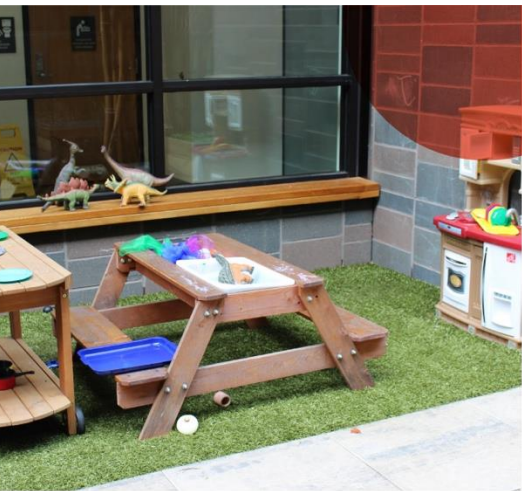SEATTLE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Specialized and Family Child Care Process Evaluation: Final Technical Report

Prepared for the Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning

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December 2024

About the Evaluation Team

Education Northwest is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping all children and youth reach their full potential. We partner with public, private, and community-based organizations to address educational inequities and improve student success. While most of our work centers on the Pacific Northwest, our evaluations, technical assistance, and research studies have national impact and provide timely and actionable results. For this evaluation, Education Northwest is partnering with the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®). AIR is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and provides technical assistance to address challenges in the U.S. and around the world. AIR's mission is to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SUGGESTED CITATION

Gandhi, E., Nishioka, V., Zhang, C. X., Martin, A., & Pierson, A. (2024). *Specialized and family child care process evaluation: Final technical report*. Education Northwest.

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Executive Summary

Seattle's Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) launched the Seattle Preschool Program (SPP) in 2015 as part of the Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise (FEPP) levy that aims to close opportunity gaps and build a better economic future for Seattle students. As one of four FEPP investment areas, the SPP offers high quality learning environments that are evidence-based, equity-focused, and culturally-responsive in partnership with preschool providers throughout the city—including community-based providers, Seattle Public Schools, and University of Washington Haring Center for Inclusion.

Throughout 2024, DEEL partnered with Education Northwest (EDNW) and American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) to evaluate implementation of three SPP classroom models: Dual Language Initiative (DLI), special education inclusion (SPP Plus), and family child care (FCC) classrooms. The mixed methods evaluation included interviews and focus groups with families, administrators, teachers, and DEEL coaches to better understand their perspectives on each classroom model as well as analyses of existing data on classroom quality and child outcomes. We also convened an advisory committee to ensure the evaluation used culturally relevant data collection and analysis procedures, and to help make meaning of the evaluation findings.

Key findings

The three classroom models show alignment with evidence-based practices in many instances, but there is room for growth. A summary of key findings as well as the goals, components, and outcomes each classroom model follows.

DLI classrooms use the Soy Bilingüe curriculum, a strengths-based dual-language immersion model, to deliver culturally and linguistically responsive programming

In 2023–24, SPP supported 22 DLI classrooms that provided 359 children (17 percent of all children in SPP) with dual-language instruction in eight non-English languages: American Sign Language, Amharic, Mandarin, Cantonese, French, Somali, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. In focus groups, DLI teachers described their experiences with Soy Bilingüe trainings and curriculum as valuable, and the Soy Bilingüe accreditation scores indicate over 80 percent of DLI educators were adequate to excellent implementers of the dual-language model. DLI classrooms had similar average Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores in classroom organization and emotional support domains but lower scores in the instructional support domain. It is notable that DLI CLASS scores are above the 2020 Head Start national means across all three domains (2020 is the latest published year; Head Start, 2020).

Site visit observations and focus group findings indicate alignment of DLI classroom instruction with evidence-based dual-language immersion practices. During site visits, teachers used multiple strategies to promote bilingual children's language development, connect the content of instruction to children's languages or cultures and differentiated instructional strategies to accommodate different language proficiency levels. Most DLI families who participated in focus groups believed the DLI classroom recognized, valued, and celebrated their children's cultural backgrounds. They also said their children were more social by engaging with other children and noticed improvements in their children's emotional regulation and early literacy skills.

The outcomes and perceived benefits of DLI classroom show positive findings and areas for growth. Overall, children in DLI classrooms met Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) growth targets at similar rates in most domains and had a higher rate of meeting all six widely held expectations than comparison classrooms. For kindergarten children who are eligible for English learner services in Seattle Public Schools, the children who previously attended DLI classrooms had similar or slightly higher kindergarten readiness outcomes.

SPP Plus classrooms provide inclusive learning environments in which children with an Individual Education Program (IEP) and typically developing children learn together in general education preschool settings

In 2023–24, SPP supported 28 SPP Plus classrooms that served 510 children (24 percent of all children in SPP) and 138 children enrolled in SPP Plus had IEPs. Although the goals and contractual requirements are the same for the SPS and Experimental Education Unit (EEU) programs, there are differences in the classroom setting, program structure, teacher certifications, and intensity of children's support needs. All SPP Plus classrooms enroll 15 to 18 preschool children, compared to 20 students enrolled in many other SPP classrooms, and five to seven of the enrolled students must receive IEP services. Of the 28 SPP Plus classrooms, 23 classrooms are located within public elementary school settings operated by Seattle Public Schools and five are operated by the Experimental Education Unit (EEU) as part of the University of Washington Haring Center for Inclusive Education.

SPP Plus classrooms operated by SPS and the EEU differ in student characteristics, student needs, type of setting, and staffing arrangement. All SPS classrooms provide a full-day program for students with mild to moderate disabilities. Each SPS school site has one or two classrooms that are co-taught by a full-time general education teacher and a half-time special education teacher. The EEU operates five SPP Plus classrooms that serve children with mild to significant needs and are taught by teachers with dual general and special education certification. The EEU is located on the UW campus in a facility that provides a continuum of early childhood education services. In

2023–24, SPP Plus classrooms had higher average scores on all three CLASS domains (classroom organization, emotional support, instructional support) than DLI, FCC, and comparison classrooms.

Site visit observations and focus group findings indicate alignment among the SPP Plus programming and the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center indicators of high-quality inclusion. During site visits, the physical environment of selected SPP Plus classrooms focused on children's safety, comfort, and encouraging active engagement in learning activities. The classrooms also provided visual displays (posters, pictures, books, and other artifacts) that were visually engaging and culturally inclusive of children from diverse linguistic, racial, cultural, and ability backgrounds. The SPS and EEU classrooms used the Building Blocks Framework, a multi-tiered system of support that organizes a continuum of instruction and support for children with and without IEPs. Additionally, all SPP Plus classrooms prioritized social and emotional learning, building positive relationships, play-based instruction, and other child-centered approaches to encourage each child's engagement, independence, and inclusion in learning activities. SPP Plus families who participated in focus groups said their children with and without disabilities experienced belonging, strengthened relationship-building skills, and had opportunities to learn about acceptance of differences.

The outcomes and perceived benefits of SPP Plus classrooms are consistent with research on high quality inclusive education settings. In 2023–24, SPP Plus classrooms had higher TSG spring scale scores but a slightly lower rate of children meeting widely held expectations in all six domains than comparison classrooms. In terms of growth from fall to spring, a higher percentage of children in SPP plus met their TSG growth targets in each domain than children in comparison classrooms. Among children with an IEP in kindergarten in 2023–24, those who had previously attended SPP Plus classrooms were kindergarten ready in 4.4 of 6 domains on the WaKIDS assessment compared to 3.3 among SPP comparison classrooms and 3.5 among those who did not attend SPP. Children without an IEP who attended SPP Plus classrooms also had a higher average number of domains: 5.6 contrasted with 5.3 (comparison) and 5.5 (non-SPP).

FCC programs provide families with expanded access to high quality preschool services in child care settings that often reflect the families' cultural values and linguistic backgrounds

FCC providers offer families access to mixed-age classrooms with low child-teacher ratios, and a focus on cultural and linguistic alignment. Two hubs, one that is currently operated by BrightSpark (formerly Child Care Resources) and a second operated by a partnership between Voices of Tomorrow and Tiny Tots Development Center, coordinate SPP implementation at 22 FCC sites. In 2023–24, FCC sites served 99 children (5 percent of all children in SPP). Unlike DLI and SPP Plus classrooms, the majority of FCC providers were Black (78%), and on average, seven in every 10 children at each FCC were of the same race or ethnicity as their providers (68%) and nearly half were multilingual. Most FCC programs serve families living in the neighborhood and many share

their linguistic or cultural traditions. Among the 19 FCC classrooms that were rated on CLASS in 2023–24, the average scores for classroom organization, emotional support, and instructional support were slightly lower than the average scores across all SPP classrooms. CLASS assessment scores also showed more variability among FCCs than other types of classrooms. Compared to the 2020 Head Start national means, the FCC CLASS scores were slightly lower in classroom organization and higher in emotional support and instructional support domains (Head Start, 2020).

Site visit observations and focus group findings indicate alignment with high-quality childcare settings, but the implementation fidelity of preschool instruction varied. During the site visit observation, the warmth and welcoming environment was evident. Both FCC teachers were highly responsive to children's needs and helped them learn and practice self-regulation and social skills. Behavioral expectations were consistent for all children and adaptations and social and emotional support were individualized to support children's learning needs. During the SPP preschool lessons, both lead teachers encouraged the children to follow directions, take turns, and interact with each other in positive ways. However, there were differences in the use of evidence-based teaching strategies. Families who participated in focus groups appreciated the safety, comfort, and consistent environment that the FCC provided for their children. They also said the FCC provider helped prepare their child for kindergarten.

In 2023–24, children in FCC programs had higher average TSG scale scores in all six domains than comparison classrooms. Examining TSG scores in the spring of the child's preschool year, children in FCC programs had slightly higher averages on widely held expectations in all six domains than children in comparison classrooms. However, in all domains, a lower percentage of children in FCC programs met growth targets than children in comparison classrooms.

Considerations for DLI, SPP Plus and FCC classrooms

This evaluation showed each classroom model show alignment with many evidence-based practices, there is room for growth to meet goals for ideal preschool environments and teaching practices. Below are cross-cutting considerations for strengthening DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC services.

- Continue to expand the knowledge and use of DLI dual language immersion strategies and SPP Plus inclusion practices across the SPP classroom system.

- Improve coordination of systemwide processes within the SPP system and with external partners such as aligning training and coaching support to strengthen implementation of evidence-based instruction and equity-focused practices.

- Provide guidance, training, and coaching that will build educator and multidisciplinary team capacity on data-based decision making, social emotional learning, restorative practices, and integrated service delivery for children, classrooms, and the SPP system.

- Strengthen and differentiate support around curriculum implementation, social emotional learning, and facilitating high-quality interactions and instruction during naturally occurring activities especially for new teachers and FCC providers.

- Create opportunities for SPP Plus, DLI, and FCC staff members to share strategies, reflect on lessons learned, and coordinate services across settings to promote effective and efficient services for children and their families.

- Provide additional specialized training on meeting the needs of students receiving special education; trauma-informed care; best instructional approaches for classrooms with multiple home languages; and incorporating music, movement and play in learning activities.

- Continue to support educators on assessment administration and using data-based decision-making processes to monitor progress and improve the effectiveness of individual child, classroom, and program services.

- Continue to address systemic barriers that limit access to multiyear DLI program options, and implement retention strategies to address teacher turnover.

Introduction

The Seattle Preschool Program (SPP) was launched in 2015 and is funded by the Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise (FEPP) levy. SPP provides high-quality, evidence-based programming in partnership with preschool providers throughout the city—including community-based providers, Seattle Public Schools (SPS), and family child care (FCC) programs. The program supports Seattle children with a comprehensive approach that includes preschool services and tuition, coaching and training for early learning educators, behavioral and developmental supports for classrooms, organizational and facilities development, and child care subsidies. Specialized and nontraditional classrooms—dual-language initiative (DLI), special education inclusion (SPP Plus), and FCC classrooms—support SPP's commitment to equity and culturally responsive programming that provides each child with a high-quality early learning experience. In 2023–24, SPP enrolled 2,151 children across 137 classrooms, with about 17 percent of children in 22 DLI classrooms, 24 percent in 28 SPP Plus classrooms, 5 percent in 22 FCC programs, and the remaining 55 percent in 65 non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms. See appendix A for more detailed information about the evaluation methods.

SPP has four core goals:

1. Using high-quality early learning services that promote success in kindergarten for Seattle students

2. Supporting preschool providers to offer learning environments that are evidence-based, high-quality, culturally appropriate, and equitable

3. Providing families with multiple ways to access high-quality early learning services

4. Contributing to closure of race-based opportunity gaps

Seattle's Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) is the backbone organization that manages SPP and provides coaching, training, and other support to the programs. Throughout 2024, DEEL partnered with Education Northwest and AIR to evaluate SPP's specialized classrooms (SPP Plus and DLI classrooms) and FCC programs.

Dual-Language Initiative

In 2020, DEEL launched its DLI, which is focused on providing instruction in English and a classroom focus language through a dual-language immersion model. Teachers and assistants in these specialized classrooms participate in training for the program's Soy Bilingüe curriculum, and teachers and site directors participate in dual-language professional learning communities. In the 2023–24 school year, 22 classrooms operated by eight agencies were designated as DLI classrooms.[1]

SPP Plus

The other specialized classroom offered through SPP is SPP Plus, an inclusive education model that ensures children with an individualized education program (IEP) participate in general education instruction alongside children without disabilities. Beginning in 2016, the Experimental Education Unit (EEU) at the University of Washington Haring Center for Inclusive Education began piloting the SPP Plus program in two classrooms to help SPP deepen the quality and use of inclusive practices to support all children. Since that time, the EEU and SPS have expanded the number of SPP Plus classrooms. In 2023–24, the Haring Center for Inclusive Education operated five SPP Plus classrooms through its EEU and SPS operated 23 SPP Plus classrooms. Although children with IEPs may enroll in any SPP classroom, the establishment of the SPP Plus classroom model is an intentional step toward building inclusive classroom models that ensure each child receives high-quality general education instruction in a general education setting, regardless of their special education designation.

Family Child Care Classrooms

SPP began working with FCC programs as part of a pilot program in 2017–18, which was then expanded in subsequent years. FCC providers offer families access to mixed-age classrooms, low child-teacher ratios, and cultural and linguistic alignment. Two hubs, one that is currently operated by BrightSpark (formerly Child Care Resources) and a second operated by a partnership between Voices of Tomorrow and Tiny Tots Development Center, coordinated SPP implementation through subcontracts with 22 FCC providers in 2023–24.

Evaluation Team, Design, and Questions

Education Northwest and AIR partnered with DEEL to conduct three interrelated evaluations of SPP that examine trends, implementation, and impact of SPP services. This 2024 report presents findings from the second evaluation that analyzed family, teacher, and DEEL staff perspectives on the implementation of DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC programs as well as analyses of existing data on classroom quality and child outcomes. Findings from this report are a natural extension of the 2022

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[1] Other classrooms may use multiple languages but are not necessarily part of the Dual Language Initiative.

evaluation (see report and brief) that analyzed existing data to describe trends and relationships among child, educator, and program characteristics and outcomes. The findings from a third evaluation examining the impact of SPP on kindergarten readiness will be released in late 2025.

Education Northwest and AIR assembled an evaluation team that is uniquely qualified to help DEEL learn more about the implementation of SPP's DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC programs. All team members are experienced mixed-methods evaluators of early learning programs, four members identify as a person of color and four members are multilingual. As evaluators, our team is committed to equity and social justice and recognizes the importance of approaching our work with cultural humility. Throughout the evaluation, we have actively reflected on how our identities, experience, and privileges influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation of evaluation findings.

Advisory committee

Education Northwest convened an evaluation advisory committee that included preschool administrators, teachers, coaches, higher education early childhood experts, and a FEPP committee member. The advisory committee met six times to review the evaluation questions and methods. The committee also shared their insights on the meaning of evaluation findings and the implication of these findings on recommended next steps.

Evaluation design

The evaluation design and this report were informed by brief reviews of the literature, discussions with DEEL, and input from the advisory committee. For this evaluation, we described and compared implementation and practices in DLI classrooms, SPP Plus classrooms, and FCC classrooms that differed in program characteristics and geographic locations. Qualitative data sources included interviews and focus groups, open-ended questions on existing SPP surveys, program documents, and site visit observations. Quantitative data sources included SPP enrollment data, program participation data, existing SPP surveys, Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) assessment data, Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) kindergarten readiness assessment data, and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations.

Comparison classrooms
Throughout the report, we present results of "comparison classrooms." In this report, this refers to any SPP classroom that is not a DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classroom. This comparison group does not change based on classroom type. For example, for DLI classrooms, comparison classrooms are any classroom that is not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC.

Evaluation questions

1. How are DLI and SPP Plus classrooms being implemented and supported?

  1a. To what extent are these programs being implemented with fidelity?

2. How do DLI and SPP Plus service offerings support child outcomes?

3. To what extent are DLI and SPP Plus classroom models aligned with evidence-based practices in early childhood dual-language and special education instruction?

4. How is preschool being implemented and supported across SPP FCC providers?

  4a. To what extent do FCC providers implement the SPP model with fidelity?

  4b. What successes and challenges do FCC providers demonstrate in implementing SPP with fidelity?

  4c. How do services provided by DEEL support FCC hubs and providers?

5. How does SPP participation (including the supports provided by DEEL) affect the quality of FCC provider learning environments?

  5a. What factors may have contributed to lower kindergarten readiness outcomes observed among children who attend FCC preschools?

6. How can the implementation of SPP's specialized classrooms and FCC programs be improved to support child outcomes?

The remainder of this document is organized into sections that describe the DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC implementation findings. Each section includes a description of the classroom model, alignment with evidence-based practices, and a summary of classroom quality and child outcomes. The sections also report the focus group, document review, and site visit observation findings and considerations for next steps. A more detailed description of the evaluation data sources and methods are in appendix A and supplemental data tables are in appendix B.

Dual-Language Initiative Classrooms

Dual-language early learning programs provide culturally responsive programming, one of SPP's key strategies in building high-quality learning environments that will foster equitable education child outcomes. As part of an effort to standardize how dual-language programming is offered and provide training and support for teachers and programs who provide it, Seattle's Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) launched a dual-language initiative (DLI) in 2020. This section summarizes the potential benefits of dual-language model programs and provides a description of DLI classrooms, including implementation fidelity, alignment with evidence-based practices, and successes and challenges. It also reports key findings on the relationship between DLI participation and child outcomes.

Potential Benefits of the DLI Model

Understanding dual-language programs in preschool is essential due to their potential to support child development and outcomes. Research has shown that children who attend these programs not only achieve proficiency in two languages (Barnett et al., 2007; Oliva-Olson, 2019) but also experience cognitive benefits such as enhanced executive functioning skills (Bialystok, 2018; Costa et al., 2008). Children's participation in dual-language programs has been associated with improved academic performance, particularly in literacy and math, as well as social and emotional development (Bibler, 2021; Bialystok, 2011; Steele et al., 2017). Research also shows that it is most advantageous to learn two languages early on in life due to biological and environmental differences between younger and older learners (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2018). Dual-language education also fosters cultural awareness and inclusivity, helping children learn and appreciate their culture and their communities (Carrillo, 2022; Mueller et al., 2020). These research findings underscore the importance of dual-language programs for young children.

DLI Classroom Model

DEEL launched the SPP DLI classrooms in the 2020–21 school year to address the growing need to serve the large proportion of Seattle families with multilingual learners, defined as children who speak a language other than English in their home. The population of multilingual learners grew from 23 percent in 2015 to 40 percent in 2022.

In 2023–24, there were 22 SPP DLI classrooms across 10 sites (nine of which were community-based provider sites, and one was offered by SPS). Each dual-language classroom provides instruction in English and one additional primary language (referred to in this report as "classroom focus language"). The classroom focus languages offered through SPP's DLI program in 2023–24 were American Sign Language (ASL), Amharic, Cantonese, French, Mandarin, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

SPP's DLI programs offer instruction in English half the time and in the classroom focus language the other half of the time. Programs may use different language models to achieve the balance between the two languages, such as alternating the language of instruction by day or splitting time throughout the day. The classroom focus language is displayed in the dual-language classroom and includes the description of the language model, how teachers support second language learning, a list of home and ancestral languages, home language support, how teachers assess language development, and how teachers prevent home language loss.

DEEL designed the DLI program with the vision that the program would have the following long-term impact on participating children in the DLI classroom. DEEL's DLI logic model includes the following outcomes:

- SPP children maintain their home language, learn English, and demonstrate emergent bilingualism.

- Multilanguage learners are kindergarten ready.

- Children's cultural identities are affirmed in their learning experiences.

Lead and assistant teachers from participating agencies engage in training for the program's Soy Bilingüe curriculum, and both teachers and site directors participate in dual-language professional learning communities.

