

Growing Strong Learners in Galt Joint Union Elementary School District

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Background

In California's Central Valley, approximately 20% of enrolled students in the public-school system are learning English. Many of these students live in rural communities and come from families that have, historically, been less likely to participate in early education programs. In addition, the majority of English learner (EL) students enter kindergarten less prepared and achieve at lower levels than their non-EL peers (CDE, 2020; Robinson-Cimpian, Thompson, & Umansky, 2016).

In an effort to promote school readiness and success for EL students, the James B. McClatchy Foundation is investing resources to advance academic achievement for ELs in California's Central Valley. The foundation is providing financial support and technical assistance to its grantees serving Pre-K EL students, while learning from those grantees as they implement new programs and strategies. As a grantee in the James B. McClatchy Foundation's Pre-K initiative, *Growing Strong Learners*, the Central Valley's Galt Joint Union Elementary School District (GJUESD) is working to support parents, families, schools, and communities in developing tools and processes to support successful kindergarten entry and continuing academic achievement for the district's EL students. The central goals of the project include increasing family engagement and building the capacity of parents and educators to promote kindergarten readiness for ELs.

GJUESD's Fairsite Preschool, where the *Growing Strong Learners* project took place, provides part and full-day preschool programs to children 3 to 5 years of age. The preschool and school readiness program are funded through the California Department of Education, Title I, Migrant Education and First 5 Sacramento. Located south of Sacramento, the preschool serves approximately 250 Pre-K children. Approximately one-third of Fairsite Preschool students are ELs.

Fairsite Preschool's *Growing Strong Learners* Program

Strategies

During the 2019–2020 school year, Fairsite Preschool developed and implemented *Growing Strong Learners* program strategies to improve instructional quality and to engage families to more comprehensively prepare Pre-K EL students for kindergarten. The preschool's innovative approach included strategies to increase EL student enrollment and their parents' capacity to support learning at home while enhancing their connectedness and involvement in school. At the same time, professional development was provided to teachers that focused on promoting parent connectedness and involvement in school, parent support of learning at home, and instructional strategies to further support EL students' success in school. The sections below describe key aspects of GJUESD's *Growing Strong Learners* project at Fairsite Preschool.

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT)

One key activity undertaken by the preschool to achieve its *Growing Strong Learners* goals was implementing the Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) dual-capacity building program with preschool teachers and parents. APTT (Paredes, 2011) is a model of family engagement that is based on research showing that schools can improve students' academic outcomes when families and teachers work together to maximize student learning inside and outside of school. APTT activities are also meant to supplement traditional parent conferences by expanding opportunities for families and teachers to collaborate. They are designed to create a pathway for teachers to share grade-level information, tools, and strategies that families can apply at home and in the community to accelerate student learning. A number of evaluations have found that APTT can be effective in promoting family connectedness to school and student achievement (e.g., Sanzone, et al., 2018; Ferguson, 2017; Matos, 2017; Sparks, 2015). For example, an evaluation of APTT in 24 elementary schools suggested that students whose parents participated in APTT performed better on a reading assessment, compared to students in the same school whose parents did not attend APTT meetings.

When implementing APTT, teachers lead three group parent meetings throughout the year where parents learn about their child’s curriculum, become better acquainted with each other and the teacher, and plan for supporting learning at home. One important aspect of parent APTT meetings involves teachers sharing data with parents related to their child’s academic performance. Once parents view their child’s progress toward kindergarten-readiness benchmarks, parents learn strategies for how they can support learning at home to build their child’s skills in areas associated with the benchmarks. Parents play fun learning games related to the skill, then leave the meeting with their own set of game pieces to implement the games at home with their child. When parents attend the next APTT meeting, teachers once again share assessment data with parents, and parents can see if their child has progressed towards meeting the kindergarten-readiness benchmarks of focus. Parents who cannot attend an APTT meeting often meet with a teacher or administrator at a later time to review what was presented at the meeting and to receive the at-home learning games.

