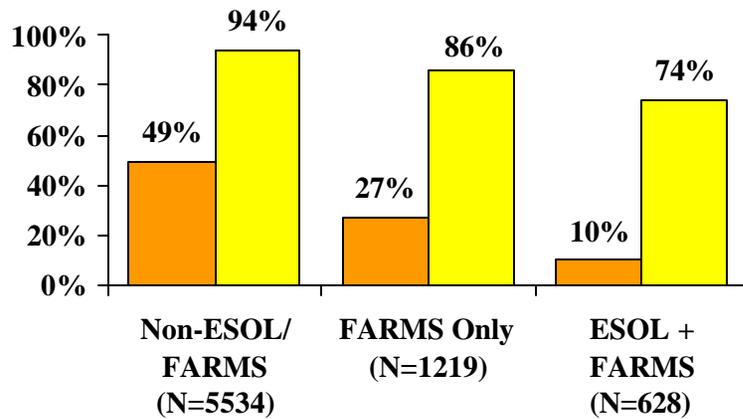


*Book Levels 1 through 5 represent increasingly difficult texts included in the kindergarten ECAP; book levels above 5 are texts from the Grade 1 ECAP

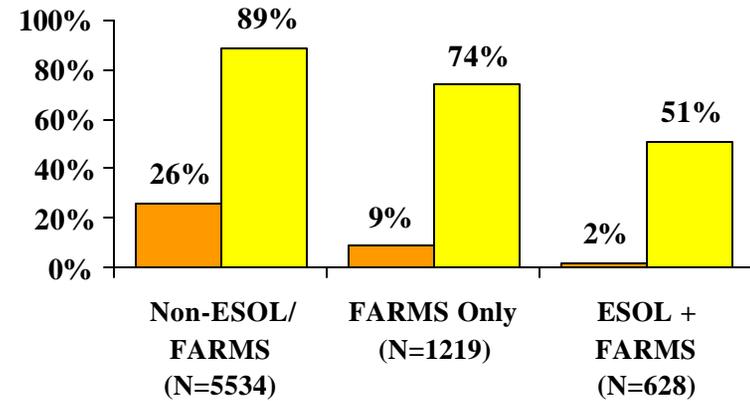
Exhibit 3

Kindergarten Student Progress in Achieving "Reading-Ready" Scores in Early Reading Skill Areas Fall 2000 to Spring 2001

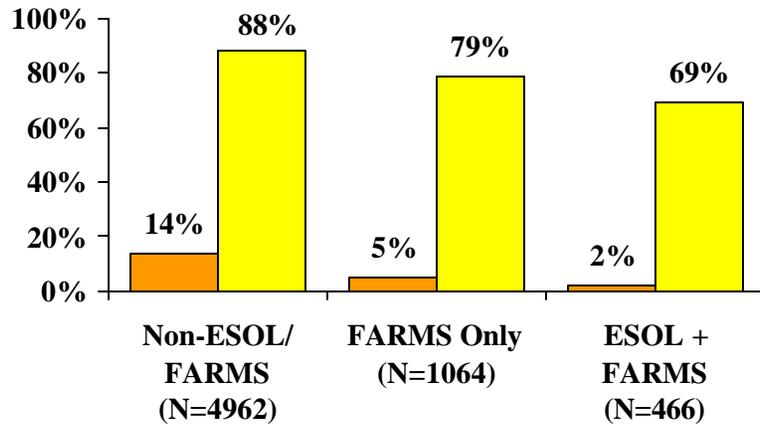
Letter Identification
(45+Letters Correct)



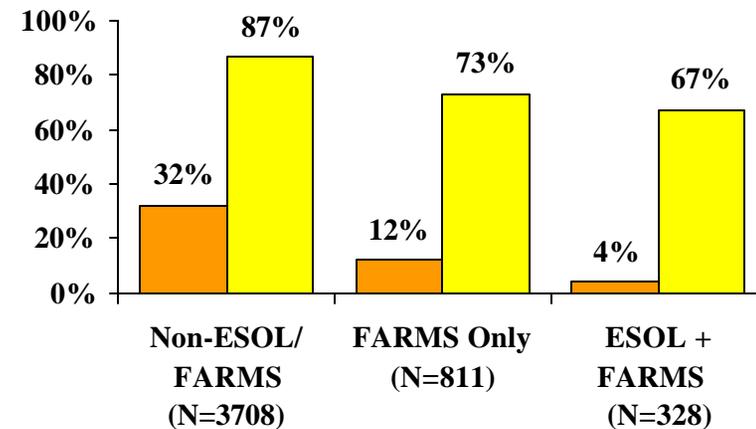
Concepts About Print
(13+ Concepts Correct)



Word Recognition
(8+ Words Correct)



