

# Gardendale Early Learning Program: Year 6 (2024–2025) Evaluation Brief

**Authors:**

Emily Diaz, PhD

Vasiliy Sergueev, BS

Sarah Glidden, BA

Lauren Decker-Woodrow, PhD



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Early Childhood Education Municipal Development Corporation  
3510 S WW White Road  
San Antonio, TX 78222

**Prepared by:**

Westat  
An Employee-Owned Research Corporation®  
7501 Wisconsin Avenue  
Suite 1000E  
Bethesda, Maryland 20841-6527  
(301) 251-1500

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## Introduction

**Children attending the Gardendale early learning program are experiencing positive classroom environments, accelerating their learning, and benefiting academically and socially.** The Pre-K 4 SA replication site at Edgewood Independent School District's (ISD) Gardendale Elementary School opened in 2019 and continues to serve children in pre-kindergarten (pre-K) through second grade. The Gardendale annual evaluation focuses on examining classroom quality and children's learning at the site. During the sixth year of its operation (school year 2024–25), the partnership served more than 280 children. Many of the children have therefore received the support of this partnership for several consecutive years (50.5 percent of children attended for at least two years). Of those children served, 58.3 percent were boys and 41.7 percent were girls, nearly all (95.8 percent) were Hispanic, and 27.2 percent received English-language learner services. Westat analyzed data collected from classroom quality observations, teacher report assessments, and direct child achievement assessments.

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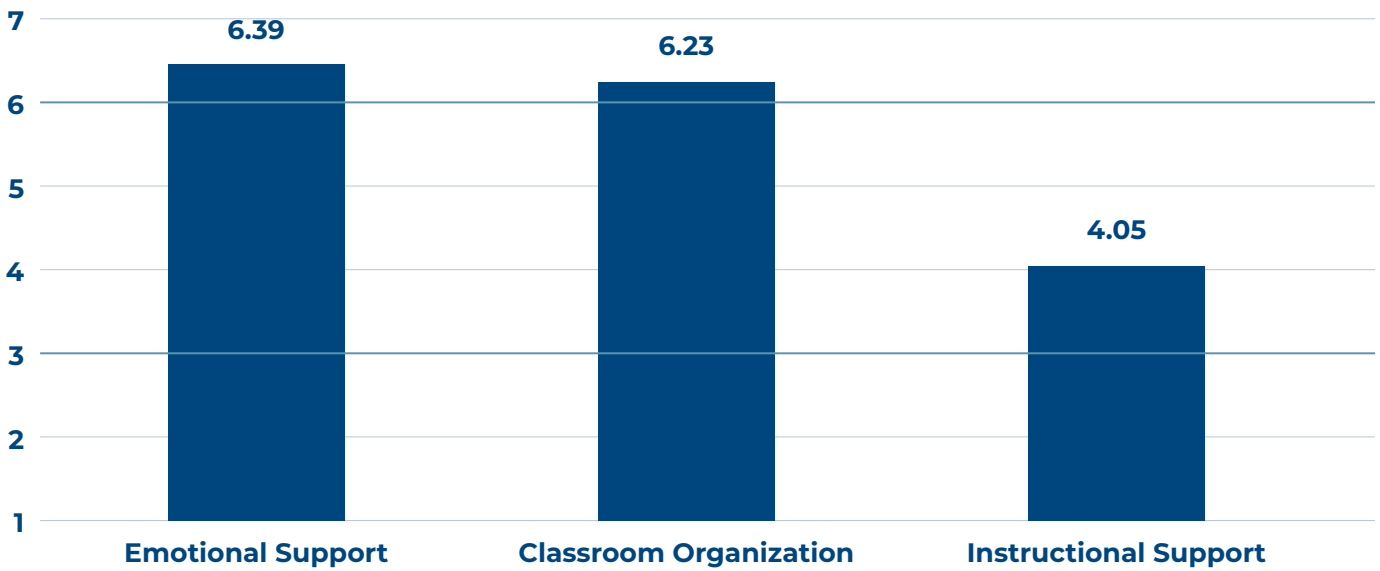
## Classroom Quality Results