In terms of the enrollment process, families apply to SPP in the spring each year either through DEEL or directly with the provider. Eligible preschoolers are selected through a lottery that takes into consideration factors including the child's age, home address, siblings' attendance, experiences with homelessness, dual language status, and income. If applying through DEEL, families are unable to rank their choice in preschools and therefore need to ensure that all preschool locations they applied for would work for their family. Some sites that offer DLI programs run their own application separate from the DEEL application.

The Soy Bilingüe model emphasizes culturally and linguistically responsive dual-language instruction

One innovative feature of SPP's DLI program is its emphasis on culturally and linguistically responsive dual-language instruction through the adoption of the Soy Bilingüe curriculum. The Soy Bilingüe Curriculum is a community-oriented, child-centered dual-language approach to working with young children. It provides teachers, families, and educational leaders with guidance in creating linguistically and culturally relevant dual-language preschool classrooms and emphasizes respect for cultural diversity, the cultivation of cultural expression and creativity, family collaboration, a commitment to promoting fairness and undoing bias, a child-centered and socially oriented approach, documentation and accountability to learning, and specialized skills in first and second language and literacy development.

The Soy Bilingüe accreditation process includes an observational assessment and educator training

The Soy Bilingüe dual-language preschool classroom accreditation is a strengths-based process for observing, documenting, and recognizing the work of dual-language and language responsive classrooms under the leadership and guidance of the Center for Linguistic and Cultural Democracy (CLCD). The goal is for all participating programs to receive dual-language accreditation by 2027. The Soy Bilingüe preschool assessment is the central tool used in the Soy Bilingüe dual-language preschool classroom accreditation. The 102 items of the assessment are divided into six parts: family and community collaboration, linguistically and culturally relevant environments, interactions during schedule components, child nurturing and guidance, assessment and planning, and indigenous language. Through the accreditation process, SPP teachers gain a teaching framework designed to cultivate skills in two languages and are equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively engage families and implement bilingual instruction in the classrooms.

Consultants from CLCD conduct classroom observations, and classrooms are assessed on these 102 items. Most of the SPP DLI classrooms are implemented as planned according to this observational data. DEEL staff are working with classrooms to ensure they have support in any areas where CLCD observational scores indicate a need.

The accreditation must be completed within 12 months of teachers completing the seven Soy Bilingüe seminars. Dual-language accreditations are awarded once a year, during the end-of-year celebration in June. The accreditation is good for three years (from the date of issue). It can be renewed by retaking a seminar and updating the educator portfolio. Teachers may use previous seminars they have completed if the training completion dates occurred within three years of the accreditation application. Agencies may request in-service dual-language training and curriculum support from CLCD. To participate, the classroom educators must be in a well-developed dual-language, multilingual, language restoration, or language and culturally responsive classrooms and complete seven CLCD seminars. See the Staffing section below for more information about teacher characteristics and credentials.

Enrollment and Child Characteristics

In the 2023–24 school year, 359 children enrolled in one of the 22 SPP DLI classrooms, making up 17 percent of all children in SPP. Children enrolled in DLI classrooms had similar family income levels as comparison classrooms (non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms): 28 percent of children in DLI classrooms were living in households with incomes at or lower than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, 26 percent were at 350 percent or greater, and 23 percent had unknown family income levels.[2]

DLI programs enroll a larger proportion of Asian children than comparison classrooms

Asian children comprised the largest racial/ethnic group in SPP DLI programs (31%), followed by Black children (23%), Latine (18%), and white (16%). Data are suppressed for American Indian/Alaska Native children (AIAN), Middle Eastern and North African (MENA), Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander children (NHPI), two or more races, and children of unknown race/ethnicity who were in DLI classrooms due to sample sizes of 10 or less children (figure 1).

Racial/ethnic composition in the DLI classroom is slightly different from that of comparison classrooms that excluded DLI, SPP Plus and FCC classrooms (figure 1). Specifically, there are more Asian children and fewer white children enrolled in DLL classrooms. Over the last year, the percentage of Black children enrolled in DLI programs increased from 17 percent in the 2022–23 school year to 23 percent in the 2023–24 school year.

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[2] The 2024 federal poverty level (FPL) is $15,060 for an individual and increases for larger families. The 185 percent federal poverty level for 2024 was $27,861 for one person, and $37,814 for a family of two. The 2024 poverty guidelines are in effect as of January 17, 2024. Please refer to the 2024 poverty guidelines for more information: https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/7240229f28375f54435c5b83a3764cd1/detailed-guidelines-2024.pdf

Figure 1. DLI programs enroll a larger proportion of Asian children than comparison classrooms, 2023–24

Legend: ■ Asian ■ Black/African-American ■ Latinx ■ White ■ AIAN, NHPI, Unknown, MENA, Two or More Races

Group	Asian	Black/African-American	Latinx	White	AIAN, NHPI, Unknown, MENA, Two or More Races
DLI	31%	23%	18%	16%	12%
Comparison	15%	24%	18%	27%	17%
All SPP	17%	26%	17%	26%	15%
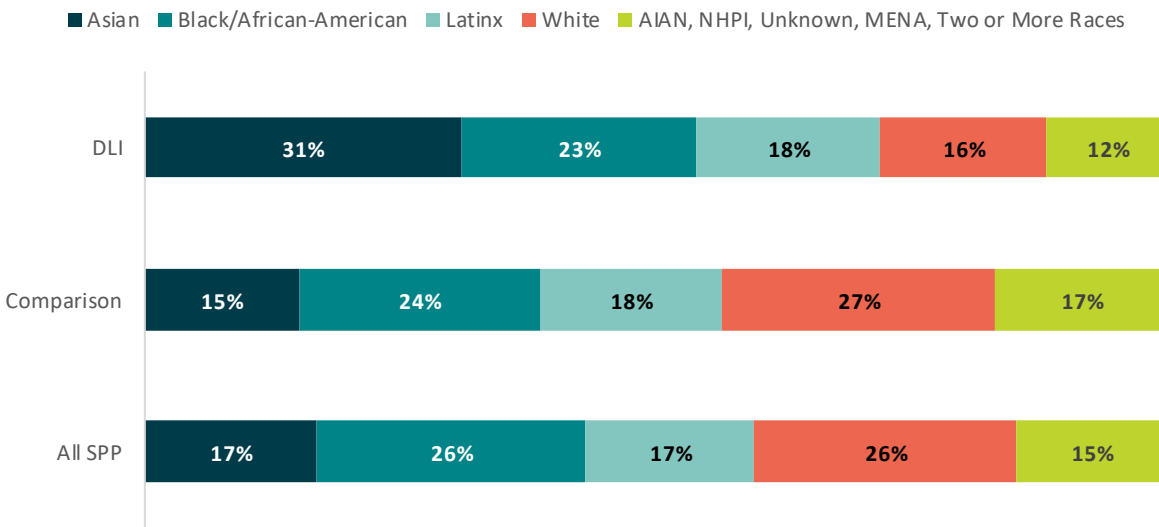
Note: Numbers for unknown race/ethnicity, American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI), Middle Eastern and North African (MENA), and two or more races are not shown separately due to small numbers of children. Bars show the percentages of SPP children in each racial/ethnic group and is scaled from 0 to 100. The number of children shown in this graph is 2,151 for the SPP program, 359 for DLI program, and 1,183 for comparison classrooms (classrooms that were not DLI, FCC, or SPP Plus).
Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

SPP has traditionally enrolled children from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds. For children participating in the DLI program, such linguistic diversity is especially evident. In 2023–24, there were at least 45 different languages spoken in households with children in SPP, and 27 of these languages were spoken by children in the DLI program as their primary languages. The proportion of multilingual children enrolled in the DLI program in 2023–24 was 63 percent, whereas the proportion of multilingual children across SPP was 40 percent. About one in every four children (27%) spoke the classroom focus language at home.

Most families found it easy to enroll their children in a SPP DLI program

Most family focus group participants described the process to enroll their children in DLI programs as "easy" and "not difficult." Some added that the process included filling out and submitting a form. They said that it would be helpful to consider adjusting the enrollment window to accommodate the needs of some families (e.g., rolling enrollment to have additional time to learn about the program, accommodations if families recently moved or experienced challenges that prevented them from meeting the enrollment deadline).

In fact, DLI site directors who completed the 2024 Seattle Preschool Director Survey administered by DEEL reported that they agree and strongly agree (75%) that they are adequately supported by DEEL regarding the SPP enrollment process. Additionally, site directors reported on the survey that their programs are well-prepared to assist families with the SPP enrollment process, reflecting a strong foundation of support and readiness across programs.

The enrollment process for families with children with an IEP is different and included ongoing conversations with program staff about their children's preschool options to collectively determine the next steps.

Staffing

In 2023–24, 46 teachers (including both lead and assistant teachers) were staffed across 22 DLI classrooms. Most classrooms had two teachers, while three of 22 classrooms had three educators supporting each classroom.[3] The majority of the classrooms (68%) had at least one lead teacher speaking the classroom focus language.

SPP employs staff members from diverse linguistic backgrounds who report speaking at least 18 different languages as their primary languages. Teachers in DLI programs, like those in English-focused classrooms, are expected to have knowledge of early childhood and child development as well as curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment. In addition, dual-language teachers are expected to have a high degree of proficiency in receptive expressive skills in the languages in which they teach. One teacher in each classroom must be certified, have completed seven Soy Bilingüe trainings, and have received a score of at least 102 on an assessment to become accredited. As of 2024, seven of the 46 DLI teachers (15%) had completed their Soy Bilingüe training and DEEL's goal is to support all 22 classrooms to become accredited by 2027. Data on other education credits or trainings, however, were not comprehensive and were not included in this current evaluation.

DLI classrooms employed more educators of color and more multilingual educators than comparison classrooms

In terms of racial/ethnic backgrounds, Asian (28%), Black (28%) and Latine (26%) teachers made up the majority of DLI classrooms' teaching staff. Compared with the rest of the classrooms in the SPP program, DLI classrooms had more Asian teachers and fewer white teachers. On average, in each classroom, about half of the teaching staff were persons of color.

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[3] In these three classrooms, two classrooms had one lead teacher with two assistants and one classroom had two lead teachers and one assistant teacher.

DLI classrooms have 78 percent of educators who speak a language other than English as a primary, secondary, or tertiary language, compared to 43 percent of comparison classrooms (non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC). Among DLI teaching staff, 10 languages were reported as teachers' primary languages, including Spanish (26%); Chinese (11%); and American Sign Language, Amharic, and French (4%). Thirty-six of the 46 DLI teaching staff reported speaking at least one language that is not English, with 10 teacher and staff members only reporting speaking English.

A higher percentage of students were taught by educators with the same racial/ethnic background in DLI classrooms than in comparison classrooms

When looking at the teacher-student race match, 63 percent of students were taught by at least one teacher from the same racial/ethnic background, compared with 39 percent, on average, in comparison classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus or FCC classrooms. Research has shown that having a same-race teacher in the early grades is associated with decreased rates of high school dropout for Black students and increased rates of college matriculation (Gershenson et al., 2022).

On average, 36 percent of children in each DLI classroom had at least one teacher who spoke the same primary language. Even though this percentage is higher in comparison classrooms (62 percent), most of the children and teachers in comparison classrooms spoke English. When examining the language match percentage, excluding those who speak English as a primary language, DLI classrooms have a higher rate (31 percent) contrasted with comparison classrooms (18 percent).

Classroom Quality

To understand how closely DLI classrooms are implemented with fidelity, we analyzed two sets of data. First, we developed an implementation rubric and analyzed SPP administrative data to understand the distribution of DLI classrooms by varying levels of implementation (emerging, adequate, and excellent implementation). The implementation rubric scores are in appendix C. Then, we examined CLASS assessment scores across the three classroom models.

Implementation rubric scores showed some variation in implementation across DLI classrooms.

To answer the question of how dual-language inclusion classrooms are being implemented, we first adapted an implementation fidelity rubric that details the key components of SPP's DLI classrooms and thresholds for emerging, adequate, and excellent fidelity levels. The rubric is based on a document review of the program manual and reports from earlier process and impact evaluations and on input from DEEL staff members about which policies and practices were most important for implementation.

The rubric details five measurable implementation indicators, such as the number of teachers in the classroom speaking the child's home language and each classroom's Soy Bilingüe self-assessment score. For each classroom, we rated each quality indicator using descriptive statistics calculated from existing administrative, enrollment, and educator certification data from 2023–24. (See table C1 in appendix C, which outlines the indicators and thresholds used to determine each DLI classroom's implementation level and the numbers of DLI classrooms within each implementation category).

In terms of educator qualifications, we found that the majority of the DLI classrooms (68%) had at least one lead teacher who reported speaking the classroom focus language. While there were seven classrooms with no lead teachers speaking the classroom focus language, four of them had at least one assistant teacher who spoke the focus language. Of 22 DLI classrooms, six (27%) were staffed with one lead teacher that completed the required Soy Bilingüe trainings and was accredited. The rest of the classrooms (73%) did not have a lead teacher who completed the required trainings.

When looking at the Soy Bilingüe accreditation scores as a measure of classroom quality, four out of the 22 classrooms (18%) stood out as excellent implementers with a full score of 102. The majority of the DLI classrooms (64%) were adequate implementers with scores between 81 and 102, and a few classrooms (18%) did not reach the adequate implementation threshold score of 80.

Finally, as for classroom enrollment and children's focus language, 55 percent of the classrooms were emerging implementers with fewer than 35 percent of children in the classroom reporting speaking the focus language in their home. Only four classrooms had over half of the children speaking the focus language in the home (18%).

DLI classrooms had similar average CLASS scores in classroom organization and emotional support but lower scores in instructional support than comparison classrooms

SPP has used CLASS since 2015–16 as a measure of classroom quality. This observational tool assesses three domains of interactions: classroom organization, emotional support, and instructional support. The domain of classroom organization assesses the management of children's behavior, time, and attention (Head Start, 2021). The emotional support domain measures the extent to which teachers promote a positive classroom climate. The instructional support domain assesses the degree to which teachers implement curriculum and effectively promote cognitive and language development.

Certified CLASS observers use a specific protocol to rate each classroom on a scale of 1–7, where scores of 1–2 indicate low-quality interactions, 3–5 indicate mid-quality interactions, and 6–7 indicate consistently effective interactions (Head Start, 2021). In 2023–24, SPP classrooms' CLASS

scores were slightly lower than those from 2022–23 but remained consistent with scores from preceding years (see figure B1 in appendix B).

Among all 22 DLI classrooms that were rated on CLASS in 2023–24, the average scores for classroom organization (6.2) and emotional support (6.5) were similar to those of comparison classrooms that are not DLI, SPP Plus or FCC classrooms (6.2 on classroom organization and 6.5 on emotional support). However, DLI classrooms, on average, had lower instructional support scores (3.0) than those of comparison classrooms (non-DLI, non-SPP Plus and non-FCC classrooms) in the SPP program (3.3) and instructional support scores decreased between 2022–23 and 2023–24 (figure 2). Additionally, there was large variability in DLI classrooms' instructional support ratings (standard deviation [SD] = 0.81) compared to other domains (classroom organization SD = 0.65; emotional support SD = 0.43). Still, all DLI CLASS scores in 2023–24 were above the 2020 Head Start national means of 6.0 for classroom organization, 5.8 for emotional support, and 2.9 for instructional support (2020 is the latest published year; Head Start, 2020). Note that while the CLASS assessment is not designed to measure specific DLI best practices, it is found to be a valid instrument for predicting developmental and learning outcomes among dual language children.

These findings align with national data on Head Start classrooms where the instructional support domain tended to have the lowest ratings with the biggest variations of the three CLASS domains (Head Start, 2020). Because the three dimensions of instructional support (concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling) focus on promoting cognitive and language development through activities that encourage higher-order thinking and language skills, it is possible that language barriers and classroom dynamics play a role in the lower instructional support scores in DLI classrooms.

Figure 2. DLI classrooms had lower average CLASS scores in instructional support compared to comparison classrooms, 2023–24
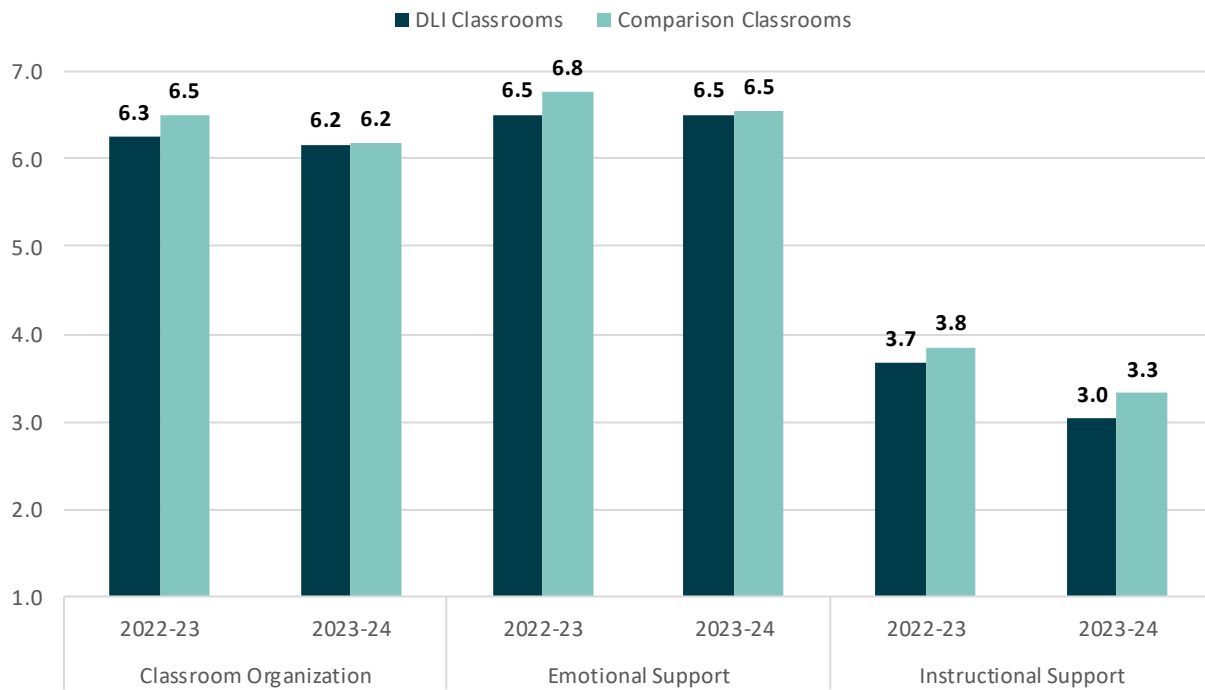
Note: Comparison classrooms refer to non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms in the SPP program. The number of classrooms was 22 for DLI and 65 for comparison classrooms. Possible CLASS scores range from 1 to 7.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Outcomes and Perceived Benefits of DLI Classrooms

In focus groups, family members discussed the perceived benefits of the DLI program for their children and overarching themes mentioned by multiple families are highlighted throughout the report. Overall, families are satisfied with the learning opportunities in their children's classrooms but the reasons for their satisfaction varied. A few family members liked that SPP DLI classrooms have a rich language environment where children are exposed to multiple languages and have peers from diverse language backgrounds. A few additional family members said they also appreciate the individualized support their children with an IEP receive and the play-based and child-centered approach used in the SPP DLI classrooms.

> *"I think that in my child's classroom, they meet my child where he is at, at where he wants to communicate, and the activities that he wants to do, and they take the cue from him. Like they are not making him … expecting him to do something that even if other kids are doing it, they don't make him feel like he has to be doing that. So, they let him explore—not only explore but work at a level where he wants as much or as little as he wants to do in that."*
>
> **—Family member**

Children in DLI classrooms met TSG growth targets at similar rates in most domains and had a higher rate of meeting all six widely held expectations than comparison classrooms

Overall, children in the DLI classrooms show slightly higher rates of meeting the Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) growth targets in four of the six TSG outcome domains (language, literacy, physical, and social and emotional), a similar rate in the math domain, and a slightly lower rate in the cognitive domain compared with comparison classrooms (figure 3). Of these domains, only the difference in rates for meeting growth targets in the physical domain is a statistically significant difference (at the 0.05 level), indicating that for most domains, children in DLI classrooms met TSG growth targets at similar rates as comparison classrooms.