Hearing & Recording Sound
(8+ Written Sounds Correct)



■ Students scoring at or above "reading-ready" scores in fall 2000
■ Students scoring at or above "reading-ready" scores in spring 2001

Exhibit 4
Achievement of Reading Skills
4-year-old vs. 5-year-old Students at Entry to Kindergarten

Fall 2000 and Spring 2001 Mean Scores on Early Reading Skill Assessments

	Fall 2000			Spring 2001		
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD
Letter ID						
Entry Age 4 years	2089	29.8	18.79	2089	49.5	9.21
Entry Age 5 years	5691	34.9	17.44	5691	51.1	6.88
Concepts About Print						
Entry Age 4 years	2089	6.9	4.47	2089	13.8	3.03
Entry Age 5 years	5691	8.6	4.59	5691	14.6	2.42
Word Recognition						
Entry Age 4 years	1823	2.2	4.12	2063	14.2	7.37
Entry Age 5 years	5132	3.3	5.23	5636	16.0	6.79
Hearing & Recording Sounds						
Entry Age 4 years	1365	3.5	3.93	2012	9.2	3.97
Entry Age 5 years	4090	4.8	4.33	5444	10.1	3.57

Note: All fall and spring mean differences between 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds are significant ($p < .001$).

**Differences Between 4- and 5-year-old Students in Percentage Scoring At or Above
 “Reading-ready” Scores**

Assessment Time	Percentage Difference Between Students Entering Kindergarten at 4-years-old vs. 5-years-old				Mean Difference at Each Assessment Time
	Letter ID	Concepts About Print	Word Recognition	Hearing & Recording Sounds	
Fall 2000	10%	10%	6%	9%	9%
Winter 2001	7%	15%	10%	8%	10%
Spring 2001	5%	10%	6%	6%	7%
Mean Difference for Each Reading Skill Area	7%	12%	7%	8%	

Note: All percentages are in favor of the 5-year-olds.

Exhibit 5a

Fall-to-Spring Student Progress: Letter Identification Readiness(45+ Letters Correct) Half-Day vs. Full-Day Kindergarten