Fairsite Preschool teachers were provided specialized training in how to implement APTT meetings and other activities and were supported through the 2019–2020 school year by an APTT trainer. All parents were invited to attend APTT meetings in fall and then again in winter.¹

Other Teacher Professional Development

In addition to APTT training, Fairsite Preschool teachers and instructional assistants took part in professional development focused on incorporating new instructional strategies to support EL students. Training in English language development (ELD), along with literacy and early mathematics professional development, was conducted during the school year to build educators’ capacity to support EL students during classroom instruction. In addition, dialogic reading and early literacy development training was delivered by a California Reading and Literature Project consultant. Training in Pre-K mathematics instruction and classroom coaching

¹ The implementation of some program activities was impacted by quarantine regulations necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, it was not possible for teachers to carry out the third APTT parent meeting, due to shelter-in-place guidelines. In addition, parent-facing events, including kindergarten transition events were not held after March, 2020.

were provided by an Early Childhood Education coach and through the AIMS Center for Math and Science Education at Fresno Pacific University. Teachers furthered their learning in their professional learning communities.

Bilingual Community Outreach Assistant (BCOA)

In addition to APTT activities, the preschool put into place other strategies to support parents of ELs and to increase parent engagement. A new position was created at the preschool, titled Bilingual Community Outreach Assistant, or BCOA. The preschool's BCOAs worked to promote engagement of Spanish-language dominant parents at Fairsite Preschool by frequently communicating with parents of EL students in-person and virtually. The BCOAs answered questions for parents; reminded them of upcoming events, activities, and deadlines; forwarded helpful resources to parents; assisted parents in the enrollment process; and provided language interpreting for parents. The BCOAs planned and hosted parent outreach events and meetings and attended EL advisory meetings with parents to support the development of EL parent leadership. In addition, BCOAs coordinated recruitment events to enroll EL and migrant preschool students and worked with preschool families as they prepared for their child to transition to kindergarten. During school closure due to the COVID-19 quarantine, the BCOAs made weekly phone calls to check in with EL families, provided a daily live tech hotline, prepared and distributed distance learning packets and technology (Chromebooks and hotspots), and delivered resources to families' homes.

Ready4K Texting Program for Parents

Ready4K is an evidence-based text messaging program for parents of young students. Through the *Growing Strong Learners* program, parents receive information and fun recommendations for promoting their child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Suggestions such as counting steps or pointing out letters or shapes are meant to build on everyday family routines. The program is offered in English and Spanish, as well as other languages. The preschool invited parents to enroll in Ready4K, and those who did not opt-out of the program received daily texts designed to support their child's readiness for kindergarten.

Previously Established Parent Engagement Activities

During the 2019–2020 school year, the preschool continued and enhanced a number of parent engagement activities that had been occurring at the preschool for several years. These activities included listening circles — a structured process designed to bring people together to better understand each other, build and strengthen connections, and solve problems. Outcomes of the listening circles are shared with the broader preschool parent community and all are invited to comment and respond to ideas and early plans for action. By participating in listening circles, parents were able to share their concerns, listen and respond to other parents' concerns, and problem-solve and plan with preschool teachers, administrators, and community members. Parents also had the opportunity to join monthly Parent Advisory Committee meetings where they were invited to provide feedback to preschool staff and suggest improvements that they would like to see at the preschool site.

In addition, families, teachers, and BCOAs continued to use Class Dojo, a school communication platform that teachers and school staff use to share what is occurring in the classroom and at school through photos, videos, and messages. During the regular school year, Fairsite Preschool posted parent resources (academic, social-emotional, parenting) on Class Dojo. For instance, in a sample week, 221 messages were posted, with 120–250 views per post. During distance learning while the COVID-19 epidemic shelter-in-place order was in effect, teachers recorded virtual learning sessions (read-alouds, literacy, math and science activities, arts and crafts) and posted them on Class Dojo so that families could access them on demand.