Figure 3. Children in DLI classrooms meet TSG growth targets at higher rates in four of six domains than children in comparison classrooms, 2023–24
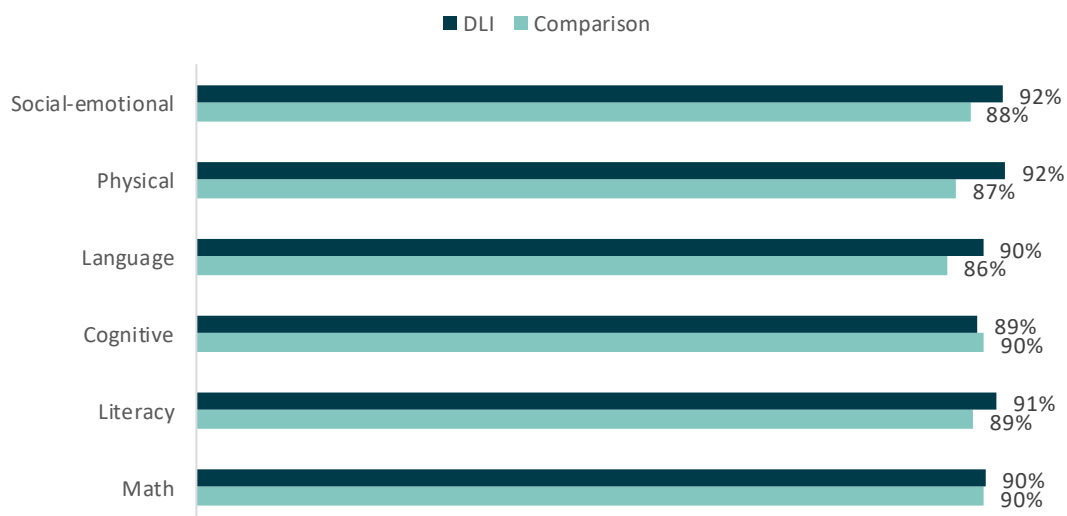
Note: Comparison classrooms refer to non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms in the SPP program. The physical domain was the only domain with statistically significant differences in rates for meeting growth targets.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Additionally, a higher percentage of children in the DLI program (87%) met all six TSG widely held expectations in spring 2024, compared to the percentage of children in comparison classrooms (80%; figure 4).[4] This percentage for children in the DLI program increased compared to the prior year (82% to 87%), but decreased slightly among comparison classrooms (classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC; 82% to 80%).

Figure 4. More children in the DLI program met all six widely held expectations in the spring TSG than in comparison classrooms in 2023–24
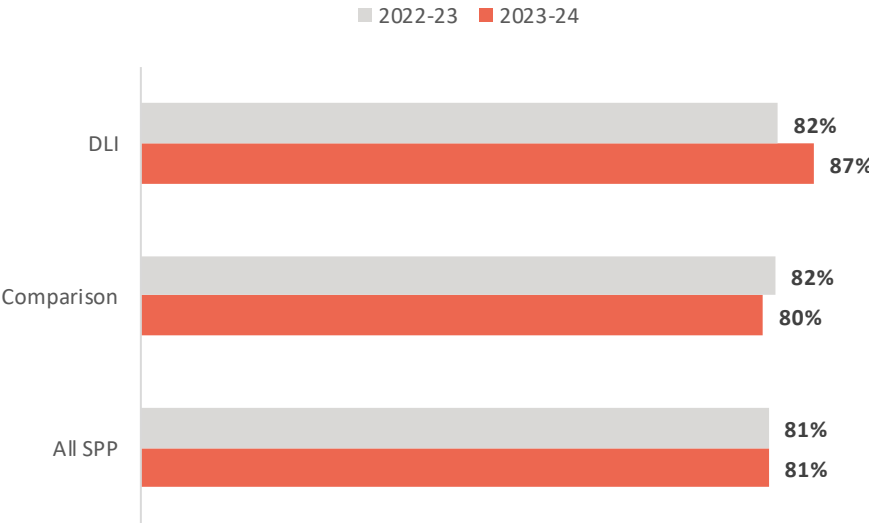
Note: Comparison classrooms refer to non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms in the SPP program.
Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Families note DLI programs have improved their child's language and social skills

The findings above are supported by information reported in the family focus groups. Specifically, many family focus group members said they noticed their children making progress in learning the focus language, even when their children have little to no background in the focus language. Although less common, family members also reported that their children were being more social by engaging with other children and noticed improvements in their children's emotional regulation and early literacy skills.

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[4] This result was statistically significant at the 0.05 level and remained statistically significant after controlling for child race/ethnicity, language, income, and gender.

"We've seen [child] grow from knowing very little sign language to being not totally fluent, but a lot more fluent receptively, and a lot more progress in communicating as well."

– Family member

Within DLI classrooms, multilingual children and children who spoke only English at home were similarly likely to meet growth targets in most TSG domains when accounting for child demographic characteristics

When looking solely among children enrolled in DLI classrooms, children who spoke only English at home met growth targets at higher rates than multilingual children in five of the six domains (the exception being the social-emotional domain). However, when controlling for children's age, race/ethnicity, gender, and income levels, these differences were only statistically significant for one domain: cognitive. This indicates that in most domains, multilingual children are not more or less likely to demonstrate higher levels of growth than children who spoke only English at home when controlling for other demographic characteristics and DLI enrollment status.

Children in DLI and children in non-DLI, non-SPP Plus and non-FCC comparison classrooms performed similarly on TSG when accounting for child demographic characteristics and classroom features

To understand how participating in the DLI program may impact children's outcomes, the evaluation team used descriptive (noncausal) multivariate regression analysis to explore the relationship between DLI participation status and TSG scores, controlling for child demographic characteristics.

Our analysis showed that there were no significant differences between children enrolled in DLI and children enrolled in comparison classrooms that are not DLI, SPP Plus or FCC classrooms in terms of their scores on the TSG assessment when child characteristics, such as race, income, and preferred language, were controlled for. These findings suggest that enrollment in DLI is not necessarily a cause of improved TSG outcomes but, rather, that DLI children have differing characteristics that may be related to TSG outcomes.

Other factors related to improved TSG outcomes include average attendance rate, child age, female, and speaking English at home. These findings suggest that encouraging regular attendance may be one way to support child outcomes. This aligns with the finding from a large-scale research study surveying dual language learners in California that duration of enrollment in early learning settings was positively associated with the skills of preschool-aged DLLs from a Spanish-language background (Martin et al., 2022).

One factor negatively related to TSG outcomes was experiencing homelessness within the past year. The finding suggests that supporting children who experience homelessness may help improve their overall well-being and developmental outcomes over time.

For kindergarten children who are eligible for English learner[5] services in Seattle Public Schools, the children who previously attended DLI classrooms had similar or slightly higher kindergarten readiness outcomes

Looking at the connection to WaKIDS, among children who are eligible for Seattle Public Schools' English learner services in kindergarten in 2023–24, those who had previously attended DLI classrooms had a similar level of kindergarten readiness compared to children who had attended SPP comparison (non-SPP Plus and non-FCC) classrooms (ready in 4.9 domains compared to 4.8 domains, respectively). Those who previously attended DLI classrooms had slightly higher levels of readiness compared to those who did not attend SPP (ready in 4.9 domains compared to 4.5 domains, respectively).[6] Among children who were not eligible for English learner services, children who attended DLI classrooms had the same average number of domains as children who attended comparison classrooms (non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms) and slightly lower average number of domains than children who did not attend SPP (figure 5).

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[5] Seattle Public Schools offers a variety of instructional programs and services to help students achieve academic excellence while still learning English. English learner services (required by federal law) are provided at every school with eligible multilingual students. See the SPS website for more information on eligibility: https://www.seattleschools.org/departments/multilingual/eligibility-for-multilingual-services/

[6] Seattle Public Schools students who did not attend SPP may have attended other preschool or early education programs. Additionally, due to limitations with the process of matching data between SPP and SPS, some students who are included in the data as not attending SPP may have actually attended SPP.

Figure 5. Among children in kindergarten who qualified for English learner services in 2023–24, those who attended SPP DLI classrooms demonstrated similar or higher levels of kindergarten readiness than children who attended SPP comparison classrooms and children who were not in SPP
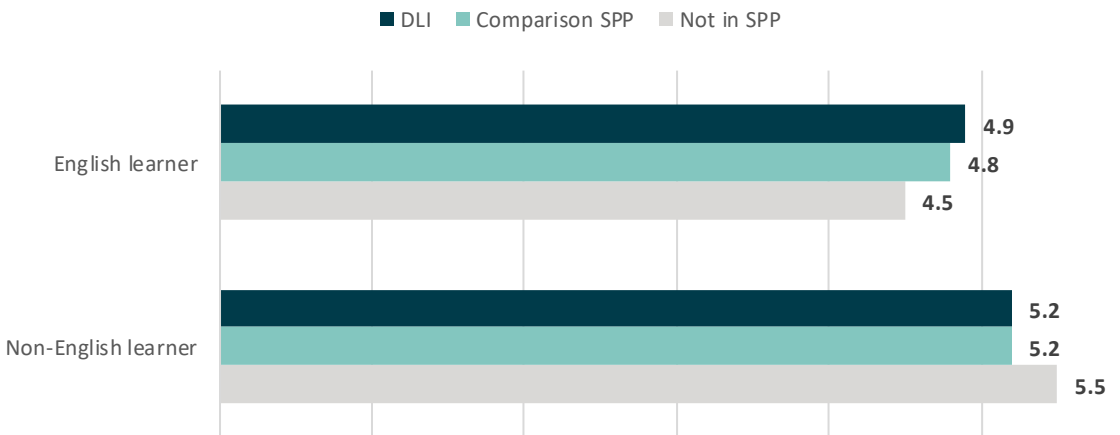
Note: Comparison classrooms refer to SPP classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms. The numbers of SPS children eligible for multilingual services were 58 for DLI (2023–24), 128 for comparison classrooms in SPP (2023–24), and 319 for children not enrolled in SPP previously (2023–24). The numbers of non-multilingual learner children were 61 for DLI (2023–24), 394 for comparison classrooms in SPP (2023–24), and 2,372 for children not enrolled in SPP previously (2023–24).
Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Professional Development, Coaching, and Support

DEEL offers a variety of training options covering a wide range of topics, including learning opportunities focused on dual-language learning, family engagement, indigenous languages, identity, trauma, oppression, and assimilation, among others. The trainings are open to all SPP educators with priority given to DLI teachers. While the trainings have been helpful, DEEL staff are actively seeking opportunities to make enhancements, such as:

- Offering evening trainings in response to directors' requests

- Making adaptations based on teacher feedback

- Addressing virtual trainings, which have been a challenge

- Considering training opportunities for experienced teachers

Coaching, which has been impacted over the past few years by the COVID-19 pandemic and hiring freezes, was identified as a key area for improvement through discussions with coaches. DEEL staff are exploring opportunities to adapt and optimize coaching, including using city funds for an internal expert dual-language coach.

To gather information on teachers' perspectives on the DLI, we asked them about the training and support they received in the 2023–24 school year as well as successes and challenges they experienced. Overall, SPP DLI teachers are pleased with the instructional materials and professional development opportunities to support the children in their classrooms. SPP DLI teachers identified multiyear early learning and the provision of targeted support for children learning English as a second language as successes. They identified teacher retention and administration of child assessments as challenges.

SPP DLI teachers report satisfaction with Soy Bilingüe trainings and curriculum

Most teachers interviewed said they attended DEEL-hosted Soy Bilingüe seminars and described the experience as valuable. A few teachers in two programs also mentioned the valuable partnerships that DEEL and their program have with community organizations. These community organizations provide trainings to teachers on topics such as race and social justice.

> *"I think through all this training, the teachers are embracing multicultural concepts— so we can bring what we learned into the classroom to better serve our family and the children."*
>
> —Educator

The Soy Bilingüe curriculum is well received by SPP DLI teachers due to its emphasis on cultural responsiveness

SPP DLI teachers reported that they appreciate specific elements of Soy Bilingüe. For instance, teachers like the strategies to create a classroom environment that is reflective of languages and cultures of the students (e.g., labeling/labels) and supports second language learning. They also like that Soy Bilingüe aligns with HighScope's curriculum approach, which emphasizes active teaching and learning. A teacher recommended making Soy Bilingüe a requirement beyond DLI classrooms.

> *"For me, what Soy Bilingüe has done is really encourage me and remind me ... Because I'm a white lady, so not imposing my White, standard American culture in the classroom as much, but making sure that we're representing not every culture in the whole entire world, but really focusing and honing in on the cultures that are represented by the families in our class that particular year. Next year I might not have any kids who speak Tagalog in my classroom, so maybe we'll learn more words in Somali next year, or whatever the case ends up being."*
>
> —Educator

SPP DLI teachers have recommendations for additional training topics

Although SPP DLI teachers did not provide feedback about other DEEL-hosted trainings (e.g., Creative Curriculum, HighScope, content areas), some teachers suggested additional topics that they would like to receive training on. They recommended training on meeting the needs of students receiving special education; trauma-informed care given the unique experiences of the population of children that teachers work with; best instructional approaches for classrooms with multiple home languages; and music, movement, and play.

SPP DLI teachers are satisfied with the coaching support they receive from SPP coaches

According to SPP DLI teachers who were interviewed, coaches generally visit them once a month to observe instruction and/or provide recommendations in the areas they can improve on, including instructional strategies and their classroom environment.

SPP DLI teachers expressed overall positive experiences with SPP coaches in the interviews. Teachers liked the fact that coaches shared information and resources, connected teachers to other DLI teachers, and helped them navigate relationships with colleagues. It was not always clear to newer SPP DLI teachers whether SPP coaches visited for evaluative purposes or to provide support.

Observations and Perceptions of Alignment with Evidence-based Practices

After developing and scoring the DLI implementation rubric, we identified three DLI classrooms with differing implementation fidelity levels, focus languages, and program operators to conduct classroom observations. Program evaluators collected implementation data through site visit observations at three DLI classrooms, a key informant interview with one administrator, focus groups with 13 educators and eight families, and a review of relevant policy and procedural documents. The goal of the site visits was to observe teachers' instructional practices and classroom environments to better understand how DLI classrooms are implemented and to supplement the CLASS data to gain further insight into how DLI implementation is aligned with evidence-based practices. Below, we spotlight key findings from the site visit observations, aligned with evidence from research literature and supplemented by interview and focus group findings.

Site visits confirmed there is strong alignment between implementation rubric scores, observed implementation fidelity, and teachers' observed practices and instruction in the classroom

Two trained observers conducted separate hour-long site visits to each of three selected classrooms and documented whether evidence-based practices were consistently observed. To collect the

data, the study team adapted the Illinois Dual Language Teacher Leadership Project evaluation classroom observation protocol[7] and incorporated input and feedback from DEEL.

The observation protocol covered three main topics: classroom settings and characteristics, classroom language and environment scan, and observed instructional practices and activities. The observed instructional practices section captured evidence statements on the extent to which the lead and/or assistant teachers were implementing up to 16 different evidence-based activities or teaching strategies. These 16 items fell into five broad categories of instructional strategies:

- Facilitate connections between languages

- Demonstrate respect for diverse backgrounds

- Promote bilingual students' development in content areas

- Differentiate for multiple language proficiency levels

- Assess student progress

Data collected from site visit observations confirmed there is strong alignment between implementation rubric scores, observed implementation fidelity, and teachers' actual practices and instruction in the classroom.

All three observed classrooms fostered an engaging environment for their children and offered language learning opportunities

We documented the language instruction practices that were utilized in each of the three observed classrooms, including whether teachers communicated and read to students in English, the classroom focus language, and students' home languages and whether students had opportunities to talk to one another in English and in the classroom focus language. In all three classrooms, we observed both lead and assistant teachers communicating with students in English and the classroom focus language. No other languages apart from English or the classroom languages were observed. In only one classroom, teachers were observed reading to students in both English and the classroom focus language during the two-hour observation.

Classroom observers also documented findings related to the classroom environment during their site visits. In all three classrooms, observers confirmed seeing books representing students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, labels presented in children's home languages, and visual displays representing diverse children and cultures. In one classroom in particular, teachers consistently provided students with hands-on learning opportunities and peer interactions. Such activities included painting on T-shirts, using sand and rocks for experiments, and using sticks to create

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[7] The protocol was created for the Illinois Dual Language Teacher Leadership Project to evaluate a master's degree program for dual language teachers through Roosevelt University and funded through a National Professional Development Grant by the Office of English Language Acquisition at the U.S. Department of Education.

shapes. Implementation research has shown that organized instruction is foundational to children's ability to connect vocabulary, especially for children who are learning a new language and content (National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, 2024). Anchoring activity themes and topics in the here and now allows dual-language children to see and feel the content they are experiencing and build conceptual connections and vocabulary connections through hands-on activities.

Most DLI families reported that SPP DLI classrooms recognize, value, and celebrate children's cultural backgrounds

Similar to what was observed in the classrooms, most family members who participated in DLI family focus groups reported that their children's SPP DLI program actively celebrated a variety of cultural holidays, such as Día de los Muertos, Chinese New Year, Hanukkah, and Eid. They expressed that the program fosters a culturally aware educational experience because DLI classrooms teach children about diverse foods and traditional songs and dances.

> *"[My child] talked a lot about Eid. He was really excited about Eid. He talked about the different foods. [The teacher] brought in mint tea and some foods. And [my child] talked about which ones [he liked] … He tried all of them, which is actually somewhat unusual for him."*
>
> **—Family member**

> *"My son every day came back home and then sings, sings in Chinese. It surprised me. When we were [children], we learned the same song."*
>
> **—Family member**

Family focus group participants also noted the various cultural festivities and inviting families to present their cultural traditions in their children's DLI program as key indicators of the program's dedication to embracing the cultural diversity of its students.

Most teachers created a learning environment that includes students of diverse backgrounds, and some teachers made intentional efforts to connect content of instruction to students' languages or cultures

Research suggests that when early learning programs include and celebrate children's cultural identities, they not only enhance students' self-esteem but also encourage respect and acceptance of diverse backgrounds among peers (Carrillo, 2022; Mueller et al., 2020). Overall, teachers in all three classrooms encouraged students to share their ideas and perspectives in both English and the classroom focus language and fostered a respectful learning environment. For example, all teachers

across the three classrooms consistently used respectful language (e.g., "thank you!") and a warm, calm voice throughout the observations. Teachers also repeated questions in both English and the classroom focus languages to encourage student engagement and interactions. While the classroom environments were generally supportive and respectful, only a few teachers consistently made the connections between instructional materials and students' cultures and community lives. In one instance when this was observed, the lead teacher expanded on a discussion about a falling tree and encouraged students to describe the environment and community they live in. Strong connections between home and school have been shown to be related to positive learning and developmental outcomes for children from diverse backgrounds (Durand, 2011).

Teachers in all three observed classrooms used multiple strategies to promote bilingual students' development in content areas

There were many examples of teachers fostering comprehension by scaffolding learning and asking questions like, "What colors are you using to complement that?" Despite these rich exchanges, we also noted a few missed opportunities for teachers to highlight the connections between different languages. For instance, when a student showed the teacher a drawing of a house, the teacher said the word "house" in both English and the classroom focus language. However, this interaction only happened after the child approached the teacher about her drawing. Teachers and coaches could create opportunities in the classroom to bridge cross-linguistic connections (García, 2017; Howard et al., 2018).

Teachers in all three classrooms differentiated instructional strategies for different language proficiency levels and encouraged students to use both languages; however, the practices of providing feedback and assessing students' progress were not consistently observed

Teachers used a variety of instructional group formats (e.g., working in pairs first, then transitioning into independent play), multiple instructional modalities (e.g., painting on different objects, reading and singing), body gestures and signs (e.g., accompanying instructions with hand gestures pointing to eyes and mouth), as well as pauses in speech (e.g., waiting for students to respond to an answer) to support children with varying levels of language proficiency. Such scaffolding practices were observed consistently in all three classrooms. In one classroom, students demonstrated their understanding by participating in a classroom activity and following the instructions from the lead teacher. In another classroom, the teachers encouraged students to demonstrate understanding by answering questions orally in both languages and in writing.

In most classrooms, teachers would provide feedback to students by saying "good job" or "brilliant," but only a few teachers would walk around the classroom to monitor students' progress during activities and provide support as needed. In classrooms where this was observed, the teachers asked

questions during activities and checked in on students to make sure they were able to complete the task at hand. When students struggled, the teachers made sure to support them either by showing them how to complete the task or asking follow-up questions to ensure they understood the topic of discussion. Observers noticed that teachers were more likely to provide feedback and support to students who were more engaged and willing to share. The students who were less proactive tended to receive less teacher attention. Teachers' feedback in the focus group suggests they may be struggling with providing individualized feedback given the lack of resources and support in the classroom. Because providing targeted feedback can be used as an intentional teaching strategy to foster oral language skills in English and home language for young children (Cheatham, Jimenez-Silva, & Park, 2015), this is an area where more training and coaching might be most beneficial to teachers in these DLI classrooms.

While child assessment data can provide valuable information about children's learning, some SPP DLI teachers encounter challenges with administering the child assessments

According to SPP DLI teachers, TSG and HighScope child assessments help them monitor children's learning and development across the school year and inform teaching practices. However, a few SPP DLI teachers expressed frustration with the documentation process for TSG. A teacher, for example, said adaptations to the administration of TSG to a handful of objectives and for a group of children would be helpful.

> *"It feels like a box to check, because I'm having to put documentation in for every child for dozens of objectives and dimensions ... It's so overwhelming."*
>
> —Educator

SPP programs that span multiple years and provide tailored support for students learning English as a second language foster significant growth in children

A few SPP DLI teachers described the growth they observed in children who had prior child care or preschool or those who were enrolled in their program for multiple years.