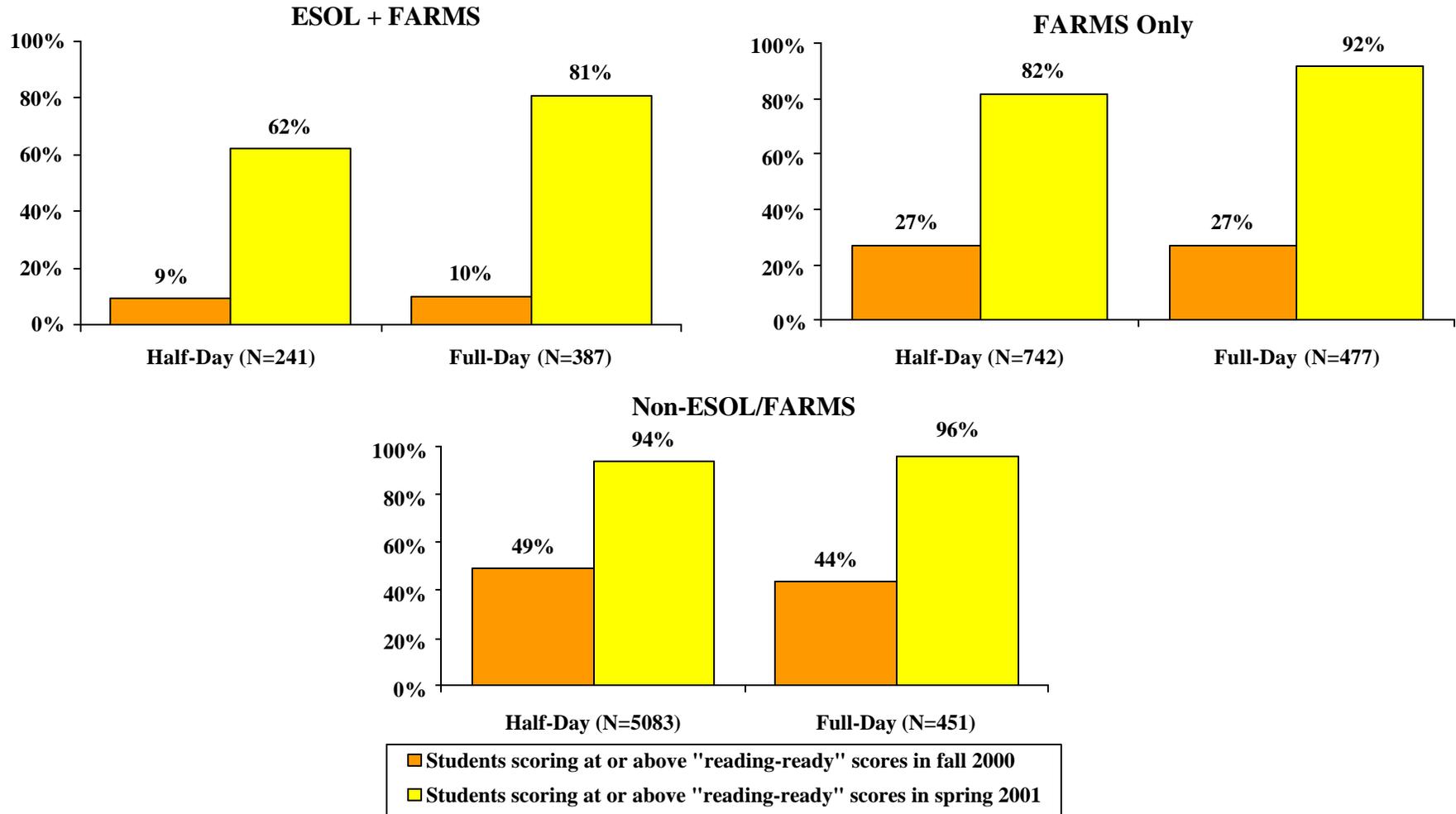


Exhibit 5b

Fall-to-Spring Student Progress: Concepts About Print Readiness(13+ Concepts Correct) Half-Day vs. Full-Day Kindergarten