**Children are consistently experiencing emotionally supportive and well-organized learning environments.** Observations indicated, on average, high levels of Emotional Support and Classroom Organization, and midrange levels of Instructional Support using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS; see Exhibit 1). CLASS is a validated tool to assess the quality of teacher–child interactions. This tool assigns qualitative ratings based on observed interactions between teachers and children in classrooms. It uses a 7-point scale subdivided into low (1, 2), mid (3, 4, 5), and high (6, 7) ranges of quality. Certified observers assign these scores based on what they see and hear for a selected period in the classroom. CLASS consists of three domains

- **Emotional Support.** Scores above 6, as observed in Gardendale this year, suggest warm, supportive, respectful, welcoming environments that value and incorporate children's perspectives.
- **Classroom Organization.** Scores above 6, observed in Gardendale this year, suggest effective interactions, such as proactive behavior management, clear expectations, and minimal disruptions for behavioral challenges.
- **Instructional Support.** Gardendale's scores in the midrange suggest teachers sometimes provide support that extends children's thinking, ask questions that encourage children to analyze and reason, scaffold children's learning, and give children experiences to both hear and use language. (In a high-scoring classroom, observers would see these types of interactions more consistently and sustained for longer periods of time.)

Moreover, classroom quality results improved compared to last year, suggesting that the ongoing partnership between Pre-K 4 SA and Edgewood ISD is helping provide children with higher quality learning environments and interactions over time.

**Exhibit 1** | Gardendale children experience emotionally supportive and well-organized learning environments



**Note:** The teal horizontal lines mark the boundaries between the three score ranges: low (below 3.00), midrange (between 3.00 and 5.99), and high (6.00 and above).

## Academic and Social Outcome Results

**Children displayed significant improvement in early literacy and early numeracy.** Westat assessed children on a range of academic and social measures. Sometimes those measures were collected for the whole class (such as by using Teaching Strategies Growth, Observation, and Learning [GOLD] assessment, through which teachers collect data about each child in their classrooms on a range of academic and social outcomes). For other measures, a random sample of children were assessed across the four grade levels (including direct child assessments that measure aspects of literacy, numeracy, and vocabulary).

Children across all grade levels showed significant growth on indicators of early literacy, early numeracy, and expressive and receptive vocabulary over the school year (see Exhibits 2 and 3). Westat also observed accelerated learning which indicates the reduction of existing learning gaps in early literacy and numeracy for some children compared to normative samples.



**Exhibit 2** | Children demonstrated significant growth in literacy and vocabulary

Outcome	Assessment	Grade	Domain	Growth (fall to spring)	
Early Literacy	GOLD	PK	Literacy	↑	
			Oral Language	↑	
		K	Literacy	↑	
			Oral Language	↑	
	WJ <sup>a</sup>	PK–2nd	Letter-Word	↑	
		PK–2nd	Letter-Word (high achieving)	↑	
	ROWPVT <sup>a</sup>	PK–2nd	Receptive Vocabulary	↑	
	EOWPVT <sup>a</sup>	PK–2nd	Expressive Vocabulary	↑	
	MAP	K	Reading	↑	
				1st	↑
				2nd	↑
	mCLASS	K–2nd	English Literacy	↑	
Spanish Literacy			↑		

**Note:** GOLD = Teaching Strategies GOLD; WJ = Woodcock-Johnson and Bateria; ROWPVT = Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test. EOWPVT = Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test; MAP = Measures of Academic Progress.

<sup>a</sup> Assessments conducted for a random sample of children.

↑ Indicates a positive significant result

**Exhibit 3** | Children demonstrated significant growth in numeracy

Outcome	Assessment	Grade	Domain	Growth (fall to spring)
Early Numeracy	GOLD	PK	Mathematics	↑
		K		↑
	WJ <sup>a</sup>	PK–2nd	Applied Problems	↑
			Applied Problems (high achieving)	↑
	MAP	K	Mathematics	↑
		1st		↑
		2nd		↑

**Note:** GOLD = Teaching Strategies GOLD; MAP = Measures of Academic Progress; WJ = Woodcock-Johnson and Bateria.

<sup>a</sup> Assessments conducted for a random sample of children.