> *"They come in, they're 3, 4, and 5, and I think it seems to help with the two years that they are in the class, because the first year, it's a lot of learning to be in their environment, feel comfortable in their environment, learning to make friends."*
>
> —Educator

In addition, a few SPP DLI teachers mentioned that children who are learning English as their second language make substantial progress in their language learning over the course of preschool, which aligns with prior research findings (Hammer et al., 2014). Teachers identified a number of factors as contributors to children's language development: children's use of their home language to help them learn and use English, support from families who encourage their children to learn a second language, and children's confidence to use the second language. Children with developmental delays (e.g., speech and language delays) and receive additional support or special education services were also considered by a few SPP DLI teachers as making substantial growth. However, teachers noted it is important to have more timely and efficient identification and support for children who may be eligible for special education.

A few SPP DLI teachers also identified factors that can hinder children's progress in learning the classroom focus language: (a) learning a classroom focus language different from their home language, (b) limited opportunities for children to use the classroom focus language with their peers if only a small number of children who are fluent speakers of that language are enrolled in the program, and (c) children's preference not to use the classroom focus language as regularly as their peers do.

SPP DLI classrooms encounter common issues with teacher retention

SPP DLI teachers commonly describe low teacher wages and the pay inequity between SPS teachers and center-based organization teachers as key reasons for teachers leaving their positions for other opportunities. These challenges are not uncommon—school districts across the nation struggle with teacher shortages including inadequate compensation or incentives (Torre Gibney et al., 2021). SPP DLI teachers similarly recommend paying teachers fair wages to keep and attract teaching staff, in line with a research review that concluded pay increases can support retention of early educators (Totenhagen et al., 2016).

> *"I have been struggling on keeping a teacher assistant in my room … and it has been so difficult for the kids, because they can't build that bond with an adult if the adult, there's always a change. And I have [a] substitute, different kinds of people coming in and out of the classroom, and it's only me that they see that's consistent. So, they're very attached to me, emotionally, and it's hard if I have 19 and I have to get to know each and every one of them."*
>
> **—Educator**

Implications and Next Steps

Our findings point to SPP's DLI programming having unique benefits for families as well as growth areas specific to this program model. From the findings explored above, our evaluation team has developed a set of implications and next steps for DEEL to consider.

- **Consider expanding access to DLI and Soy Bilingüe.** With positive or similar child outcomes between DLI and other classrooms, DEEL could consider expanding the DLI program and broadening access to Soy Bilingüe. If the program is expanded, DEEL should work to increase instructional support practices in DLI classrooms to ensure similar classroom quality across all classroom types.

- **Strengthen multiyear DLI programs.** Teachers recognize the benefits of multiyear program attendance for students learning more than one language. Continue to prioritize multiyear DLI program options for families.

- **Provide additional specialized training opportunities.** While teachers and site directors generally find the training offerings sufficient, there is a desire for more training support. Offering training sessions on supporting students with IEPs and classrooms with diverse home languages would enhance teachers' skills and help meet diverse student needs. Teachers could also benefit from resources and training that provide specific strategies on creating environments that include children's home languages and cultures. Learning about evidence-based instructional support practices focusing on providing effective feedback and making vocabulary connections between languages could also help improve teachers' engagement and interactions with multilingual children. This may also help bolster CLASS scores in instructional support.

- **Expand coaching and peer support.** Teachers appreciate the support they receive from coaches. Continue these coaching practices and explore opportunities for coaches to provide targeted assistance, especially related to strategies for supporting multilingual students and students with disabilities. Additionally, DLI teachers expressed interest in joining a community of practice to share strategies, resources, and best practices with DLI educators from other SPP programs.

- **Improve support for assessment administration.** Some teachers find it challenging to administer assessments consistently. Consider providing additional guidance or training on streamlining assessment procedures.

- **Implement retention strategies to address teacher turnover.** To sustain quality and consistency in DLI programming, consider offering incentives such as career development opportunities, recognition programs, or compensation adjustments to retain high-quality teaching staff.

SPP Plus Classrooms

Ensuring children with disabilities receive high-quality instruction and opportunities to learn alongside their peers without disabilities is a state and national priority. At its core, inclusion means children with disabilities have access to all aspects of their preschool classroom—including social relationships, general education curriculum and instruction, and extracurricular activities. The joint position statement of the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), which communicates a shared definition related to beliefs, outcomes, and systems change, is as follows:

> *"Inclusion embodies the values and practices that create access to individualized opportunities for every child and their family. State agencies, community partners, and families all work together to provide access to inclusive high-quality early learning settings for all children. Inclusive practices ensure that all children and their families, regardless of ability, can participate in a broad range of activities and are supported to engage as full members of their program, school, communities, and society. The desired result of inclusive experiences for all children and their families is that they feel a sense of belonging to a community, develop positive relationships and friendships, and experience learning that engages the individual child's development."*
>
> **—DCYF and OSPI Joint Inclusion Position Statement**

Inclusive education values the whole child and views diversity in ability, race, and cultural identities as an asset that benefits everyone's learning. Effective inclusionary practices build children's confidence in their identities as lifelong learners and help prepare them for success in preschool, kindergarten, relationships, and success throughout their school career.

Potential Benefits of SPP Plus Classrooms

The benefits of inclusive preschool settings for all children are clear. Children with disabilities achieve better academic, attendance, and social outcomes than children who have not been included (Choi et al., 2017; Green et al., 2014; Kart & Kart, 2021; Phillips & Meloy, 2012). All children, regardless of their special education designation, gain a sense of belonging, learn empathy, strengthen relationship-building skills, and receive differentiated instruction that values their strengths and supports their specific learning needs (Cross et al., 2004; Kart & Kart, 2021; Kwon, Elicker, & Kontos, 2011; Nahmias et al., 2014). For students without disabilities, inclusion increases relationship-building skills and connection with peers while having mostly neutral or positive effects on academic learning (Diamond, 2001; Shogren et al., 2015; Yu, Ostrosky, & Fowler, 2012). Additionally, administrators and educators who support children with disabilities in typical

preschool settings often improve their capacity to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each child regardless of their special education designation (Buysse et al., 1999; Heir et al., 2016). Despite the clear benefits of inclusion, the lack of high-quality, inclusive preschool settings continues to be a systemic barrier for children with disabilities in Washington and across the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

SPP Plus Classroom Models

The SPP Plus classrooms provide the support necessary for children with disabilities to learn alongside their typically developing peers in a general education preschool setting. In 2023–24, SPS operated 23 SPP Plus classrooms, and the Experimental Education Unit (EEU) at the University of Washington Haring Center for Inclusive Education operated five SPP Plus classrooms. The contractual requirements for SPP Plus programs are the same for SPS and EEU classrooms. All SPP Plus classrooms enroll 15 to 18 preschool children, compared to 20 students enrolled in many other SPP classrooms, and five to seven of the enrolled students must receive IEP services. The SPS and EEU programs differ in the classroom location, lead teacher certification, program structure, and children's characteristics (table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the similarities and differences between the SPS and EEU SPP Plus preschool models

SPP Plus Model	SPS	EEU
Classroom location	SPS elementary or K–8 public school—most with two adjoining SPP Plus classrooms	University of Washington building housing SPP Plus, 0–3 early support, project data serving children with autism spectrum disorder
Additional early learning programs	Head Start preschool, SPP programs, developmental inclusive preschool, and kindergarten	0–3 early support programs, project data serving children with autism spectrum disorder, early childhood education and assistance program, and kindergarten
Enrollment	Children with IEPs enroll in SPS and admission is based on a lottery/priority system Children in general education enroll through the DEEL website	Children with IEPs enroll in SPS and admission is based on a lottery system Children in general education enroll through the EEU website
Number of children in SPP Plus classrooms	15–18 children, five to seven of whom have IEPs	15–18 children, five to seven of whom have IEPs
Lead teacher certification	Full-time general education teacher and part-time special education teacher	Full-time dual certified teacher
Related services	Physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, and other related services provided by SPS	On-site school nurse, social worker, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech language pathologists; other related services provided by SPS

SPP Plus Model	SPS	EEU
General education curriculum	High Scope	Creative Curriculum
Child characteristics	Children with mild to moderate disabilities	All children with IEPs regardless of their disability or support needs
Operating hours	Aligns with the SPS elementary school schedule. In 2024–25, school hours are 7:55am–2:25pm on M, T, Th/F and 7:55am to 1:10 pm on W	Aligns with the SPS elementary school hour requirements. In 2024–25, program times are 8:40am to 3:00pm on M, T, Th/F and 8:40am to 1:45pm on W

Source: Authors' analysis of qualitative data and document review, 2023–24

SPP Plus classrooms operated by SPS and the EEU differ in the type of setting, general education curriculum, and enrollment procedures

SPS classrooms are district-operated and are located within elementary or K–8 schools

SPS enrolls students with qualifying IEPs in its SPP Plus classroom programs based on their educational support needs—the full-day program serves children with mild to moderate disabilities. Children with significant needs that require intensive support are served by part-day programs that are outside the SPP system. SPP Plus classrooms operated by SPS are housed in elementary or K–8 schools located across the district. Each SPP Plus location has one or two classrooms that are co-taught by general education and special education teachers. All SPP Plus classrooms operated by SPS use HighScope as their general education curriculum. Some classrooms also use other curriculums such as Second Step, which focuses on social and emotional learning skills. Families of children receiving general education services must apply for SPP services application on the DEEL website. For children with qualifying IEPs, enrollment in SPP Plus is based on placement recommendations of their child's special education case manager and IEP team.

EEU classrooms are operated by the University of Washington and are in a facility that houses a continuum of early learning programs

The five EEU SPP Plus classrooms are housed on the University of Washington's Seattle campus in a facility that provides early support services for infants and toddlers, SPP Plus classrooms, early childhood education and assistance program classrooms, and full-day kindergarten. The SPP Plus program is a full-inclusion model that serves all children regardless of their disability or support needs; its lead teachers have dual special education and general education certification. SPP Plus classrooms are full-day programs and use the Creative Curriculum general education curriculum that provides children with play-based opportunities to learn social and emotional, math, literacy, and other developmentally appropriate skills. Admission of children with IEPs is based on a lottery system operated by SPS. To be considered, families must enroll their child in SPS, indicate their

eligibility for special education services, and complete a school choice form indicating their interest in the EEU program. Admission of children without disabilities is also based on a lottery system operated by the EEU, and families must apply through the EEU application process.

Enrollment and Child Characteristics

Race and ethnicity of children enrolled in SPP Plus classrooms was similar to comparison classrooms

In 2023–24, 510 children enrolled in SPP Plus classrooms (24% of all SPP children) and 27 percent of SPP Plus children had IEPs. The racial and ethnic backgrounds of children enrolled in SPP Plus classrooms was similar to comparison classrooms (figure 6). The highest percentage of children identified as white (32%), followed by children who identified as Black (25%), Asian (14%), Latine (14%), and all other races (14%). The percentage of children enrolled in SPP Plus classrooms who were multilingual was also smaller in SPP Plus classrooms (32%) than comparison classrooms (40%).

Figure 6. Race/ethnicity among children enrolled in SPP Plus classrooms was similar to children in comparison classrooms, 2023–24
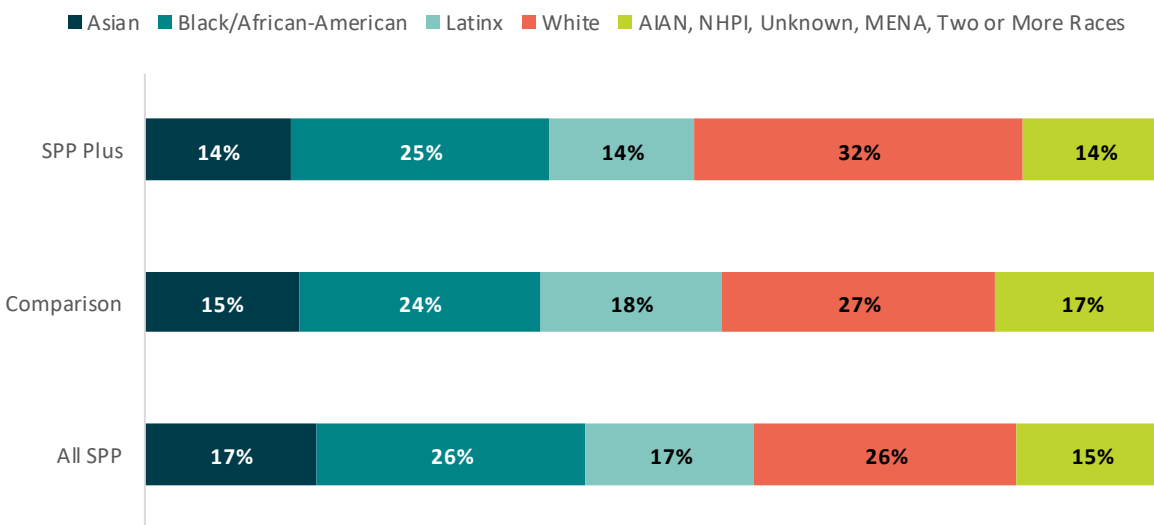
Note: Percentages for unknown race/ethnicity, American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI) are not shown separately due to small numbers of children. Bars show the percentage of SPP children in each racial/ethnic group and is scaled from 0 to 100 percent. Sum of percentages across a bar might not total 100 due to rounding. The number of children shown in this graph is 2,151 for the SPP program, 510 for SPP Plus program, and 1,183 for comparison classrooms (classrooms that were not DLI, FCC, or SPP Plus).

The number of children shown in this graph is 2,151.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Staffing

The racial and ethnic backgrounds of SPP Plus staff were similar to comparison classrooms

In 2023–24, 74 staff members (teachers and assistant teachers) were assigned to the 28 SPP Plus classrooms. Most staff members identified as white, followed by Asian, Black, and Latine; 85 percent spoke English as their primary language, and a small number of teachers spoke Chinese (including different dialects), Spanish, Amharic, or Tagalog. Similar to non-SPP Plus classrooms, about 40 percent of the children were taught by at least one teacher from similar racial or ethnic backgrounds as their own, and 76 percent of children shared the same primary language as one or more of their classroom staff members, with most of these language matches being English. The SPP Plus classrooms generally had at least three adults supporting children throughout the day, but the organization of staffing differed between SPS and the EEU.

Lead teachers in SPS and the EEU classrooms have different educational backgrounds

SPS classrooms are co-taught by general education and special education teachers

SPS uses a co-teaching inclusion model in which general and special education teachers co-plan learning activities to ensure instructional strategies are differentiated to meet the needs of each student. The majority of participating elementary schools house two adjoining SPP Plus classrooms. Each classroom has one general education lead teacher and two or more education assistants. In addition, one special education teacher is responsible for IEP case management and delivery of specially designed instruction for the 10 to 14 children with IEPs enrolled in both classrooms. Within the SPS co-teaching model, the teachers and assistant(s) may assume various roles such as jointly teaching a learning activity, teaching a small group, supervising a specific learning center or station, and providing instruction to individual students (Lawrence et al., 2016). SPS teachers and administrators stated several benefits of the co-teaching model, including ongoing collaboration between general and special education teachers that provides opportunities for children with and without disabilities to engage in general education instruction throughout the day. The assignment of a special education teacher to two classrooms within the same building helps strengthen relationships within the preschool community while limiting barriers such as travel time and communication lapses that are challenges in itinerant special education service models.

"They [general education and special education teacher] work together to support the student in the general education setting and the special educator brings that consultation. So they're working with the team and building their capacity and learning on meeting the needs of all students. And that also transfers to all kids within the program because they're thinking with a different lens—how do we really accommodate and modify so that these are practices, evidence-based practices that really work for all.

—Key informant

EEU classrooms are taught by teachers dual-certified in general and special education

The EEU inclusion model employs lead teachers who are dual certified in general education and special education. To simulate public education settings, the EEU has a certified lead teacher and at least two other adults in the classroom at all times. A key benefit of dual certified lead teachers is the clear expectation that every child in your preschool is the teacher's responsibility regardless of special education designation. Dual certified teachers also ensure that one person on every team understands and can bridge the delivery of evidence-based general and special education services. In addition, dual certified teachers reduce the time and expense required for two teachers to create a shared and cohesive teaching approach.

Classroom Quality

We used two sets of data to examine the extent to which SPP Plus classrooms are implemented to fidelity and with quality. This section reports findings of the implementation fidelity indicators and the CLASS assessment observations for SPP Plus classrooms.

Implementation rubric scores showed some variation in implementation across SPP Plus classrooms, but data quality may influence these findings

The SPP Plus implementation fidelity rubric details four measurable implementation indicators of SPP Plus classrooms and thresholds for emerging, adequate, and excellent fidelity levels calculated from existing administrative data: enrollment, staffing, educator qualifications, and family engagement (see table C2 in appendix C). Below is a summary of adequate and excellent implementation percentages using available data for each indicator and data quality issues that may have influenced these findings.

Enrollment data indicate 93 percent of classrooms had between four to six students with IEPs enrolled in the class. Although it is possible that all seats allocated for students with IEPs were not filled, this finding may not consider special education seats are "on hold" for general education children who are being evaluated for special education services. During the beginning of the school

year, SPS holds one special education seat in each program for general education students who are in the process of referral and/or evaluation for special education. This practice was instituted to better manage over-enrollment in special education seats and to avoid unnecessary transition of children to a different preschool program because their special education eligibility changed and the SPP Plus program did not have available special education seats. To improve the accuracy of enrollment data, SPP Plus staff complete a form that includes updates on the number of children enrolled in special education and general education seats.

Staffing data indicate 78 percent of classrooms had three or more staff supporting the classroom indicating excellent to adequate implementation.

Educator qualification data indicate 21 percent of classrooms had a lead teacher with a special education certification; however, the reliability and completeness of teacher qualification data are unclear. For example, SPS assigns the general education teacher as the lead teacher and, in practice, the part-time special education teacher co-leads the classroom. However, it is unclear how the roles of general and special education teachers are reflected in DEEL data.

Family engagement implementation data reflects findings from relevant family survey items. For 73 percent of SPP Plus classrooms, 60 percent or more of all families in those classrooms reported on the SPP family survey that they agreed or strongly agreed with the following items: "I know about my child's learning goals," and "Teachers work closely with me to meet my child's needs."

SPP Plus classrooms had higher average scores on all CLASS domains than comparison classrooms

SPP Plus classrooms in 2023–24 had the highest average CLASS scores in all three domains (classroom organization score = 6.4, emotional support score = 6.7, instructional support score = 3.7) compared with comparison classrooms (figure 7) as well as DLI and FCC classrooms (see table B2 in appendix B). SPP Plus classroom scores also showed the least variability across all three domains, compared with DLI, FCC, and other SPP classrooms (see table B2 in appendix B).

Figure 7. SPP Plus classrooms had higher average CLASS scores in all three domains than other types of classrooms, 2023–24
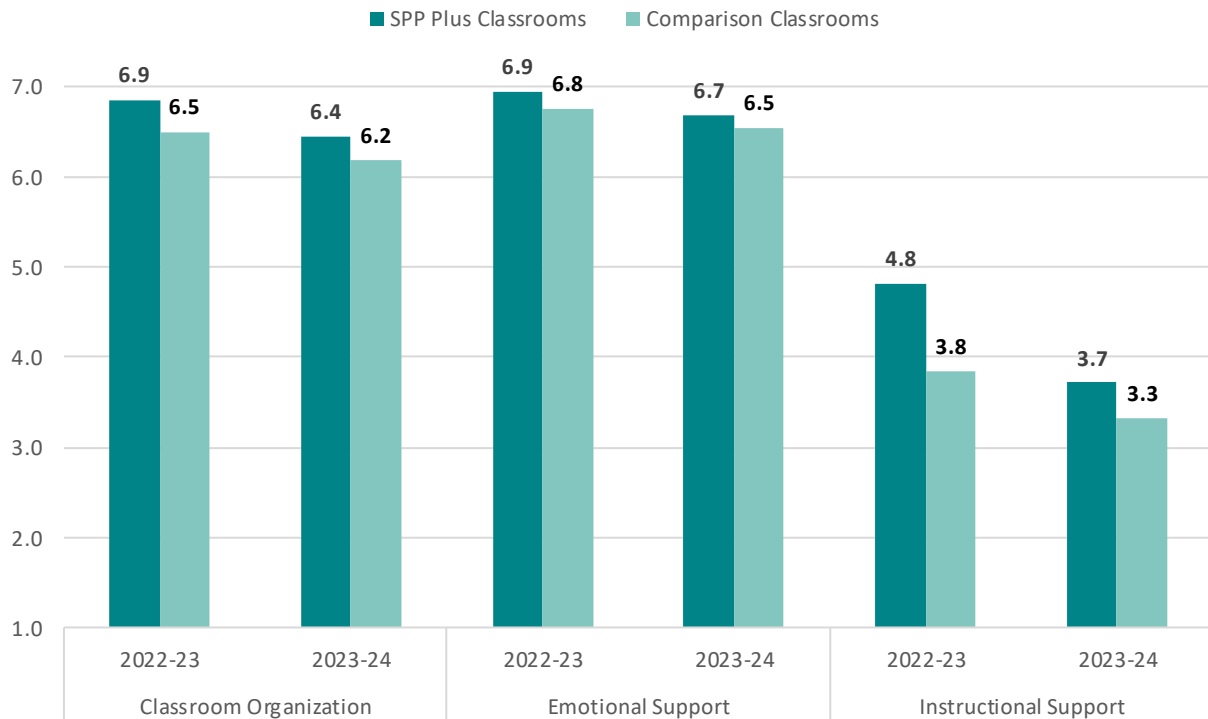
Note: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms. The number of classrooms was 28 for SPP Plus and 65 for non-DLI and non-FCC classrooms in 2023–24. Possible CLASS scores range from 1 to 7.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Outcomes and Perceived Benefits of SPP Plus Classrooms

Participation in SPP Plus classrooms benefits children with and without IEPs, their families, and the educators who provide inclusion services. Our evaluation findings emphasize the positive regard for the quality and positive outcomes associated with the SPP Plus classroom.