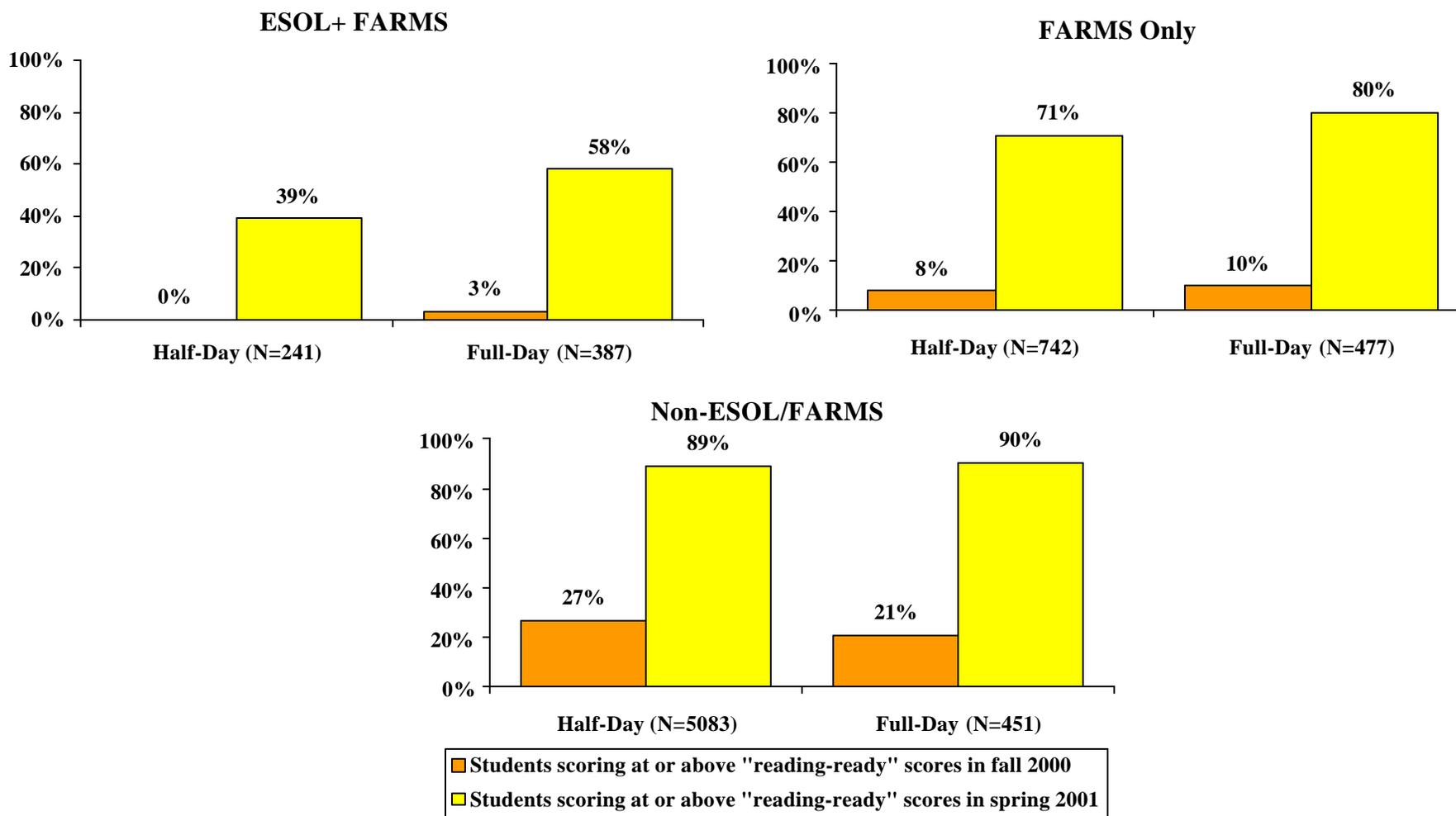


Exhibit 5c

Fall-to-Spring Student Progress: Word Recognition Readiness (8+ Words Correct) Half-Day vs. Full-Day Kindergarten

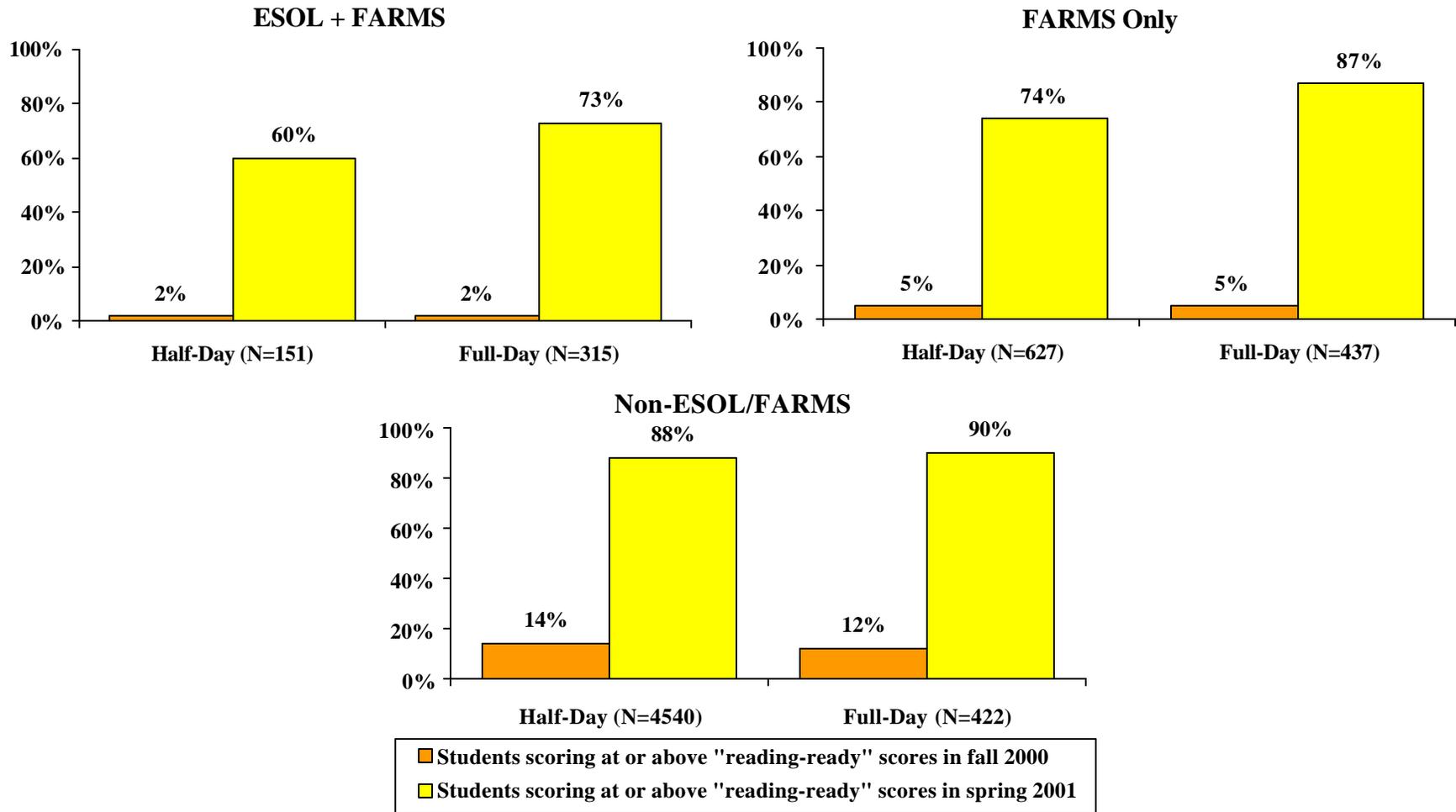


Exhibit 5d
Fall-to-Spring Student Progress: Hearing & Recording Sounds Readiness
(8+ Written Sounds Correct)
Half-Day vs. Full-Day Kindergarten