↑ Indicates a positive significant result

**Children displayed significant growth in their social-emotional readiness according to teacher reports with some exceptions.** Children in pre-K demonstrated significant improvement across multiple indicators in the social-emotional domain. These indicators included both the GOLD (described above) and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA), both of which are teacher-reported measures assessing children’s social-emotional development. Children in kindergarten through second grade performed similarly over the year across all indicators when assessed in the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), a teacher-reported measure assessing children’s social-emotional development (see Exhibit 4).



**Exhibit 4** | Some children demonstrated significant growth in several social-emotional readiness factors

Outcome	Assessment	Grade	Domain	Growth (fall to spring)
Early Literacy	GOLD	PK	Social-Emotional	↑
		K		↑
	DECA	PK	Initiative	↑
			Self-Control	↑
			Attachment	↑
			Total Protective Factors	↑
			Behavioral Concerns <sup>a</sup>	—
	DESSA (mini)	K–2nd	Overall	—
	DESSA (full)	K–2nd	Self-Awareness	—
			Self-Management	—
			Social Awareness	—
			Relationship Skills	—
			Decision-Making	—
Optimistic Thinking			—	
Overall			—	

**Note:** DECA = Devereux Early Childhood Assessment; DESSA = Devereux Student Strengths Assessment

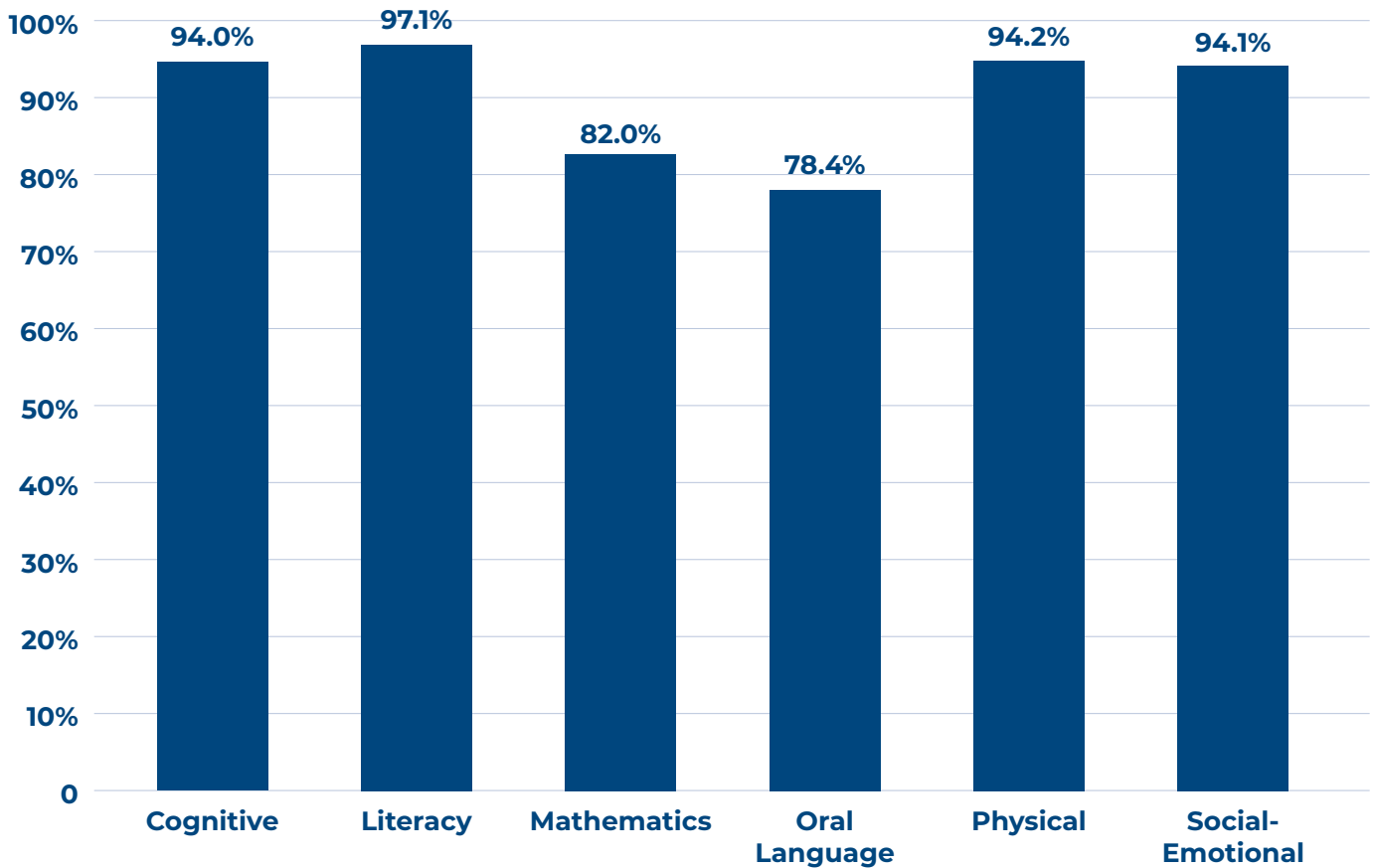
<sup>a</sup> The Behavioral Concerns outcome is intended to measure problematic behaviors, which is reversed from the other outcomes measuring positive behaviors. A positive significant result in Behavioral Concerns indicates a significant reduction in challenging behaviors.