SPP Plus classrooms had higher percentages of children who met TSG growth targets than SPP comparison classrooms

In 2023–24, SPP Plus classrooms had higher TSG spring scale scores but a slightly lower rate of children meeting widely held expectations in all six domains than comparison classrooms. In terms of growth from fall to spring, a higher percentage of children in SPP Plus met their TSG growth targets in each domain compared to children in comparison classrooms (figure 8). These results are statistically significant at the 0.05 level for all domains and remain statistically significant in five of six domains (language is no longer statistically significant) when controlling for child race/ethnicity, language, gender, and income.

Figure 8. A higher percentage of children in SPP Plus classrooms met their TSG growth targets than children in comparison classrooms, 2023–24
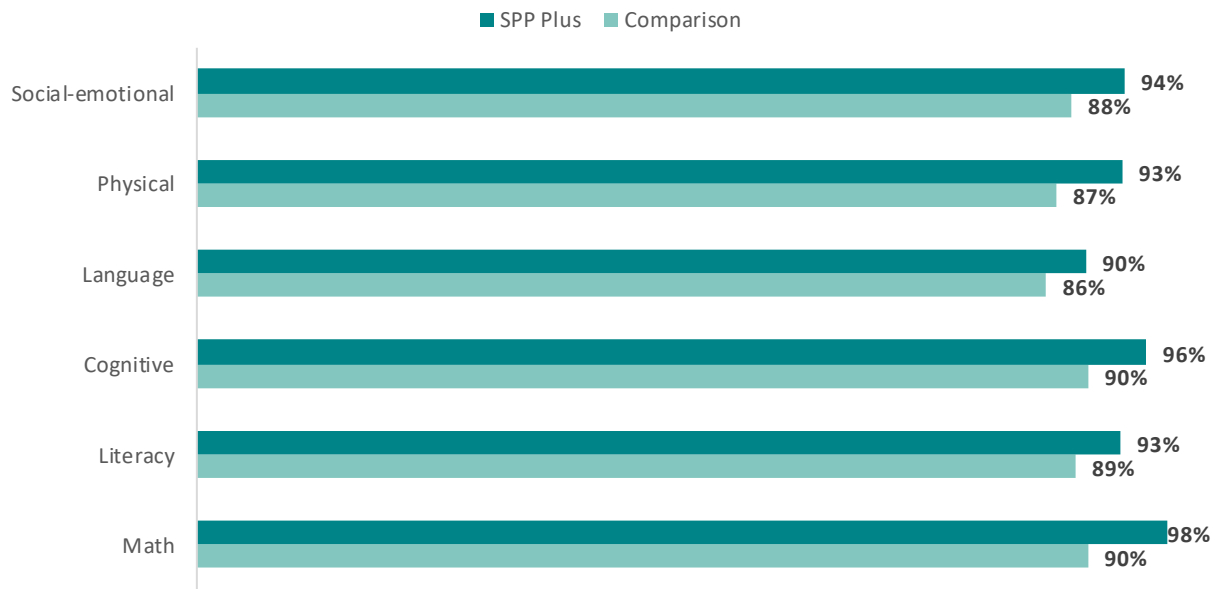
Note: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms.
Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

SPS children who attended SPP Plus classrooms also had better kindergarten readiness outcomes than children who attended SPP comparison classrooms or children who do not attend SPP classrooms

Among children with an IEP in kindergarten in 2023–24, those who had previously attended SPP Plus classrooms were kindergarten ready in 4.4 of 6 domains on the WaKIDS assessment compared to 3.3 among SPP comparison classrooms and 3.5 among those who did not attend SPP (figure 9). Among children without an IEP, those who attended SPP Plus classrooms also had a higher average number of domains: 5.6 contrasted with 5.3 (comparison) and 5.5 (non-SPP).

Figure 9. Seattle Public Schools kindergarten students with and without an IEP who attended SPP Plus demonstrated more kindergarten readiness on WaKIDS than children in comparison SPP classrooms and children who did not attend SPP
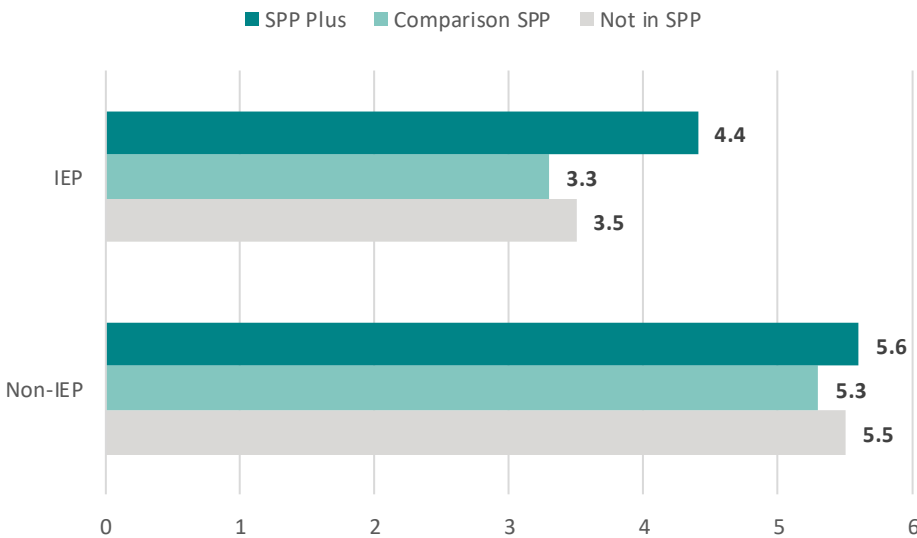
Note: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Inclusive classrooms provide opportunities for all children to learn about communities in the "real world"

Administrators, lead teachers, and families who participated in focus groups recognized the benefits of inclusion for students with IEPs in the general education instruction and settings. Consistent with research on inclusion, they believe that children who attend inclusive preschools develop skills that will prepare them for future successful interactions in "real-world" communities (Shogren et al., 2015). Inclusive classrooms also help children develop beliefs that promote acceptance of differences and challenge stereotypes that associate disabilities with limitations or deficits.

> *"I think preschool is a pretty incredible opportunity to support kids to have experience of really being in community. And that being in community means that we are celebrating everybody's strengths and what everybody brings and attending to everybody's challenges, and all the kind of ways that we're each growing."*
>
> **—Educator**

"Our students with IEPs are experiencing the destigmatization of having meeting accommodations and differentiation and tools and breaks, and all the things that we use to support their learning. We offer these tools to everybody and not everybody uses them. But we're just making it normal to need something different, to be able to learn successfully and to feel confident learning, and that they're getting what they need … So I'm hoping that sense of I'm getting what I need, and there's nothing strange or not normal about that. I hope that that stays with them for the rest of their schooling."

—Educator

Children with and without disabilities experience belonging and learn relationship-building skills

Inclusive preschools create learning environments where children with and without disabilities learn and grow together (Kart & Kart, 2021). Key informant interviews and educator focus groups highlighted that SPP Plus provides an experience of belonging and building relationships with people who are not the same as you are.

"It gives kids a broader sense of understanding of diversity in general, but especially diversity of ability. We have so many kids that go on in Seattle public schools and are recognized with the Seymour Caplan award in elementary school that focuses on giving back to your community … like being a good friend in kindergarten through fifth grade. That's the people who get it. And so many of the students that have participated in this program have received that award in their elementary school."

—Key informant

"And then I think socially, it's just so valuable to have a community of kids that have various needs and communication styles and physical differences because that's the world we live in. I think it beneficial for all the kids to have conversations about why doesn't that kid talk like I do and providing a lot of opportunity for kind of opening kids up to…difference."

—Educator

Educators and families said children without disabilities develop social and emotional skills and experience mostly neutral or positive effects on their academic learning

Administrators, educators, and families who participated in focus groups expressed strong support for inclusion and did not mention any concerns that inclusion of children with disabilities would negatively impact the educational outcomes of students without disabilities.

> *"She's learning all these new things. You know, intellectually, emotionally, socially ... Here at home, we do ABCs and our colors and shapes and whatnot. But I feel like now that she's going to school, her knowledge has definitely expanded a lot more. She recently, for example, learned how to spell her name ... She's more vocal now, her pronunciation is more clear, and her choice of words has definitely expanded."*
>
> **—Family member**

Professional Development, Coaching, and Supports

DEEL provides training on curriculum, assessments, and a variety of content areas with a focus on race and social justice. General content area topics include culturally responsive teaching practices, anti-bias, social-emotional learning, inclusion, universal design, and outdoor teaching. DEEL coaches also provide culturally responsive instructional coaching to help educators understand the DEEL training and to address the specific needs of instructional staff.

SPP Plus administrators and teachers are satisfied with the quality of DEEL trainings on general topics, but suggest changes in coaching and selection of specialized trainings

SPS and EEU administrators and teachers expressed satisfaction with the quality of DEEL trainings on curriculum, assessment and general content area topics. Several educators said the topics are so big and broad that DEEL trainings function as introductory courses and they identified the need for specialized trainings on behavior, trauma, and mental health. Educators also emphasized the importance of coaching to help teachers incorporate the training concepts into their own practice. The failure to apply training concepts in classroom practices reduces the likelihood that the practice will be implemented with the fidelity required to achieve desired outcomes.

"I think the DEEL trainings are extremely solid. I think that the multiple systems of coaching is too fragmented to support implementation of the trainings. Because coaches are coming from so many different places, like, you know, the SPP, early achiever coaches, inclusion coaches and whatnot. The fragmented system of coaching makes us inefficient at supporting a classroom [and] implementing the great training that occurs."

—Key informant

Educators found the DEEL trainings useful but said sometimes there were too many topics making it unclear which should be implemented in their settings. Others said some trainings, such as the race and equity training series, are valuable and delivering them yearly or every two years would help ensure classrooms continue to use these practices.

"I valued a lot of the training we had the past couple of years that it was about race and equity, and I have missed having any of that continuing training this year … Sometimes it feels like their trainings are stuff that they're just throwing at you, and it doesn't always feel like it's organized, or like part of a cohesive plan on what they want you to be using in your classroom."

—Educator

Coaching is essential to high quality services, but several barriers weaken coaches' effectiveness to improve instruction

The importance of coaching to advancing high-quality early childhood education is evident across early learning systems. Unfortunately, differences in contractual obligations, heavy caseloads, and differences in coaching priorities contribute to fragmentation that undermines implementation of a coordinated, more efficient coaching approach. Efforts to address this systemic issue include collaboration that allows coordination of effective coaching across organizations that will maximize support to teachers. Effective coaching also requires the time, resources, and expertise to model instruction and/or provide real-time consultation.

"The biggest concern across all teachers is always behavior followed by instruction and feeling comfortable, accessing curriculum… In my opinion, it takes at least three years to feel fully comfortable in its use. It does take a long time and bringing them back to it and calling out pieces that might be useful to them, so that they're more likely to access it and going in and modeling and showing how it can be used. Those have been really impactful."

—Key informant

For SPP Plus, administrators, educators, and coaches emphasized the importance of coaching to help teachers apply what they are learning to their own practices. The delivery of coaching that matches the needs of SPP Plus teachers who are certified and trained in general education, special education, or dual certified teachers is complex. It requires coaching that maintains a balance between general education and special education instruction and looks very different depending on what the teacher's needs are. Effective coaching requires discussing strategies from the lens of both general and special education and supporting professional development that considers the teacher's learning needs, classroom setting, and individual student needs. Coaches must also address teacher burnout through emotional support and promoting resilience.

> *"But for [dual certified teachers], they are balancing being a general education teacher, but are first and foremost, special education teachers. So I tend to push the general education side a lot, even though I can speak to them in a special education way. It requires considering each teacher's learning needs, their experience, and the varying special needs that are embedded in their classrooms. And sometimes they just need somebody to listen, because it's lonely in teaching."*
>
> **—Key informant**

Observations and Perceptions of Alignment with Evidence-based Practices

The evaluation team collected implementation data through six site visit observations; key informant interviews and focus groups with 22 administrators, educators, and families; and review of relevant policy and procedures documents. These implementation data described the alignment between the SPS and EEU classrooms and the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center indicators of high-quality inclusion (ECTA, 2023). The following paragraphs report key findings related to the physical environment, use of child-centered approaches, meaningful interactions among adults and children, social and emotional learning, and instruction.

The physical environment of SPP Plus learning environments included features associated with high-quality preschool settings

The intentional efforts to organize classroom learning environments that foster children's safety, comfort, active participation, and learning was evident across all SPS and EEU classrooms observed during site visits. During the site visit, the attention to safety and cleanliness was evident in well-organized staff schedules and supervision responsibilities and securing spaces through safely locking doors, windows, and fencing outdoor areas. Each classroom had furniture, sinks, toilets, and storage areas that were sized for promoting independence for young children with and without disabilities. Although children with wheelchairs and other mobility devices were not observed

during the visit, the classroom layouts could be adapted to provide safe access to all spaces and at least one outdoor play space.

The staff members' focus on child safety and cleanliness was demonstrated in the organization of food storage, selection of furniture and materials, and storing of hazardous materials out of children's reach. The safety of children was also evident in well-organized routines for child drop-off and pickup routines, transitioning to and from indoor and outdoor play areas, and ensuring that access to these areas and restrooms was limited to SPP Plus children.

The physical layout of each classroom included defined areas for whole class or large group learning, lunch and snack activities, small group learning, and designated learning areas for art, reading, and dramatic play, and sensory and quiet areas with appropriate materials. Equally important, each classroom showcased children's work and information about their interests and identity to foster belonging. The classrooms also provided visual displays (posters, pictures, books, and other artifacts) that were visually engaging and culturally inclusive of children from diverse linguistic, racial, cultural, and ability backgrounds.

SPS and the EEU use the Building Blocks framework to organize a continuum of instruction and support for children with IEPs

The use of the Building Blocks Framework in SPS and the EEU classrooms was evident in program documents, focus groups, and site visit observations (Sandall et al., 2024; Seattle Public Schools, 2024). The Building Blocks Framework can be used in preschool and child care centers to support inclusion of children with IEPs. The framework begins with a foundation of high-quality general education instruction and each of the four building blocks adds support and interventions to support inclusion of children with IEPs:

1. Universal strategies that provide a welcoming, inclusive learning environment and high-quality general education instruction for all students

2. Accommodations and modifications for children with IEPs to be able to participate more independently

3. Embedded learning opportunities that provide instruction and support to children on their IEP goals within naturally occurring general education learning activities

4. Child-focused instructional strategies that may be offered one-on-one because of the level of support needed

All classrooms used child-centered approaches that encourage each child's engagement, independence, and inclusion in learning activities

Each classroom posted and followed daily schedules that included structured, choice-based, and structured routines to foster independence, decision-making, and inclusion of each child in general education learning activities. All classrooms posted classroom expectations and guidance for staff members on strategies to foster asset-based interactions, recognize children's accomplishments, and/or encourage children to practice self-help skills throughout the day. Encouragement of children's autonomy was evident in the use of play-based learning to encourage children's engagement, reflection, and ownership of their own learning throughout the day, assigning children with "jobs" such as line leader or helper and helping children learn and practice social and emotional learning throughout the day.

> *"We have seen a massive behavioral change in my son ... I think it's because of their ability to redirect to a purposeful, intentional activity while keeping in mind his preferred activities. And so there haven't been any problems, I think, because of the classroom setup. But if there is anything all they have to do is, you know, get low, and they talk to him about it, and he's able to be redirected into a safer place and dive into learning again."*
>
> **—Family member**

The use of individualized staff supervision, support, and accommodations to ensure each child with disabilities is included in general education activities was evident in all classrooms and during most activities. Consistent with the four building blocks of inclusion, there were exceptions due to delivery of individualized specially designed instruction or providing behavioral support to help a child regulate their emotions.

> *"It's been incredible so far, like you know, his behavior changed almost immediately. Like to get him into a place where he had an [occupational therapist] that he worked with and you know a speech therapist. The class is very structured, and the teachers are really experienced."*
>
> **—Family member**

> *"She's very shy and timid, and so, meeting with her teachers before the school started. We voiced that, and they've supported her and kinda talked in her level, in a sense. And I feel like she's more comfortable going to her teachers now and then. I know that they also have special education teachers and other resources that they provide."*
>
> **—Family member**

Classroom staff prioritize social and emotional learning, building positive relationships, and using emotionally supportive interventions

Administrators, educators, and families agree that SPP Plus classrooms provide children with and without disabilities with appreciation for the value each child brings to their classroom. They also believe learning how to build friendships with peers from different abilities, race, language, and cultural backgrounds will prepare them for a diverse world. To this end, all SPP Plus classrooms provided adult- and child-led opportunities to interact with peers throughout all observed activities.

> *"She's enjoying the structure, and her teacher has been awesome. I mean, she's just enjoying the dynamic of the classroom. She came from a home daycare which was very small and so she was ready for a more social environment. Her engagement and social skills, and just in the few weeks have flourished as well."*
>
> **—Family member**

Educators and families agree that communication and family engagement are important, but there is disagreement on how well these practices are implemented

Families and teachers agreed that their ongoing partnership and communication contributes to better instruction and outcomes for their child. Families appreciated the ongoing updates, the willingness of the teachers to answer questions, and the support for accessing resources. They also appreciated the updates during drop off and pickup and the pictures, information, and classroom information shared on Talking Points, an online platform that enables teachers to connect with families in multiple languages.

However, there were differences regarding the extent to which families feel welcome in the classroom. Some teachers believed that families needed additional support and time to feel comfortable visiting the classroom. In contrast, some families sensed they were not welcome to visit or increase their involvement in their child's classroom.

> *"[Families] have a hesitancy to come in but I think once you kind of welcome them in, I think a lot of families are very eager to come in and see. You know what preschool looks like, and kind of just if it changed and they noticed it didn't. It's still just a bunch of 3-, 4-, 5-year-olds exploring the environment, right?"*
>
> **—Educator**

"So [visiting the classroom] has not been offered to me in any way, shape or form. I can't even say that I would feel welcome. If I asked, I'm sure they might say yes, but I'm not sure how yes means "come, be here" or, you know, it does not. I don't have that vibe as far as the community aspect."

—Family member

Several family members said they wanted to meet and talk with other families but did not have contact information for the families in their child's preschool. They also said that school events for families are limited.

"This program is severely lacking in my connection with other parents, other students, and I think that's the nature of public school. Not every parent is gonna be able to be in the classroom multiple times a week, and I understand that. I would like to have a contact sheet, you know preschoolers can't really exchange phone numbers to meet up with friends outside of school, and if I'm not seeing them at pickup or drop off, I have no way to connect with these other parents or my kid's friends."

—Family member

SPP Plus educators expressed the need to address system-level processes that influence access and improvement of SPP Plus services

Administrators and teachers said access is limited for some families because of enrollment, contract requirements on number of special education seats, and child care to accommodate their child's needs. One suggestion was to leave one special education seat open in the fall so that general education children who are found eligible for special education during the school year can remain in their SPP Plus classroom.

Enrollment in SPP Plus is challenging due to differing processes for children with and without disabilities as well as admission to SPS and EEU classrooms

Families of children with IEPs often have support from the child's case manager or a program staff member to help with enrollment processes. SPP Plus administrators expressed concerns about enrollment of children without IEPs, and some family members of children without an IEP said the enrollment process was confusing.

"I know that they try to do their best on their actual website. But again, I wasn't sure which application mine even went to. Whether it was the city of Seattle or SPP. And even today, I still don't know the difference between the two. So I think it would be helpful knowing which is which and then also the timeline of specific dates or weeks that we would be hearing."