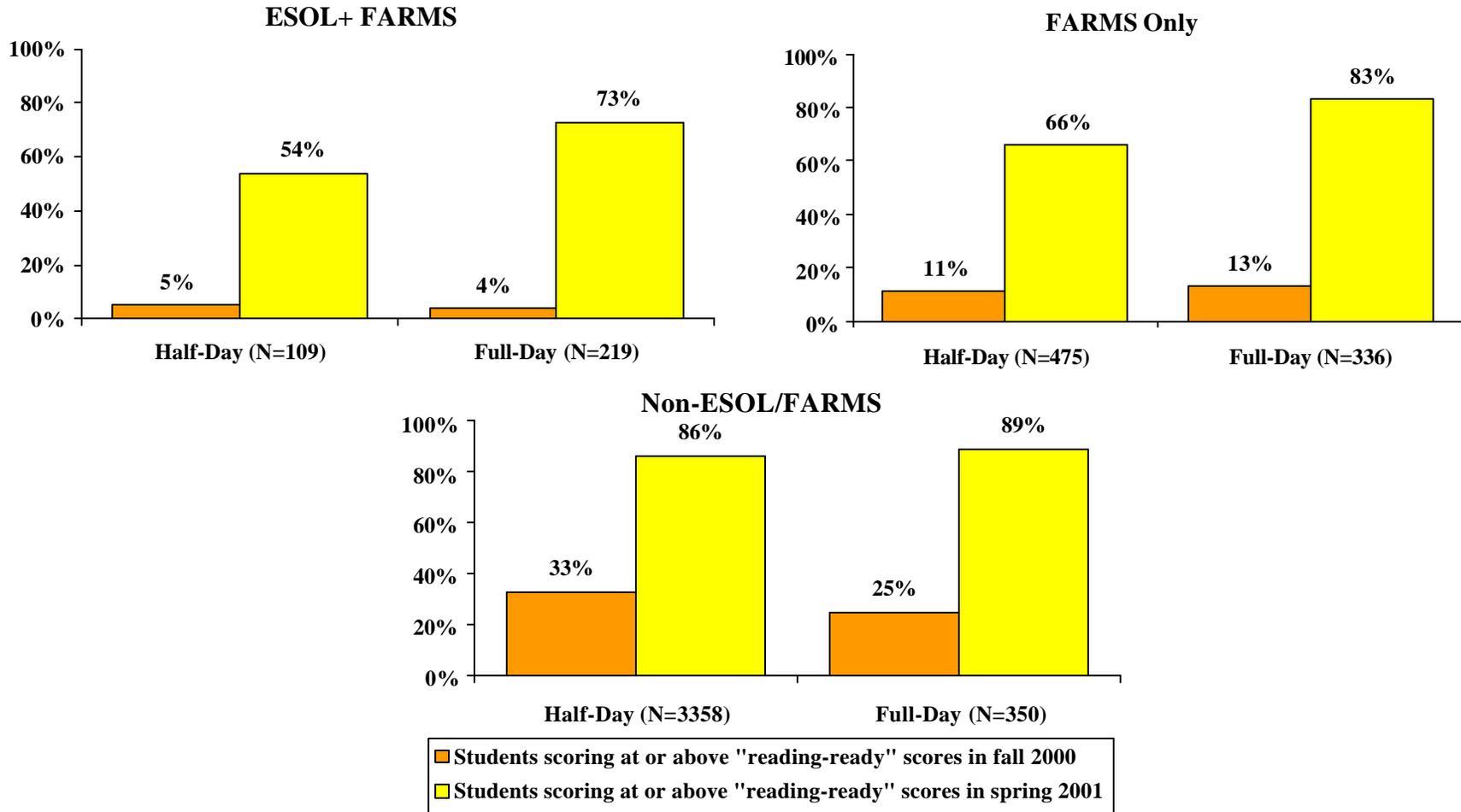


Exhibit 6

Student Progress in Half-Day vs. Full-Day Kindergarten

Fall-to-Spring Increase in Percentage of Students “Ready”

	Increase in % of Students “Ready” (Average over Reading Skill Areas)		Full-Day vs. Half-Day Increase (Full-day > Half-day)
	Full-Day	Half-Day	
Non-ESOL/FARMS	66%	59%	7% >
FARMS Only	72%	61%	11%>
ESOL + FARMS	67%	50%	17%>
All Students	68%	57%	12%>

Exhibit 7

Spring 2001 Reading Skill Profiles of Students Full-Day vs. Half-Day Kindergarten