↑ Indicates a positive significant result

# Kindergarten Readiness

**Children displayed kindergarten readiness according to teacher reports.** The majority of 4 year-old children demonstrated readiness for kindergarten in the spring across all six GOLD outcomes. Among Gardendale children in spring 2025, average kindergarten readiness scores ranged from the high 70 to mid-80 percent (for Mathematics and Oral Language outcomes) to the mid to high 90s (for Cognitive, Literacy, Social-Emotional, and Physical outcomes; see Exhibit 5).

**Exhibit 5** | Most children demonstrated kindergarten readiness across GOLD outcomes



**Note:** GOLD = Teaching Strategies GOLD.

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## Conclusions

Gardendale's Year 6 findings indicate positive early learning experiences for children. Broadly

- Classroom quality was moderate (Instructional Support) or high (Emotional Support and Classroom Organization) across grade levels.
- Children grew in both literacy and numeracy development across multiple measures and indicators of achievement.
- Children grew in most social domains of development across multiple measures, with some exceptions. Self-control and behavior concerns remained the same over the year for pre-K children. Additionally, kindergarten to second grade children performed similarly in their social domain scores. This pattern is different from last year where Gardendale children in kindergarten and first grade demonstrated significant improvement. Therefore, more information (e.g., changes in instructional methods or level of children and family engagement) is needed to understand what mechanisms might be behind why Gardendale children scored similarly over the year.
- Conversely, although classroom quality scores were moderate or high overall for these children, a pattern worth noting is that moderate classroom quality (Instructional Support) may correspond to GOLD outcome areas with comparatively lower—although still high—kindergarten readiness scores (i.e., Mathematics and Oral Language).



These findings are consistent with prior evaluation findings for the Pre-K 4 SA and Edgewood ISD partnership. As this partnership continues to mature, investigations of how these children continue to grow and learn will be able to offer longer-term evidence of program effectiveness and offer recommendations for improvement.

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## Implications for Practice

There are three implications regarding these findings. First, given the midrange CLASS score for Instructional Support, children would benefit from increased opportunities to think critically, be asked questions to prompt their thought processes and scaffold learning, and hear and use language. Therefore, Pre-K 4 SA should consider continuing to focus on and invest resources in improving instructional quality (e.g., teacher professional learning, mentoring, and coaching). Second, though our analyses indicate overall growth, we found some achievement gaps remain for certain measures. Therefore, there is still a need for accelerated learning so children can continue to close existing achievement gaps. Pre-K 4 SA should consider continuing to focus on and invest targeted resources (e.g., evidence-based enrichment activities or engaging families and caregivers to support their child's education) for supporting and bringing children's academic understanding up to grade level. Third, although our analyses showed that some achievement gaps remain, there is nonetheless a small subgroup of children who experienced accelerated learning and significantly reduced existing learning gaps in early literacy and numeracy. For the early literacy finding, this is the second year of improvement, which suggests a potential positive trend. Pre-K 4 SA should further observe these classrooms and teachers to fully understand the mechanisms behind this demonstrated strong improvement. This could shape professional development initiatives for teachers to improve program effectiveness and replicate this success in other classrooms.

For further details on the individual analyses and measures reported here, please refer to the full technical report and companion supplemental appendix materials.