—Family member

Contract requirements and the system of continuous support for children with IEPs also influence access to special education services

By contract, SPP Plus classrooms can serve five to seven children with IEPs. Maintaining the designated special education seats creates challenges if an enrolled child is found eligible for an IEP during the year. In these instances, IEP team recommendations to maintain the child in the SPP Plus classroom often conflicts with the lack of available seats.

Finding and arranging transportation to high-quality child care services before and after preschool is needed

SPP Plus provides full-day services for children and families. Though helpful, many families of children with IEPs need child care services before and after these preschool hours due to work or other obligations. Identifying child care services that are willing to accept and accommodate their child's needs and arranging transportation can be challenging for families.

Building a system of collaboration, communication, and data-informed decisions is a core feature of both SPP Plus models

Collaboration on general and education instruction, communication both classroom wide and about individual students, and use of data to inform decisions are essential features of high-quality inclusion programs. The approach and continued improvement needs vary depending on the SPP Plus model and resources.

Implementing data-based decision-making that uses assessments to inform instruction and program planning is an ongoing need

Administrators and teachers appreciate the focus on assessment information that is embedded in SPP programs. For many, the regular assessment requirements work well but the second TSG checkpoint occurs too close to the winter and midwinter breaks to allow adequate time to achieve meaningful change. March would be a better month for conducting the second TSG assessment.

Teachers are skilled in developing lessons and learning activities to meet children's needs. However, the capacity of educators and multidisciplinary teams to use data to improve instruction in the general education curriculum and to meet the needs of individual students would benefit from

continued support. Additional resources and knowledge about formative assessments to monitor progress was also identified as a critical need.

> *"I think in past years, I didn't have a good understanding of how to really utilize [assessment data] beyond just getting some information. Now, understanding the tool better myself, there's just some of that like understanding what you're even looking at when you are first starting out … And then we did have these like kind of built-in checkpoints throughout the year, which has been really helpful to make sure we're kind of circling back. And oftentimes, you see a lot of growth there. It's like, Oh, wow! I'm not concerned about that at all but now I'm concerned about this new thing."*
>
> **—Educator**

SPS and the EEU said collaboration, communication, and feedback systems are essential to inclusion

Both SPP Plus models have established times and resources to support collaboration among the general education and special education teachers and staff. In the SPS co-teaching model, each classroom determines how the general education and special education teachers will organize planning meetings, co-teaching roles, and scheduling. SPS provides each teacher with additional contract hours for collaboration and co-planning time.

In the EEU, teams spend five to 10 minutes every morning and every afternoon doing a pre-brief and a debrief for every person who is there. A Google Form is used to share notes with every member of the team, regardless of whether they were there that day or not. Everyone receives an update for each day about "what was the plan going into the day" and "how did it go?" These notes provide information on how things are going across all classrooms and help identify topics that should be discussed at the larger staff meeting. Each classroom also has weekly team meetings to discuss changes in building block tiers of accommodations, instruction, and interventions. Finally, the lead teacher meets with the EEU coach and family support team to discuss specific student interventions and, if appropriate, possible referral for special education.

Implications and Next Steps

The evaluation findings identify several ways that SPP Plus classrooms benefit children with and without disabilities as well as areas for growth. Below are implications and next steps based on these findings:

- **Improve coordination of systemwide processes within the SPP system and with external partners.** Although children with IEPs and multilingual instructional needs are enrolled in many SPP classrooms, the services provided by specialized classrooms (SPP Plus and DLI) and

FCC programs are siloed. Although the SPP's positive child outcomes is cause for celebration, there is a need to improve the broader system of enrollment, coordination of services, and coaching support.

- **Continue efforts to expand and improve the effectiveness of inclusive education for children with disabilities.** The need for special education services for children with disabilities exceeds the available SPP Plus and preschool resources. The lack of adequate resources are barriers to meeting federal legal requirements of providing children with IEPs with free and appropriate education (IDEA, 2004).

- **Address contractual constraints that prevent flexibility to meet the needs of all SPP Plus children.** The current contract that requires a designated number of general education and special education seats creates administrative and programmatic challenges for SPP Plus classrooms. For instance, if the designated special education seats are filled, general education children who are determined to be eligible for special education may need to enroll in a different school. Alternately, several classrooms keep a special education seat open in the beginning of the school year to ensure a general education student who is found eligible for special education can remain in the program.

- **Build educator and multidisciplinary team capacity to use data-based instruction and program improvement decisions.** Support training and coaching to increase self-efficacy in data-based improvement decisions and selection of formative child and program assessments.

- **Strengthen the coordination of training and coaching services to support implementation of evidence-based instruction and support.** Administrators and educators said there is an abundance of training and professional development opportunities but that these efforts are not aligned or well-coordinated. It would be helpful to coordinate and align a structure of training, coaching, and professional development opportunities to increase their impact on program quality.

Family Child Care Classrooms

Family child care (FCC) centers implement preschool through a hub-network structure where DEEL contracts with two hub agencies to coordinate SPP implementation through 22 subcontracts with FCC providers. This model offers SPP families a preschool option within the home environment that includes mixed-age settings, low child-teacher ratios, and a focus on cultural and linguistic alignment.

Potential Benefits of FCC Programs

Across the United States, more than 750,000 children attend FCC programs regulated or certified by the state (Weisenfeld & Harmeyer, 2024). FCC programs are appealing to many families because they offer a mixed-age small group child care option that is in a home environment where children have the opportunity to develop close relationships with their caregivers. They also offer flexibility in scheduling and, for many families, shared language and culture with the FCC provider (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2019; Porter et al., 2010). Research demonstrates that families desiring infant and toddler care, lower-income families, and those who identify as Latine or Black are more likely to use FCC than center-based care (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2019; Weisenfeld & Harmeyer, 2024).

FCC Program Model

SPP FCC centers are operated by two hubs, one administered by BrightSpark (formerly known as Child Care Resources) and the other by a partnership between Voices of Tomorrow and Tiny Tots Development Center. Founded in 1990, BrightSpark's mission is "to nurture and sustain child-centered, anti-racist early communities so that every child can have a great start in school and in life." FCC programs operated by BrightSpark serve both King County and Pierce County. Voices of Tomorrow is a community-based organization founded in 2012 that serves King County's East African refugee community. Tiny Tots Development Center was founded in 1969 and provides child care services, preschool, and early learning education in Rainier Valley and the greater Seattle areas. The hubs coordinate SPP implementation through subcontracts with 22 FCC providers (11 FCC providers from each hub). They are responsible for recruiting providers, serving as the fiscal agent, monitoring implementation fidelity, and providing technical assistance to FCC providers as needed.

"Seattle preschool program FCCs are more unique in a way that is very home based for the ethnic groups that we're working with so that they don't feel left out. Now we are moving those providers from being in the shadows to the forefront, and they are excelling at what they're doing, because the spotlight is now shining on them, and our role is to support them with what we know best."

—Key informant

FCC programs provide culturally and linguistically grounded programming for families in smaller homelike settings, which is important because often families who choose these types of care settings are left out of publicly funded preschool (Harmeyer et al., 2023). Key informants described how FCC programs "meet families where they are" and "fill a gap" by offering a smaller, more intimate homelike environment that highlights their families' cultures and language.

"What sets [FCC] apart is a smaller environment, smaller classroom that is key and also making available an alternative for families, especially immigrant families where they really want their children to hold on to their culture."

—Key informant

"It's your business, but it's also your home, and it's your family, but these are also your family. It's all those mixtures."

—Key informant

Research suggests that more than 50 percent of low-income children under the age of 6 have at least one primary caretaker who works non-standard hours, such as nights or weekends (Henly & Adams, 2018). Unlike other SPP models, FCC programs offer child care services before and after SPP program hours to help accommodate family schedules and child care needs. In addition to SPP children, the child care services are available to their younger or older siblings. Because FCC programs offer SPP programming and child care services in the same home environment, families do not need to transport children from the preschool program to child care services. The FCC's flexible child care options increases SPP's capacity to provide access and equitable preschool opportunities to programs that are responsive to their cultural, linguistic, and support needs.

"They do unique hours, there are some times when families are saying, I'm so thankful for this provider, because I'm bringing my baby in early in the morning, when it's dark, and they allow me to lay her down … and she sleeps for a little while till she wakes back up … there's unique situations that these home providers have that are serving a community of children that would otherwise be missed … equity is what's important and when we're able to use these dollars to make sure that equitably we're serving more children in a diverse situation. Parents should have a variety of ways that they can choose how they want their child served, it shouldn't be cookie cutter. I like the fact that we have an opportunity for you in a preschool setting to choose the value that works best for you and your family."

—Key informant

Enrollment and Child Characteristics

SPP families can enroll through the online portal on DEEL's website, directly through their hub, via paper application, or over the phone. FCC enrollment is a shared responsibility—providers learn about interested families from the city of Seattle, the hubs, as well as recruiting families themselves.

"Most of my children were with me from the time that they were infants and so they've grown up with me. And so, when they get to be 3 years old, I show them the application and so they enroll them. Most of my children are from that."

—Provider

Families shared in focus groups and interviews that the enrollment process is generally smooth and easy and that their provider was helpful in the process. They also described learning about the program through word of mouth, seeing the SPP's sign in front of the FCC program, or personal relationships.

"It was a fairly easy process. If I had any questions I would just, you know, ask, and she would provide more clarity, and it just made it that much easier."

—Family member

FCCs enroll children from diverse racial backgrounds who speak various languages

FCC programs enroll children that speak a variety of languages and come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Across all SPP programs, there were at least 45 different languages spoken in children's households, and 12 of these languages were spoken by children in FCC programs as their primary language. In 2023–24, the majority of children enrolled in FCC programs spoke English as their primary language (61%), followed by Oromo (12%), Somali (12%), and Spanish (less than 10%). The proportion of multilingual[8] children enrolled in FCC classrooms in 2023–24 was 55 percent, whereas the proportion of multilingual children in all SPP programs was 40 percent. In 2023–24, a larger percentage of children (81%) of children in FCC programs were living in households with incomes at or lower than 185 percent of the federal poverty level compared to other SPP classrooms.

As shown in figure 10, racial/ethnic composition in the FCC classroom differs from the rest of the SPP classrooms with nearly triple the rate of Black children enrolled (74%) compared to other SPP classroom types (rates between 23 and 26 percent). Black children comprised the largest racial/ethnic group (74%), followed by Latine (11%). Other races had fewer than 10 children enrolled in FCCs in 2023–24: white, two or more races, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and Middle Eastern/North African.

Figure 10. FCC programs serve higher percentages of Black children than comparison SPP classrooms, 2023–24
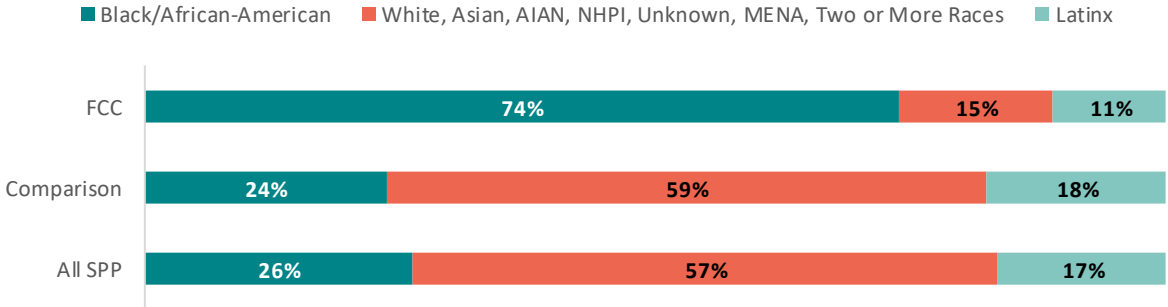
Note: Percentages for white, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI), two or more races, Middle Eastern/ North African (MENA), and unknown race/ethnicity are not shown separately due to small numbers of children. The sample sizes of children shown in this graph is 99 for FCCs in 2024. Axis shows the percentage of SPP children in each racial/ethnic group and is scaled from 0 to 100 percent. The number of children shown in this graph for all SPP is 2,151. Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms.
Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

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[8] "Multilanguage learners" in this report refers to SPP children living in a household where a language other than English is spoken.

Staffing

FCC programs have the highest proportion of teachers of color out of all types of SPP classrooms (DLI, SPP Plus, and comparison classrooms). During the 2023–24 school year, there were 41 teachers supporting 22 FCC classrooms, with fewer than two teaching staff at each FCC on average. Unlike DLI and SPP Plus classrooms, the majority of FCC providers were Black (78%), and on average, seven in every 10 enrolled children at each FCC were of the same race or ethnicity as their providers (68%). This number was significantly higher than the average for comparison classrooms at 39 percent. Slightly over half of FCC providers' primary language was English, 39 percent spoke one of three East African languages (Somali, Oromo, and Tigrinya) and a small percentage spoke Spanish and Hindi. Over half (55%) of children shared the same primary language as at least one of their FCC providers.

Classroom Quality

To understand the extent to which FCC classrooms are implemented to fidelity and with quality, we created and analyzed implementation fidelity indicators and examined CLASS assessment scores.

Implementation rubric scores show most FCCs have low teacher to child ratios and highlight a lack of data on FCC educators

The FCC implementation fidelity rubric describes two implementation indicators of SPP Plus classrooms and thresholds for emerging, adequate, and excellent fidelity levels (see table C3 in appendix C). Five percent of FCC programs have a child to teacher ratio of 9-to-1, 8-to-1, or 7-to-1 (adequate implementation), while 95 percent have a ratio of less than 6-to-1 (excellent implementation). No FCC programs had a ratio above 9-to-1 (emerging implementation) in 2023–24. The second rubric item, educator qualifications, was not able to be completed due to missing data on FCC teachers' educational qualifications and whether they have a plan to meet qualifications.

CLASS assessment scores showed more variability among FCCs than other types of classrooms

Among the 19 FCC classrooms that were rated on CLASS in 2023–24, the average scores for classroom organization, emotional support, and instructional support were 5.9, 6.3, and 3.2 respectively (figure 11). These scores were slightly lower than the average scores across all SPP classrooms (classroom organization is 6.2, emotional support is 6.5, and instructional support is 3.3).

Contrasted with DLI, SPP Plus, or comparison classrooms, FCC sites have the largest score variabilities in all three domains (see table B2 in appendix B). Within the three domains, FCC sites' classroom organization scores showed the largest variability ($SD = 1.08$), followed by instructional support ($SD = 0.86$) and emotional support ($SD = 0.65$).

Figure 11. CLASS scores for FCC programs were slightly lower than scores for comparison classrooms, 2023–24
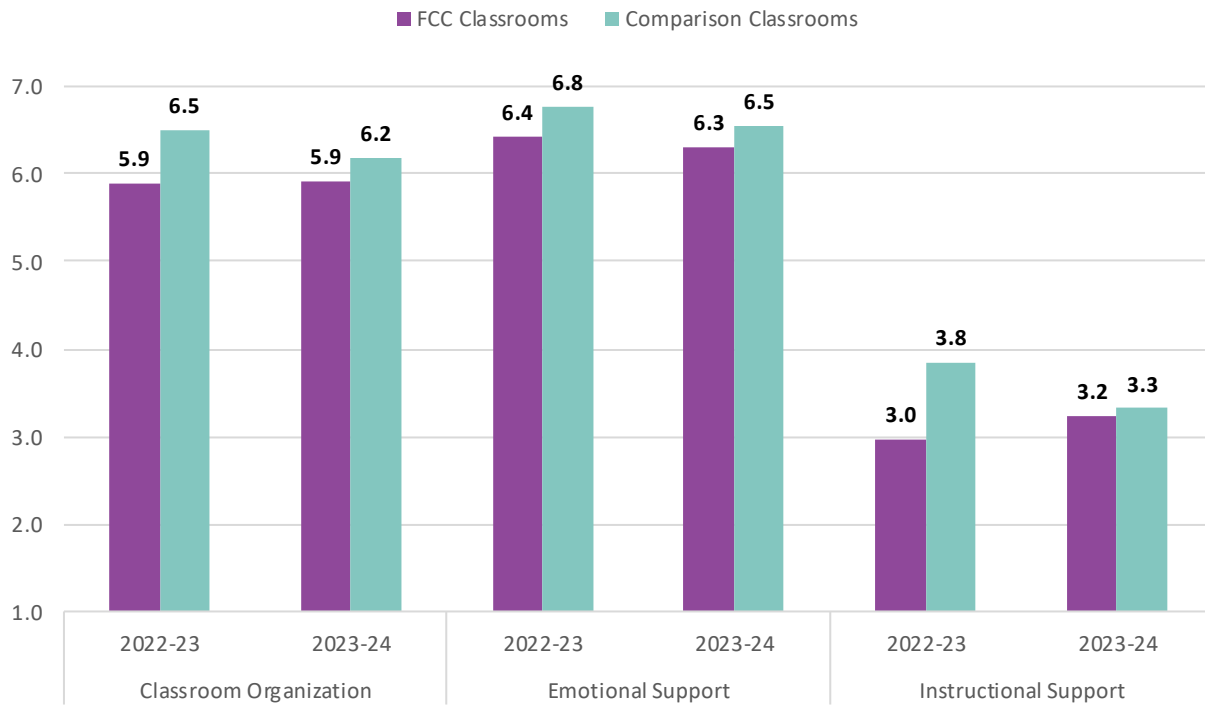
Note: The number of classrooms was 22 for FCC and 65 for comparison classrooms. Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms. Possible CLASS scores range from 1 to 7.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Outcomes and Perceived Benefits of FCC Programs

Families shared that their child's preschool successfully helped to prepare their child for kindergarten, and they valued this. They mentioned that their children learned various skills, such as ABCs, writing their name, numbers, and shapes.

"I've noticed that all of the kids that attend her preschool they come out really, really advanced and she takes the time with them you know, to teach them everything they need to in order to transition into kindergarten."

—**Family member**

"She worked with me a lot when it came down to things that [my child] needed to learn prior to kindergarten, and we came up with strategies to get her to that level so when she enrolled into kindergarten it was an easy transition and that helped out a lot."

—**Family member**

A lower percentage of children in FCC programs met TSG growth targets in all domains compared to children in comparison classrooms

In 2022–23, children who attended FCC programs had lower average TSG scale scores in the fall (upon preschool entry) compared to those in comparison classrooms[9] in the mathematics, literacy, cognitive, language, and physical domain, but higher average TSG scale scores in the social and emotional domain. In 2023–24, however, children in FCC programs had higher average TSG scale scores in all six domains than comparison classrooms.[10]

Examining TSG scores in the spring of the child's preschool year, in 2023–24, children in FCC programs had slightly higher averages on widely held expectations in all six domains than children in comparison classrooms. However, a lower percentage of children in FCC programs met growth targets in all domains than children in comparison classrooms (figure 12).[11]

Figure 12. A lower percentage of children in FCC programs met TSG growth targets in all domains compared to children in comparison classrooms, 2023–24
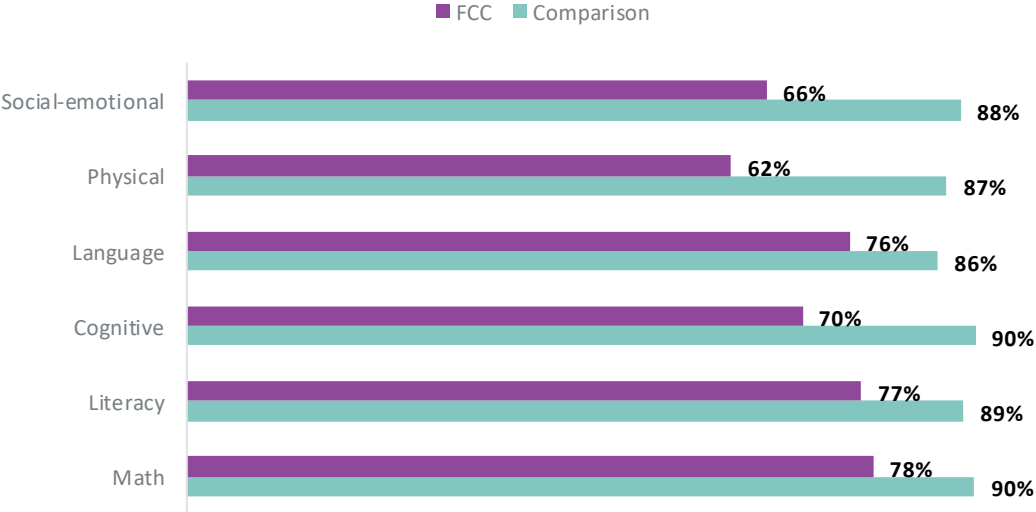
Notes: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

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[9] Comparison classrooms are non-DLI, non-SPP Plus, and non-FCC classrooms.

[10] In 2023-23, 57 children had TSG scores out of 90 total in FCCs; in 2023-24, this was 77 children of 99. These are lower participation rates (63 and 78%) than among DLI and SPP Plus classrooms (88 and 86%).