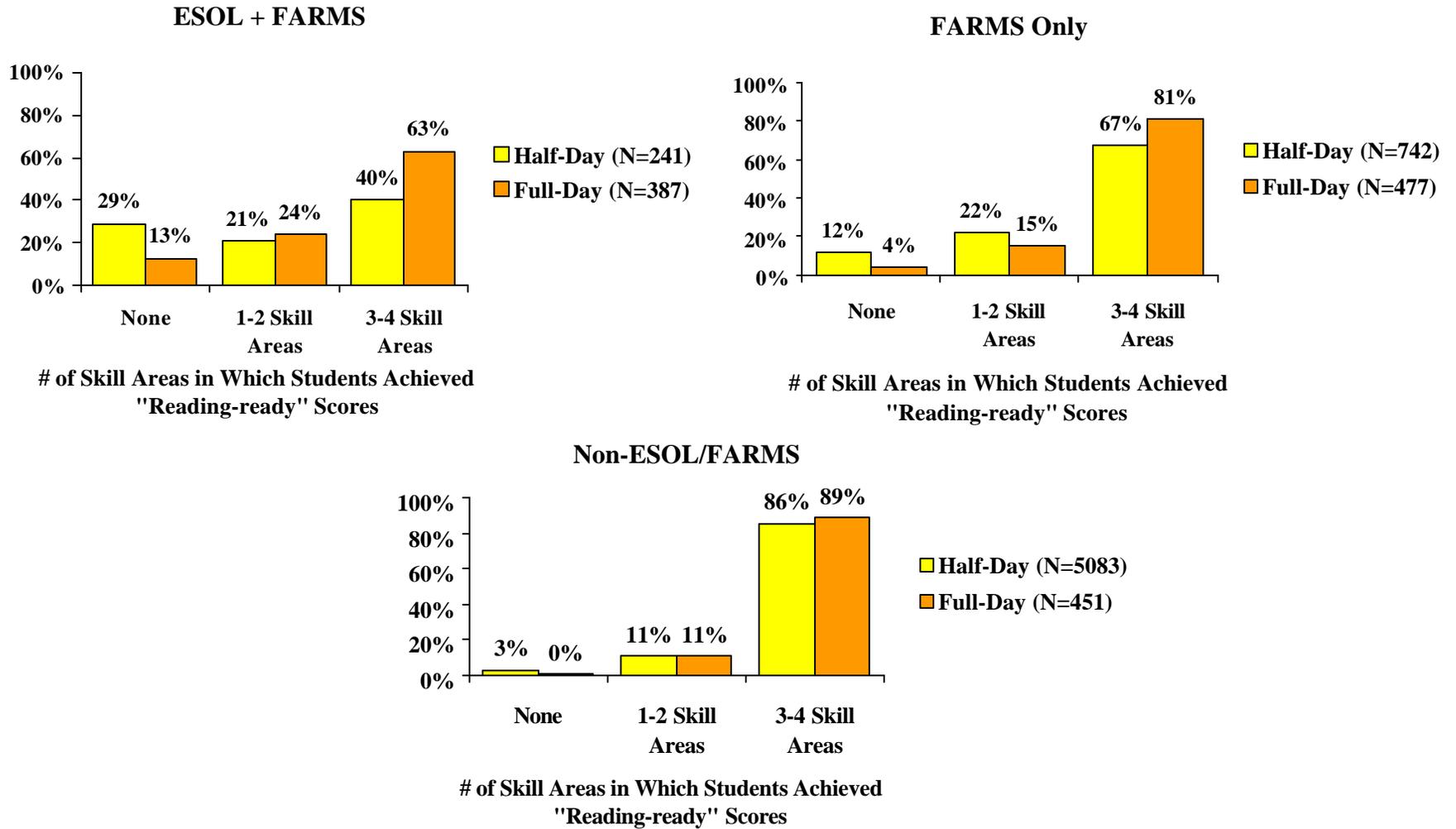


Exhibit 8

End-of-year Text Reading Skills of Students in Full-Day vs. Half-Day Kindergarten Spring 2001

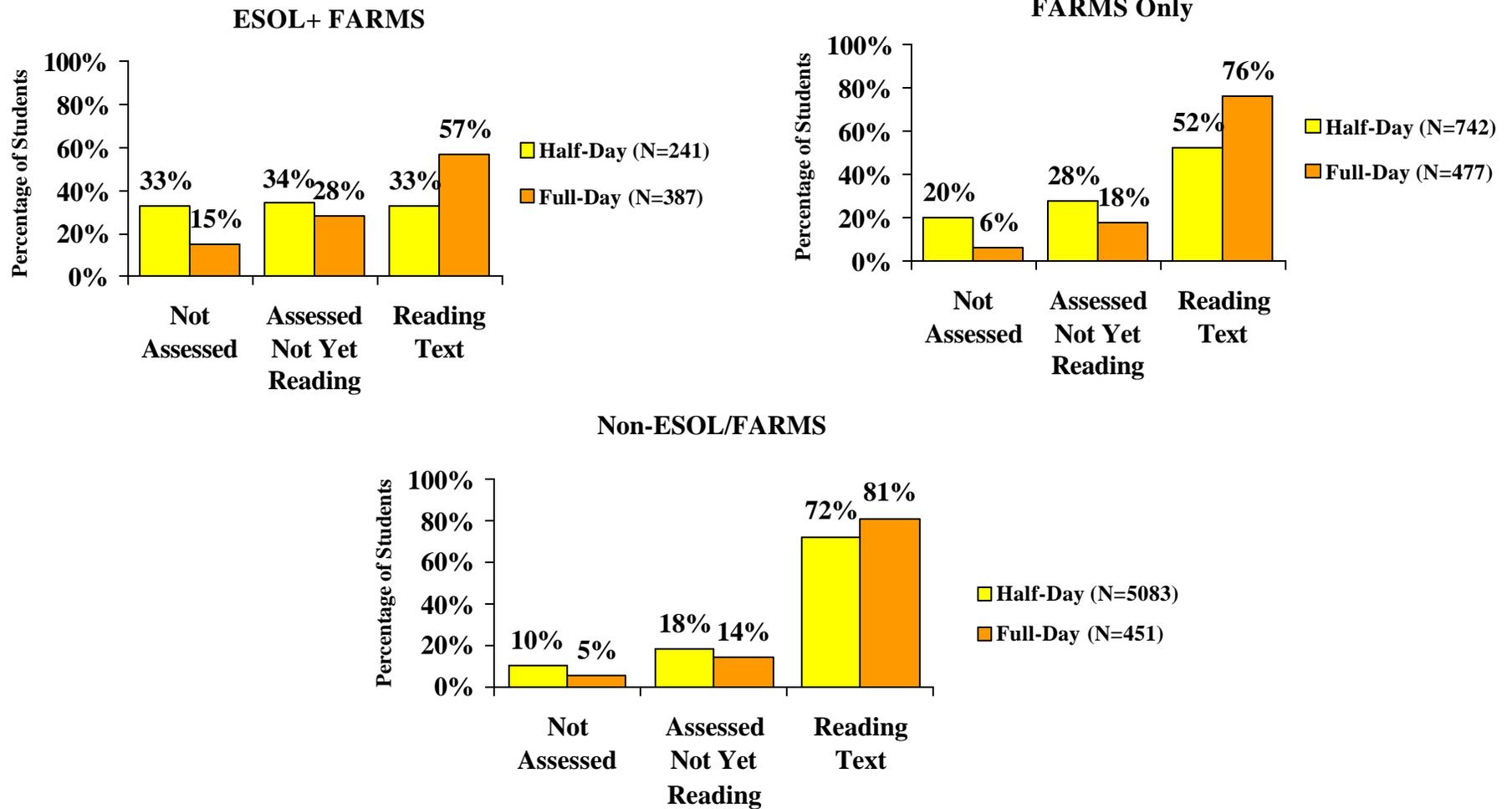


Exhibit 9

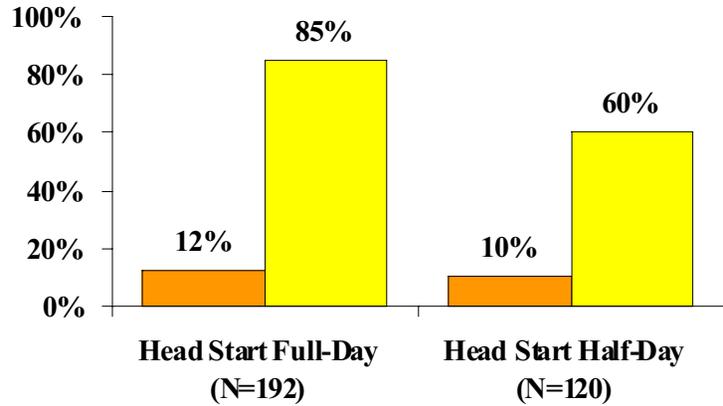
Student Achievement of Reading Skills Head Start and Full-Day Kindergarten vs. Other Program Combinations

Program	Percentage of Students with “Reading-ready” Scores on 3 or 4 of the 4 Foundational Reading Skills Areas			
	FARMS Only		ESOL + FARMS	
	n	%	n	%
Head-Start Full-Day Kindergarten	242	82%	192	70%
No Head Start Full-Day Kindergarten	235	80%	195	55%
Head Start Half-day Kindergarten	418	62%	120	35%
No Head Start Half-Day Kindergarten	324	73%	121	46%