[11] Differences in percentages of children meeting growth targets between FCC and comparison classrooms were statistically significant in all domains; these results held when controlling for child race/ethnicity, gender, language, and income.

Exploring this relationship more, we find that the CLASS domain of instructional support is significantly and positively related to meeting the growth target in five of the six domains (the exception being cognition) when controlling for FCC status. Within instructional support, the language modeling dimension tended to have the strongest relationships with meeting the growth targets in some domains; in other domains, results were more mixed. Supporting FCC programs in developing their instructional support—particularly their language modeling skills—may be helpful in supporting children in meeting their growth targets.

The preschool curriculum used by FCC providers may influence child outcomes. Although more FCC programs use Creative Curriculum than HighScope, in the analysis from 2023-24 data, using HighScope was related to a higher likelihood of meeting TSG growth targets in all domains except literacy. However, caution should be used when interpreting these findings. Curriculum choice may be related to other factors for which data are not available, such as organizational structure, providers' teaching experience, or the operating budget. Other available teacher and classroom factors, such as teacher-child primary language match, did not exhibit a strong relationship with meeting TSG growth targets.

Professional Development, Coaching, and Supports

FCC providers receive DEEL coaching support and participate in professional development along with other SPP providers.

> *"The coach is the constant in the classroom and plays a critical role in helping teachers deconstruct certain challenges. Coaches are the one stop shop which helps to get a comprehensive understanding of the classroom and related challenges."*
>
> **—Coach**

They also receive additional coaching support outside of the SPP program. For example, FCC providers enrolled in Washington's Early Achievers quality recognition and improvement system receive support from Early Achievers coaches. These coaches provide support and technical assistance in 19 different languages in person and virtually.

Professional development and training would be more helpful if it was more specific to the FCC context

Key informants advocated for trainings that are more focused on the specific FCC context. One also shared that "language is a challenge because the curriculum is very Eurocentric." Additionally, it would be beneficial for FCC educators if trainings were offered outside the traditional workday and if the pace were slower.

"Trainings are built for the audience of English speakers and content is focused more written versus visual. The way training is conducted is not supportive and conducive. They are more center based so [FCC providers] don't feel a sense of belonging ... This is their home and where they are living. They are talking about environments, mainly centers. I do see that they sometimes don't feel this is a training that reflects them and there is not a lot of motivation to participate."

—Key informant

"Sometimes I think the training pace is a little fast paced, and we're not giving them enough space to be able to interpret what they've heard and ask questions about what it is."

—Key informant

Coaching was important to FCC providers and many said more coaching services would be helpful

FCC providers shared that they appreciate their coach and rely on the guidance and the resources the coaches provide.

"[My coach] is hands on, and she's understanding, and she has access to good resources. So very helpful."

—Provider

"I wasn't working as a teacher before and when I started day care I was working more with the babies and toddlers when I started with the SPP. It was so hard for me now, especially because I never worked like in a center or school. I didn't have any idea about the activities, so it was hard. But, thank God, day by day, you know, with [my DEEL coach], with my Early Achiever coach with, you know, videos, being more curious about the program. In the beginning, I was thinking to just stop and to not continue with the program. But actually, I'm learning a lot. So, day by day. So yeah, I feel better now."

—Provider

Providers noted that one challenge is when coaching is not consistent due to turnover or differences among coaches in how often they visit classrooms, and general "alignment" among coaches. Some educators specifically said they desire more frequent coaching visits and support.

Coaches noted that large caseloads may be one factor that impacts their coaching time and "if you want quality coaching, we need more coaches."

> *"Sometimes it happens that in the end of the year there's a switch, and that's what we try to avoid as much as we can. We've been very vocal of the frustration that it brings to us, to the relationship broken between the provider and the coach so we tried to … push for at least consistency on the coaching, knowing that sometimes consistency is something we can't control, but we tried as much as we can to advocate to minimize the changes on coaching."*
>
> **—Key informant**

Some providers also specifically mentioned that it would be beneficial to receive additional coaching around supporting neurodivergent children.

> *"We're wearing multiple different hats aside from being preschool teachers, but we have students who are neurodivergent, and we don't get that additional assistance. They do need those one on ones, you know, especially given their situation. And sometimes we are spread too thin."*
>
> **—Provider**

Observations and Perceptions of Alignment with Evidence-based Practices

We collected implementation data through two FCC site visits, key informant interviews, and focus groups with coaches, educators, and families, and a review of relevant policy and procedure documents. The selected FCC sites included one program supported by Child Care Resources and a second supported by a partnership between Voices of Tomorrow and Tiny Tots Development Center. The FCC programs selected for site visits ensured inclusion of one site operated by each hub and that the providers served children from diverse language and cultural backgrounds and used different approaches for delivering preschool services. Both FCC sites were owned by child care providers with extensive years of experience and training in child care and SPP services. The goal of the site visits was to gain a better understanding of the child care program setting, the FCC's program structure, and the approach to preschool instruction. To analyze the data, the evaluation team developed an implementation rubric outlining the key features related to high quality early learning services. The following paragraphs report key findings from the site visit observations, interviews, and focus groups.

FCC physical environments focused on safety and provided areas for play and structured learning activities

Both FCC programs had physical environments that reflected high-quality implementation. The child care spaces for both FCC sites were separate from the family's living areas. Each FCC had at least two separate areas for child learning and play activities, easy access to kitchen and food preparation, and private bathrooms that accommodated young children. All areas were orderly, clean, and child-proofed, and routine sanitation was followed during observed learning activities, snacks or mealtimes, and bathroom routines.

FCC programs honor the families' language and cultural backgrounds and use different ways to communicate with families

For the most part, FCC programs serve families living in the neighborhood and/or who share their linguistic or cultural traditions. One provider serves neighborhood children with different home language and cultural backgrounds than her own. She communicates with the children's families through interpreters arranged by DEEL and older siblings who are multilingual. The location of the FCC was not only convenient for families but also contributed to feelings of trust. The other provider was multilingual and fluent in the home languages of the children enrolled in her program. She was well-versed in the families' cultural traditions as well as the children's preferences in food, activities, and interests.

> *"We specifically also selected staff that match the community members that we're serving. So, they speak the same language. I am also trilingual and so we do have a sense of understanding the power of language. And so, we are very passionate to make sure that no one is left behind because of language access."*
>
> **—Key informant**

Throughout the observed structured and unstructured activities, both FCC providers incorporated accommodations to address the communication and language needs of their children. One program used assistive communication devices and structured learning activities to support a child with significant learning needs. The teacher in the other program was multilingual and used multiple strategies to help children make cross-linguistic connections when communicating or learning new vocabulary words. During interviews, educators and families described how their FCC program values diversity and recognizing culture.

> *"I really love it you know, how diverse everybody is … I just love it, the diversity. Always my dream is diversity."*
>
> **—Provider**

"Yeah, the culture [is celebrated] because we came from different cultures ... the birthday we celebrate, the culture, the dress, the everything you can see the pictures and yeah, we do."

—Family member

Families appreciate FCC programs' safe, comfortable, and consistent environment

The observations revealed that the FCC programs provided SPP services from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. During this time, children receive breakfast, snack, and lunch. In addition, both programs offer extended child care hours for children ages birth to 12 years 11 months, including before and after SPP preschool hours. Each FCC program outlined and followed a daily schedule that includes times for independent play, preschool activities, meals, rest periods, and bathroom routines. During each observation, the children followed structured routines that included transition to a new activity and/or area, participating in preparation and cleaning up activities such as handwashing or putting materials away, following instructions, and following bathroom routines.

Families said a key aspect of their child's preschool was the close, trusting relationship they had with their child's provider. They appreciated that their children felt confident asking questions and that the environment was safe, consistent, and comfortable.

"I know that she's comfortable. I know that she's safe. I don't have to worry about her well-being while being in [the provider's] care. It's just a peace of mind."

—Family member

"She's very warm and welcoming. She's always friendly and it's like, it's actually really good. She's really good. With that she's consistent, it's never been a bad day where she's been like, you know, down or frustrated, or anything."

—Family member

FCC programs provide warm and safe environments and families said they appreciate that their child's provider took time to listen to their child and answer questions

During the site visit observation, the warmth and welcoming environment was evident. Both FCC teachers were highly responsive to children's needs and helped them learn and practice self-regulation and social skills. Behavioral expectations were consistent for all children and communication and social and emotional support were individualized to children as needed. During the SPP lessons, both lead teachers encouraged the children to follow directions, take turns, and interact with each other in positive ways. For both programs, the ratio of positive interactions to each redirection was 80 percent or higher during transitions and most routines. During focus groups families echoed this sentiment by emphasizing that they appreciated that that their children could ask their provider questions and that the environment was safe to do so.

> *"Just taking the time with her to let her know that it's ok to ask questions. And it's ok if she doesn't understand something and it's okay to be wrong, you know, and if you need help, there's nothing wrong with asking for help making it a safe environment."*
>
> **—Family member**

FCC providers are motivated to prepare students for the next step in their educational journey

FCC teachers shared that one of their primary goals is to prepare students for the next step in their education whether that is kindergarten or another level. They emphasized the critical importance of these early years and their role in providing children with "the right beginning."

> *"One of the things I do in my program is I prepare them for the next step. The next step can be going to kindergarten or basically just getting them ready to move on to whatever level they are at, even if they're 4 or 5 and they're going to be with me another year. I am preparing them for whatever you know it is. So, I like to challenge them, get their mind going, keep the communication going. And I make it fun. It's teaching. It's all about having fun, not just sitting and doing this and that."*
>
> **—Provider**

> *"We know the first five years is when they learn the key social, emotional, and academic skills … Seattle early learning preschool program is really pivotal, you know, essential for kids to have to be successful in school, in college and beyond and I think that we cover the fundamental developments and that's what we instill in early learning or Seattle preschool programs, you know to get them ready for kindergarten and so forth."*
>
> **—Provider**

Families shared that FCCs help prepare their child for kindergarten

Families described that their child's school helped prepare them for kindergarten and that they learned a lot while there.

> *"He goes to family child care, but for the most part it's a good school for him to learn. It's still like his original daycare, but it's more kids there, his age and he's ready to go to a real school. . . He's learned so much from there so far it may not be as rigorous, because I think there'll be too much for a child his age. Just pushing the ABCs to the point where he knows them."*
>
> **—Family member**

The curriculum, instructional approach, and providers' teaching experience differ among the FCC programs

The FCC programs use different curriculums, approach preschool instruction differently, and serve children with different home languages, cultural backgrounds, and learning needs. During the site visits, one program used Creative Curriculum to guide planning and track children's skill progression. The other FCC used the HighScope curriculum to plan and guide their instructional approach. Consistent with SPP expectations, both programs kept records of each child's growth by conducting regular TSG assessments to inform personalized activities. This was particularly true for one program that sent families videos of the skills their child was learning and practicing during their SPP time.

During the site visit, both FCC lead teachers were intentional in their efforts to differentiate the SPP preschool activities from other play and learning activities. Both conducted the SPP lesson similar to how students might complete an assignment in a "classroom" setting versus the child care play area, but the delivery of these SPP services differed between the two settings. One program organized a separate room for preschool learning activities that allows the SPP enrolled children to receive instruction from the FCC lead teacher in a small room with tables and chairs. The site visit was early in the school year, so newly created folders were used for the preschool learning activity.

The preschool classroom had a table for children, colorful charts on the wall, and neatly organized materials. The FCC teacher encouraged each child's participation by using modeling, imitation, and verbal cues to differentiate instruction. During preschool time, another staff member cared for the younger children in another room.

The second FCC allowed all children to participate in structured SPP preschool and other activities. The preschool had a table for children, a rug area for children to join group instruction, color displays that reflected the children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and neatly organized materials. During the site visit, the FCC lead teacher conducted a numbers lesson for three children while seated on a rug while the other staff member helped two children enrolled in SPP complete a worksheet sitting at a table. The numbers learning activity included music, visuals, and movement to engage children. The lead teacher also incorporated opportunities for children to link vocabulary in English and their home languages.

> *"[My child's teacher] helps my child with staying motivated to learn and continues to create a comfortable inclusive environment."*
>
> **—Family member**

FCC providers appreciated that SPP funds enable them to purchase materials to supplement and enhance the curriculum. However, site visit observations suggest providers would benefit from coaching on instructional practices and selecting culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate curriculum materials that match their children's learning needs. During the observation of a SPP literacy activity, the children completed a worksheet on letter sounds that was more advanced than the children's current skill level and required substantial provider support to complete.

> *"The program also helped me purchase material that the children use during choice time. I purchased a science kit with the money from the program and so there's a telescope. So, they put leaves under there, and anything you know, any crawly creatures. They look through the telescope so that's besides the curriculum itself. Those materials help me with choice time or to implement more of the program then I can scaffold their learning because they're looking through the microscope and I'm able to tell them you know how big that is or so they are learning through the different materials."*
>
> **—Provider**

Implications and Next Steps

Our findings identify the unique benefits that FCC programs provide to children and their families. They also suggest ways to enhance implementation and program services. Below are implications and next steps for DEEL to consider.

- **Ensure consistent and frequent coaching.** FCC programs appreciate the coaching they receive but expressed a desire for more frequent and consistent coaching. This may mean lessening the coaches' workloads and exploring options for increasing coaching capacity.

- **Emphasize the development of the providers' capacity to incorporate high-quality interactions and instruction with children through naturally occurring activities.** It may be helpful to discuss ways that FCC programs can meet the SPP requirements related to instruction through various learning activities other than worksheets and table activities. Additional training and coaching could also help providers incorporate play-based instruction and other child-centered learning activities throughout the day.

- **Provide training to FCC programs that is specific to the FCC context.** FCC programs are different from other SPP classroom types, and it is important to ensure the training reflects this and is offered at times optimal for the providers.

- **Continue to provide support around curriculum implementation.** FCC programs vary in terms of their curriculum implementation, and FCC providers appreciate that SPP funds allow them to buy materials to supplement the curriculum. It is important to continue providing these funds but also to provide the hubs and providers with coaching on developmentally appropriate supplemental curriculum and materials that match their children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds and learning needs.

- **Provide support to FCC programs on supporting neurodivergent children.** Some providers noted they would like additional support with how to support neurodivergent children. This is an area where they would benefit from additional training and coaching support, especially within the FCC context.

- **Continue to include FCC programs as a preschool option.** Families appreciate that SPP includes FCC programs as a preschool choice and touted the benefits of these classrooms for their family. They appreciate the environment and the cultural and linguistic diversity offered through these programs.

- **Recognize the different experience and skill levels of FCC providers and compensate them accordingly**. This could help with retention and may also elevate teaching skills. Discussing ways to recruit and retain FCC providers who have experience teaching could improve instructional outcomes and reduce the cost and disruption of provider turnover.

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Appendix A. Data Sources and Methods

Throughout 2024, the Seattle Public Schools Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) partnered with Education Northwest (EDNW) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to evaluate the Seattle Preschool Program's (SPP) specialized SPP Plus and Dual-Language Initiative (DLI) classrooms and Family Child Care (FCC) programs. Our mixed methods evaluation drew on data used in the current SPP impact evaluation and collected new data to answer questions about the implementation of these programs. The evaluation was organized into a design phase, where the evaluation plan was finalized; an evaluation phase that included recruitment, data collection, and analysis; and a reporting phase that included a draft and final technical report, a brief, and presentation materials.

This section describes the evaluation advisory committee, summarizes the evaluation data sources, details our methods, and highlights limitations.

SPP Evaluation Advisory Committee

The evaluation team convened an 11-member advisory committee to provide feedback on the process evaluation design, instruments, reports, and dissemination materials. The advisory committee members include SPP providers; educators (including from higher education); and service providers who are knowledgeable about SPP, the FEPP (Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise) levy, SPP Plus and DLI classrooms, and FCC programs. The committee also includes three DEEL coaches who support these programs. Below is a list of the advisory members:

1. Dr. Stephanie Gardner, FEPP oversight committee member

2. Sandra Taylor, Seattle Preschool FCC Hub coordinator

3. Tisha Crumley, Seattle Public Schools early learning manager

4. Karina Rojas Rodriguez, Southwest Early Learning Center director

5. Dr. Ilene Schwartz, University of Washington Haring Center for Inclusive Education faculty director

6. Grace Chu, CISC Bilingual Preschool lead

7. Lisa Matsumoto, University of Washington Early Education Unit

8. Shelby Jones, Seattle Public Schools SPP Plus teacher

9. Karina Caron, Northwest Center Kids

10. Emily Zartman, DEEL coach

11. Kimberly Early, DEEL coach

Following best practice, non-DEEL committee members received an honorarium as a token of appreciation for sharing their time and knowledge. We convened six advisory committee meetings during 2024 to elicit feedback on evaluation questions, qualitative data collection tools, and results. The evaluation team organized meeting materials to ensure advisory members and evaluation partners had access to committee meeting notes, agendas, and slide decks. Below is a synopsis of the dates of and main topics addressed during each advisory committee meeting.

- **February 2, 2024.** Members shared information about their role in early learning, discussed a recap of the SPP process evaluation, reviewed their role as members of the committee, and provided feedback on the process evaluation questions.

- **February 27, 2024.** Members reviewed revisions to the process evaluation questions, discussed a recap of the evaluation activities, and provided feedback on the draft SPP teacher focus group protocol.

- **March 12, 2024.** Members reviewed revisions to the teacher focus group protocol, discussed a recap of evaluation activities, and provided feedback on the draft family focus group protocol.

- **May 14, 2024.** Members reviewed revisions to the family focus group protocol, discussed a recap of evaluation activities, and provided feedback on high-level findings of the SPP key informant interviews.

- **September 24, 2024.** Members reviewed key findings related to SPP Plus and coaching as well as findings related to the use of evidence-based and best practices in the classroom. The committee also provided feedback on systems-level considerations.

- **November 19, 2024.** Members provided feedback on key findings related to the DLI classrooms and FCC programs. The committee also shared feedback on system-level considerations and suggested next steps for responding to the evaluation findings.

Institutional Review Board, Data-Sharing Agreement, and Seattle Public Schools Research Approval

Prior to recruitment and data collection, we submitted and received approval of our institutional review board application. We also established a data-sharing agreement with DEEL. Lastly, we submitted an application to conduct research in Seattle Public Schools, which was approved in June 2024.

Document Review

The evaluation team completed a thorough review of 36 SPP program documents covering policies; implementation guides; contracts; and manuals for the DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC programs. We then mapped key information to a crosswalk document that listed the evaluation research questions to

help identify where this information would fit into the evaluation. This document review helped inform development of the implementation rubric and the data collection protocols.

Key Informant Interviews

We partnered with DEEL to identify key informants who are knowledgeable about DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC programs. The interviews collected information on the classroom model's goals, operating procedures, perceived benefits, strengths, and recommendations for improvement. We conducted a total of nine interviews. We provided non-DEEL participants with $50 gift cards for sharing their time and knowledge.

Coach Focus Groups

We drafted a focus group protocol for SPP coaches, submitted it to DEEL for review, and incorporated the feedback. The protocol also received approval from the institutional review board. DEEL coordinated with the coach managers to generate a list of coaches with the types of classroom settings they support and the year they began coaching with the department. We recruited coaches to participate in the focus groups with equal representation from those who serve DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC classrooms. We held the first focus group with three coaches on March 25 and a second focus group with four coaches on March 27. During the focus group we asked coaches about the coaching practices or services they provide, supports and resources received, and perceived coaching benefits as well as their recommendations.

Educator Focus Groups

We drafted an educator focus group protocol and recruitment language and submitted them to DEEL for review. We then collaborated with DEEL and SPP program administrators to recruit focus group participants. We partnered with the FCC hubs to recruit and conduct two educator focus groups. We held one focus group with five educators from one FCC hub on May 28 and another focus group with three educators from the other hub on June 6. For SPP Plus, we partnered with SPS to recruit for a focus group held on May 24 with eight educators. We also worked with the Experimental Education Unit (EEU) to recruit educators for a focus group held on June 24 with three educators. For DLI, DEEL informed program directors about the upcoming data collection activities, and directors in turn informed educators. We completed two focus groups on June 3 and 6 with 13 teachers from 11 different DLI classrooms. We asked educators about goals and perceived benefits, program practices and services, support and resources, and recommendations.

Family Focus Groups

We drafted a family focus group protocol and a recruitment flyer, text messages, and a sign-up sheet. Both DEEL and our institutional review board reviewed and approved this language. We translated the recruitment materials into Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, Oromo, and Mandarin. The family focus group protocol asked questions about program practices, supports for children, and recommendations.

For DLI, we partnered with DEEL and program directors to send out two rounds of recruitment materials by both text and email. We received sign-ups from 37 interested DLI families, and eight family members participated in focus groups on June 13 and 18. We offered interpretation during these focus groups on an as-needed basis as identified through our recruitment.