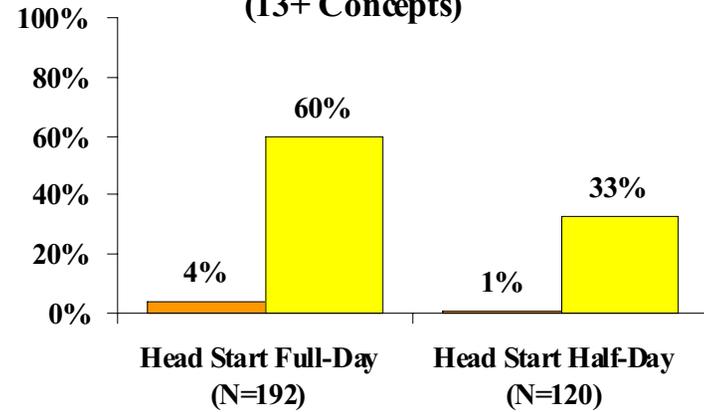
Exhibit 10

Fall-to-Spring Progress of Highest-Risk (ESOL + FARMS) Students Who Attended Head Start Full-Day vs. Half-Day Kindergarten

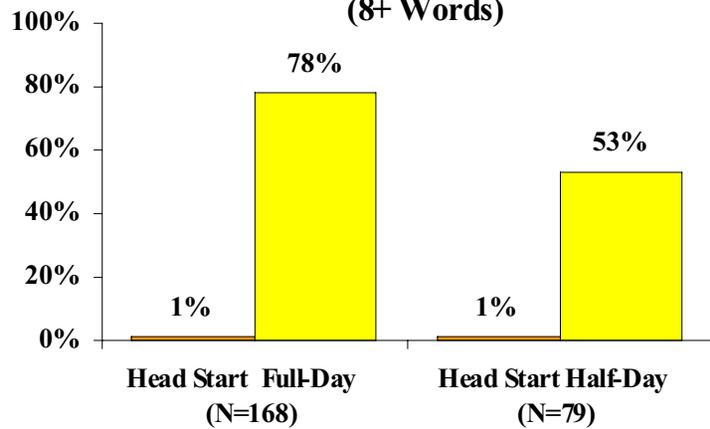
**Letter Identification
(45+ Letters)**



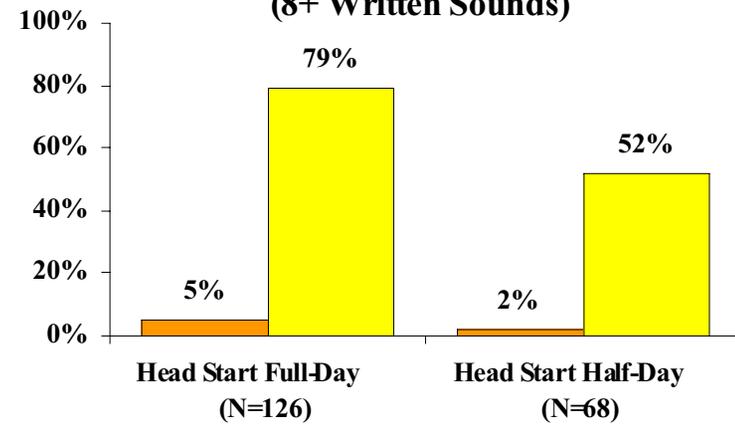
**Concepts About Print
(13+ Concepts)**



**Word Recognition
(8+ Words)**



**Hearing & Recording Sounds
(8+ Written Sounds)**



■ Students scoring at or above "reading-ready" scores in fall 2000
■ Students scoring at or above "reading-ready" scores in spring 2001

Exhibit 11

Head Start and Full-day Kindergarten Reduces the Gap in Reading Achievement at End of Kindergarten Year 2000-2001 (Non-ESOL/Non-FARMS vs. ESOL + FARMS Students)

“Reading-ready” in:	Non –ESOL Non-FARMS Students	ESOL + FARMS No Head Start Half-day Kindergarten		ESOL+ FARMS No Head Start Full-day Kindergarten		ESOL + FARMS Attended Head Start and Full-day Kindergarten	
	% Ready*	% Ready	Difference	% Ready	Difference	% Ready	Difference
Letter Identification	94% (n=5534)	64% (n=121)	-30%	77% (n=195)	-17%	85% (n=192)	-9%
Concepts About Print	89% (n=5534)	44% (n=121)	-45%	56% (n=195)	-33%	60% (n=192)	-29%
Word Recognition	88% (n=5491)	53% (n=121)	-35%	62% (n=191)	-26%	76% (n=191)	-12%
Hearing and Recording Sounds	87% (n=5298)	43% (n=116)	-44%	57% (n=186)	-30%	69% (n=185)	-18%
Mean Difference in Percentage of Students (ESOL + FARMS vs. Non-ESOL/Non-FARMS)			-39%			-27%	-17%

*Percentage of students scoring at or above “reading-ready” scores in spring 2001