We worked with hub directors to recruit FCC families and the SPS early learning manager to recruit SPP Plus families. In June, when we received SPS research approval to conduct focus groups with families, we sent an email with the family focus group recruitment flyer to the BrightSpark/Tiny Tots FCC directors and asked them to share it with families. These efforts did not result in the recruitment of any families. We also met with the ARC of King County, a community-based organization that serves families of children with disabilities. While the program administrators were willing to share information about the focus groups, their networks included communities outside of SPP's service area, making it difficult to focus outreach on families served by SPP Plus programs. For this reason, our team decided the best approach would be to ask classroom teachers to send focus group invitations to families when school began in September. This method resulted in 12 sign-ups from interested SPS Plus and FCC families. We offered interpretation during these focus groups on an as-needed basis as identified through our recruitment. We held two SPP Plus focus groups on September 30 and October 1 and one FCC family focus group on October 2. We scheduled a second FCC family focus group on October 3, but unfortunately no families attended. We continued to follow up with both FCC and SPP Plus families and ultimately conducted interviews or focus groups with six SPP Plus families and five FCC families.

Administrative Data

The evaluation team used administrative data provided by DEEL (including child enrollment, staff, program, and survey data) to understand characteristics of children enrolled in SPP, educators in SPP classrooms, and classrooms themselves. The team calculated percentages, counts, and averages to describe the data. For example, the team calculated the percentages of children in each specialized classroom type or provider by racial/ethnic group to understand patterns in enrollment.

The evaluation team used administrative data to analyze how classrooms implemented certain aspects of the program model as described in the implementation rubric. We also explored the relationships between implementation rubric items, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

scores, and Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) scores using an exploratory approach that included pairwise correlations and multivariate regression analysis. We also explored the relationship between different child, educator, and classroom characteristics with child TSG scores, particularly for FCC providers, through multivariate regression analyses. These descriptive regression analyses were not designed to imply causality, but rather to understand the relationships between different data elements.

Implementation Rubric

The evaluation team developed an implementation rubric consisting of a set of implementation fidelity indicators for each type of specialized classroom or provider (i.e., DLI, SPP Plus, and FCC). These new implementation rubric indicators expanded on an implementation fidelity rubric for the overall SPP model that was developed for the 2021–2024 EDNW/AIR evaluation. Indicators characterize key features of the classroom model that distinguish it from "typical" SPP implementation in classrooms that are not DLI or SPP Plus and through providers that are not FCCs. These implementation rubric indicators were informed by the document review, key informant interviews, and discussions with DEEL. For each indicator, we set thresholds for low, adequate, and excellent implementation and identified a data source or potential data source for determining the extent to which classrooms and/or providers were implementing with fidelity.

We conducted descriptive analysis to categorize classrooms into low, adequate, and excellent implementation on each rubric item using administrative and survey data from the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years. This information was used in descriptive data analyses as well as to inform selection of the classrooms for site visits.

Family, Teacher, and Director Surveys

We analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data from existing SPP family and teacher surveys that were administered by DEEL during the 2022–23 school year as well as a director survey that was administered in 2023–24. Each survey included multiple-choice questions, rating questions with fixed-response options, and open-ended questions. This survey data provides information about SPP implementation for each classroom type and sheds light on perceived benefits and challenges.

Family survey

A total of 1,056 SPP families (51%) responded to the 2022–23 survey. The family survey was available in the following languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Amharic, Somali, Tigrinya, and Oromo. Family survey respondents represented a wide variety of family characteristics, although respondent demographics were less diverse than SPP child demographics. For example, 32 percent of respondents spoke a language other than English at home, compared to 39 percent of SPP children in 2022–23, and 14 percent of respondents

identified as Black or African American compared to 28 percent of SPP children in 2022–23. Survey respondent demographics are presented below (note that due to rounding, categories may not add to 100 percent).

Race/ethnicity

- 21 percent Asian/Asian American
- 20 percent multiracial
- 14 percent Black/African American
- 9 percent Latine
- 33 percent white
- 3 percent other race/ethnicities

Income

- 26 percent earn less than $35,000
- 36 percent earn $35,000–$99,999
- 39 percent earn $100,000 or more

Home language

- 32 percent speak at least one language than English at home

Teacher survey

The 2022–23 SPP teacher survey was offered in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese (Mandarin), Somali, and Oromo. A total of 139 SPP teachers (47%) responded. Among responding SPP teachers, 25 percent speak a primary language other than English at home (with 58% reporting only English and 17% not responding to that question). The overwhelming majority of respondents were female (87%). More than two-thirds (68%) of respondents were lead or co-lead teachers and 61 percent were teachers at community-based organizations. More than a fifth (21%) reported teaching in SPP Plus classrooms. As a group, respondents were racially and ethnically diverse, representing a variety of backgrounds, although respondent demographics were less diverse than SPP teachers overall. For example, 19 percent of respondents identified as Black or African American compared to 31 percent of SPP teachers overall in 2022–23, and only 25 percent of respondents said they speak a language other than English compared to 43 percent of SPP teachers overall in 2022–23. Racial/ethnic demographics of SPP teacher survey respondents include:

- 22 percent Asian/Asian American
- 19 percent Black/African American
- 10–13 percent Latine
- 36 percent white

- 5–8 percent American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, North African/Middle Eastern, Asian Indian, Afghan, multiracial, and "other"
- 5 percent unknown/not reported

Director survey

DEEL administered a director survey online to 60 site directors; 35 directors responded, for a response rate of 58 percent. Thirty-five directors responded to at least some of the survey questions (Pierson et al., 2024). Eleven directors said their site or agency operated SPP Plus

classrooms, nine reported operating DLI classrooms, and four reported being an FCC site. Seventy-four percent of directors who responded to the survey were people of color.

Site Visits

The evaluation team selected 11 classrooms for site visits (3 DLI classrooms, 6 SPP Plus classrooms, and 2 FCC programs) that showed differing characteristics e.g., focus languages, location, providers, hub leads, implementation aspects). The goals of these visits were to observe the teachers' instructional practices and classroom environments to better understand implementation and to supplement CLASS data. Observers were team members with content expertise relevant to the type of classroom (e.g., dual language, inclusive special education, child care programs). When on site, we captured field notes on classroom features and best practices tailored to each site's type of service delivery. The field notes were then analyzed using data-coding frameworks that align with a framework of best practices for each type of SPP classroom. We received DEEL approval for our approach to data collection and analysis for these observations.

The evaluation team conducted DLI site visits at the end of May and beginning of June 2024. Two observers conducted separate hour-long site visits to three DLI classrooms on June 6, 10, and 13. We conducted observations of six SPP Plus classrooms: site visits to two EEU classrooms were completed on May 31, and visits to four SPS classrooms were conducted on September 17 and 18. We also visited two FCC programs on September 17 and 18. One FCC program was operated by Tiny Tots/Tomorrow's Voices, and the second was operated by Child Care Resources.

Limitations

The evaluation faced certain limitations during qualitative data collection, recruitment, and analysis. We faced challenges with family focus group recruitment and scheduling. We did our best to mitigate barriers to family participation through our recruitment strategies by having trusted teachers or others send invitations, using multiple forms of recruitment (texts, emails, phone, and the school's family communication systems), and offering recruitment materials and facilitation in multiple languages. We also offered families of children in SPP Plus and FCC programs the option of participating in an interview instead of a focus group and provided flexibility to families (such as rescheduling) if issues arose (such as caring for sick children). We acknowledge that the focus group findings may not represent the collective views of SPP families due to recruitment difficulties, the voluntary sample, potential sensitivity of topics, and unintentional bias when analyzing the qualitative data.

While site visit observation provided insights on implementation of the specialized classrooms and FCC programs, the extent to which observation data represent variations in implementation is unknown. Recruitment and scheduling of site visits was challenging due to the announcement of elementary school closures, union negotiations, and district adjustments resulting from budget

reductions. The visits provided a snapshot view of the classroom that may not fully capture the influence of staffing changes, neighborhood or school events, and previous events on observed practices. Observer bias may have influenced how observations, interviews, and focus group data were coded or interpreted.

Additional limitations related to the quantitative analyses included:[12]

- Due to a small number of respondents to the director survey from SPP Plus and FCC providers, we were not able to use those data fully for the evaluation.

- Identifying children with an individualized education program (IEP) in non-SPP Plus classrooms was impossible due to data limitations. The DEEL administrative data do not include a marker of when a child in SPP has an IEP, and thus our team was unable to compare outcomes between children with an IEP in SPP Plus classrooms and children with an IEP in non-SPP Plus classrooms.

- Identifying SPP children in WaKIDS (from K–12) data was difficult. Matching algorithms between SPP data and K–12 data are imperfect, and not all children who participate in SPP are matched with a corresponding K–12 record in the state. Additionally, not all children in SPP remain in the state or attend public school. For those children who do enroll in Washington public schools, many are correctly identified as SPP participants (that is, their records are matched), but some are not. We may not have been able to match records if a child was registered with different information (for example, if a child's name is recorded differently by the K–12 school district than by SPP). This means that some children who were enrolled in SPP are not identified as SPP participants and may be included in the group of "non-SPP" children in the analyses. For this evaluation, we only examined records for children who were attending Seattle Public Schools.

- Child assessment measures may be biased. The child assessments used in this study (TSG and WaKIDS) are the primary source of information on the performance and growth of SPP children. However, these measures may reflect cultural biases regarding appropriate performance expectations and are based on teacher observations, which themselves may be influenced by unconscious biases.

- Smaller numbers of enrolled students in DLI classrooms, in SPP Plus classrooms, and with FCC providers made it more challenging to conduct certain analyses, such as descriptive regression analyses.

- Issues with longitudinal analyses stemmed from multiple sources. First, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted and/or changed how data were collected for a period of time

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[12] Many of these limitations were included in the 2022–2024 impact evaluation report, available at https://seattle.gov/education/reports-and-data#kindergartenreadinessreports.

(especially 2019–20, but also 2020–21). This interruption makes it challenging to conduct longitudinal data analysis that includes historical data beyond 1–2 years prior. Second, enrollment in SPP specialized classrooms and FCC providers began relatively recently. Given these challenges, our analyses included 2022–23 and 2023–24 data.

- Implementation rubric analyses were incomplete in many cases due to missing data, particularly missing data on educator qualifications. In other cases, data are not yet collected systematically on certain topics.

Appendix B. Supplemental Data

Table B1. Number of children enrolled by program type, school years 2022–23 and 2023–24

Classroom type	2022–23	2023–24
Dual-Language Initiative	327	359
SPP Plus	431	510
Family Child Care	90	99
Comparison	1,198	1,183
All classrooms	2,046	2,151

Note: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms.

Source: Author's analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

CLASS Assessment Scores

In 2023–24, SPP classrooms' Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores were slightly lower than those from 2022–23 but remained consistent with scores from preceding years.

Figure B1. Average CLASS scores by domain and year, 2017–18 to 2023–24
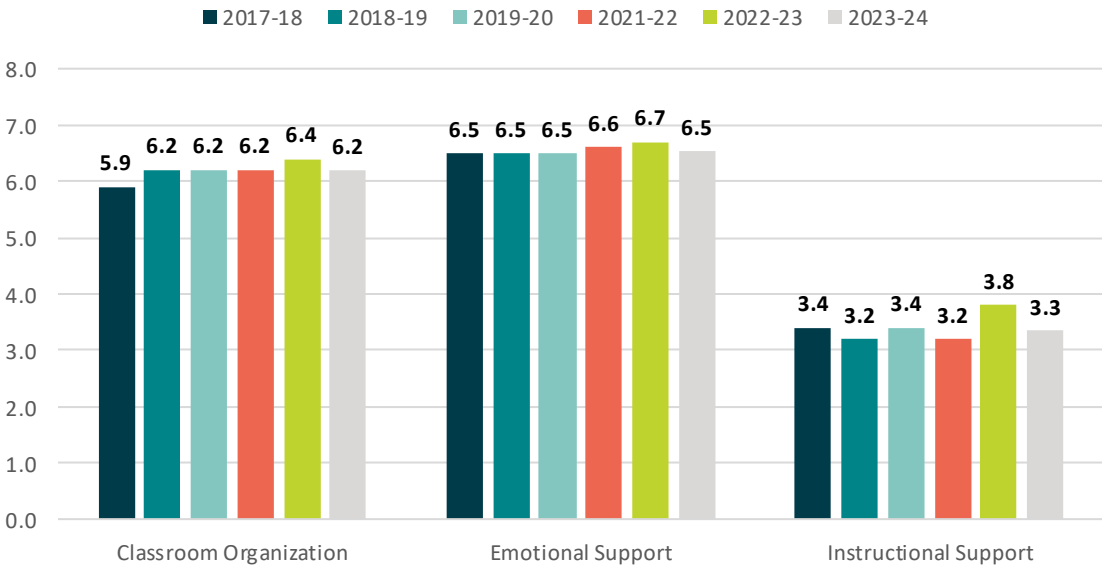
CLASS is Classroom Assessment Scoring System.

Note: CLASS observers only rated 12 SPP classrooms in 2020–21, so CLASS scores are not reported for that year. The number of classrooms in each year was: 61 (2017–18), 84 (2018–19), 74 (2019–20), 50 (2021–22), 57 (2022–23), and 141 (2023–24). All classrooms with CLASS ratings are included in this figure. Possible CLASS scores range from 1 to 7.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Table B2. CLASS average scores and standard deviations across classroom types, 2022–23 and 2023–24

Classroom type	2023			2024		
	Classroom organization	Emotional support	Instructional support	Classroom organization	Emotional support	Instructional support
DLI average	6.25	6.51	3.67	6.16	6.51	3.03
Standard deviation	0.86	0.48	0.84	0.65	0.43	0.81
SPP Plus average	6.85	6.95	4.81	6.45	6.68	3.71
Standard deviation	0.12	0.11	0.97	0.53	0.36	0.6
FCC average	5.9	6.42	2.97	5.92	6.31	3.23
Standard deviation	1.03	0.5	0.99	1.08	0.65	0.86
Comparison average	6.5	6.76	3.85	6.18	6.54	3.32
Standard deviation	0.56	0.32	0.97	0.63	0.39	0.8
All classrooms	6.37	6.67	3.76	6.19	6.53	3.34
Standard deviation	0.76	0.41	1.07	0.71	0.45	0.8

CLASS is Classroom Assessment Scoring System. DLI is Dual-Language Initiative. FCC is Family Child Care. SPP Plus is Special Education Inclusion.

Note: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms. Possible CLASS scores range from 1 to 7.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

TSG Scores

Table B3. Meeting Teaching Strategies GOLD growth targets among DLI and multilingual children

Domain and year	English only in DLI classroom	Multilingual in DLI classroom	English only in comparison classroom	Multilingual in comparison classroom
Social-emotional				
2022–23	94%	87%	89%	90%
2023–24	91%	93%	88%	90%
Physical				
2022–23	91%	92%	87%	87%
2023–24	93%	92%	87%	86%
Language				
2022–23	94%	90%	90%	92%
2023–24	93%	88%	85%	88%
Cognitive				
2022–23	95%	86%	88%	89%
2023–24	95%	86%	90%	90%
Literacy				
2022–23	91%	96%	89%	94%
2023–24	97%	88%	89%	89%
Math				
2022–23	88%	93%	88%	93%
2023–24	96%	87%	89%	92%

DLI is Dual-Language Initiative.

Note: Comparison classrooms refer to classrooms that were not DLI, SPP Plus, or FCC classrooms.

Source: Authors' analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data.

Appendix C. Implementation Rubric and Thresholds for Emerging, Adequate, and Excellent Implementation

Dual-Language Initiative

Table C1. Implementation rubric for Dual-Language Initiative programs

Dual-Language Initiative topic	Implementation indicator	Implementation thresholds		
		Emerging implementation	**Adequate implementation**	**Excellent implementation**
1. Educator qualifications: focus language	*At least one lead teacher in the classroom reports speaking the classroom focus language.*	**No lead teachers** in the classroom report speaking the focus language.	NA	**One or more lead teachers** in the classroom report speaking the focus language.
		7	**NA**	15
		32%	**NA**	**68%**
2. Educator qualifications: trainings	*At least one lead teacher reports completing required Soy Bilingüe trainings.*	**No lead teacher** has completed required Soy Bilingüe trainings.	**One lead teacher** reports completing required Soy Bilingüe trainings.	**Either two lead teachers or lead and assistant teachers** report completing required Soy Bilingüe trainings.
		16	6	0
		73%	27%	0%
3. Classroom quality	*Classroom assessment for Soy Bilingüe has been conducted, and classroom scores at the 102 threshold.*	Classroom did not complete Soy Bilingüe assessment, or classroom scored **below threshold 80.**	Classroom **scored between thresholds 81 and 102** on Soy Bilingüe assessment.	Classroom **scored 102** on Soy Bilingüe assessment.

Dual-Language Initiative topic	Implementation indicator	Implementation thresholds		
		Emerging implementation	**Adequate implementation**	**Excellent implementation**
		4	14	4
		18%	64%	18%
4. Teacher-child interactions	*Classroom Assessment of Supports for Emergent Bilingual Acquisition (CASEBA) assessment scores at or above the threshold.*[1]	CASEBA assessment has been conducted, and classroom scores **below threshold A.**	CASEBA assessment has been conducted, and classroom scores **between thresholds A and B.**	CASEBA assessment has been conducted, and classroom scores at or **above threshold B.**
		NA	NA	NA
		NA	NA	NA
5. Enrollment	*More than 50% of children in the classroom report speaking the focus language in their home.*	**Fewer than 35% of children** in the classroom report speaking the focus language in their home.	**35%–49% of children** in the classroom report speaking the focus language in their home.	**50% or more of children** in the classroom report speaking the focus language in their home.
		12	6	4
		55%	27%	18%

NA is not applicable.

[1] SPP is piloting CASEBA assessments in selected Dual-Language Initiative classrooms during the 2023–24 school year (https://nieer.org/ourwork/nieer-developed-tools-professional-development). Therefore, CASEBA data were not available for all Dual-Language Initiative classrooms at the time of scoring the implementation rubric. We excluded "Teacher-Child Interactions" from our analysis.

Source: Authors analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data with DEEL's input and feedback incorporated.

SPP Plus

Table C2. Implementation rubric for SPP Plus

SPP Plus topic	Implementation indicator	Implementation thresholds		
		Emerging implementation	**Adequate implementation**	**Excellent implementation**
1. Enrollment	*Five students in the class have an IEP.*	**Either three or fewer or seven or more** students in the class have an IEP.	**Four or six students** in the class have an IEP.	**Five students** in the class have an IEP.
		2	12	14
		7%	43%	50%
2. Staffing	*Three or more staff members (including teachers) support the classroom.*	**Two or fewer staff members** support the classroom.	**Three staff members** support the classroom.	**More than three staff members** (including teachers) support the classroom.
		6	16	6
		21%	57%	21%
3. Educator qualifications	*At least one lead teacher has a special education certification.*	**No lead teachers** have a special education certification.	**One lead teacher** has a special education certification.	**Two lead teachers** or both the lead and assistant teacher have special education certifications.
		22	6	0
		79%	21%	0%
4. Family engagement[1]	*Families feel like they are getting the information they need on their child's development.*	**Less than 60% of families** report that they agree or strongly agree with both items: "I know about my child's learning goals" and "Teachers work closely	**Between 60%–85% of families** report that they agree or strongly agree with both items: "I know about my child's learning goals" and "Teachers work closely with me to meet my child's needs."	**More than 85% of families** report that they agree or strongly agree with both items: "I know about my child's learning goals" and "Teachers

SPP Plus topic	Implementation indicator	Implementation thresholds		
		Emerging implementation	Adequate implementation	Excellent implementation
		with me to meet my child's needs."		work closely with me to meet my child's needs."
		3 sites [1]	6 sites	2 sites
		27%	55%	18%

IEP is individualized education program.

[1] The most recent family survey data came from the 2022–23 school year. Note that family data were not available at the classroom level. The numbers presented here refer to the numbers of sites that fall into each implementation threshold based on limited family survey response (157 responses acro ss 11 SPP plus sites).

Source: Authors analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data with DEEL's input and feedback incorporated.

Family Child Care

Table C3. Implementation rubric for Family Child Care (FCC) programs

FCC topic	Implementation indicator	Implementation thresholds		
		Emerging implementation	**Adequate implementation**	**Excellent implementation**
1. Enrollment	*FCCs have a lower student-to-teacher ratio than non-FCC classrooms.*	The FCC has a **child-to-teacher ratio of 10:1.**	The FCC has a **child-to-teacher ratio between 9:1 and 7:1.**	The FCC has a **child-to-teacher ratio of 6:1 or less.**
		0	1	21
		0%	5%	95%
2. Educator qualifications	*FCC staff members meet qualifications.*	FCC teacher **does not meet qualifications** and does not have a plan.	FCC teacher **has a plan** to meet qualifications.	FCC teacher **meets qualifications.**
		NA	**NA**	**NA**

NA is not applicable.

Source: Authors analysis of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning data with DEEL's input and feedback incorporated.