Other parent engagement activities at the preschool included 1) parent meetings at the beginning of the year to help families with the transition to preschool, 2) *Second Cup of Coffee* — a series of informal morning meetings for parents to build a social support network and to learn about topics affecting their child's development and learning, and 3) monthly *Family Friday* gatherings designed to provide an opportunity for parents to participate in a learning activity in their child's classroom. To complement the *Growing Strong Learners* project, each parent engagement event was enhanced for the 2019–2020 school year to include a focus on student achievement. For instance, for one *Family Friday*, parents read a book with their child

and did an activity with their child related to the current APTT area of academic focus, in this case, subitizing in mathematics.

Evaluation of GJUESD’s *Growing Strong Learners* Program at Fairsite Preschool

The James B. McClatchy Foundation’s *Growing Strong Learners* initiative supported GJUESD to evaluate its project for increasing kindergarten readiness for its Pre-K EL students. The purpose of the evaluation was to collect data from the 2019–2020 school year at Fairsite Preschool and to examine findings related to students, parents, and teachers. Evaluation activities took place from fall to spring during the 2019–2020 school year. The evaluation involved analysis of data related to parent engagement, teacher practices, and kindergarten readiness outcomes in students. The evaluation questions related to student, parent, and teacher outcomes that guided the evaluation are listed below.

Evaluation Questions

Students

1. What are the one-year academic and social and emotional outcomes for EL students at Fairsite Preschool?
2. What is the level of preparation for kindergarten of 2019–2020 Fairsite Preschool EL students, compared to the previous year cohort of preschool students?

Parents

1. What is the effectiveness of GJUESD’s *Growing Strong Learners* project in a) improving the capacity of families of Pre-K English learners to support school readiness, and b) deepening parents’ connectedness to school?

2. What is the effectiveness of the project in increasing parents' feelings of self-efficacy in supporting their child's learning at home?
3. What is the effectiveness of the project in developing parents as leaders and in expanding family learning and engagement opportunities?

Teachers

1. What is the effectiveness of GJUESD's *Growing Strong Learners* project in improving the capacity of teachers of Pre-K English learners to a) develop genuine relationships with families that lead to partnerships, b) effectively facilitate APTT meetings and family engagement activities?
2. What is the effectiveness of the project in building the capacity of Pre-K teachers to support kindergarten readiness and transition success for EL students?

Methods

Data Collection

As shown below in Table 1, to address the evaluation questions listed above, data were collected during fall-spring 2019–2020 using the following methods: observations of APTT meetings and activities, parent and teacher surveys, parent and teacher focus groups, and parent, teacher and preschool administrator interviews. In addition, secondary data analysis was conducted to explore Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) individual student scores, analytics from Ready4K, and data on student demographics and parent attendance at APTT meetings.

Table 1: *GJUESD Growing Strong Learners evaluation data sources and quantity of data examined*²

Data Source	Count
APTT meeting and training observations	3 observations
Fall parent surveys	50 surveys
Spring parent surveys	20 surveys
Parent focus groups	2 focus groups
Parent interviews	10 interviews
Teacher surveys	20 surveys
Teacher focus groups	1 focus group
Teacher interviews	4 interviews
Administrator interviews	4 interviews
User Analytics from Ready4K	166 active enrollments 15,349 message deliveries
Student Assessments	@ 150

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and open-ended survey items were examined through deductive thematic analysis. Through this approach, interviews and focus groups were transcribed and reviewed, codes were developed and reviewed by two or more evaluators, the qualitative data were sorted into codes, the completed coding was reviewed by two or more evaluators, themes related to each evaluation question were identified, and narrative synthesis was completed. Quantitative data analysis included statistical analysis of multiple datasets, described in detail below. In particular, children’s learning and development was assessed twice per year, and descriptive and correlational research methods (e.g., group means, *t* tests,

² The spring 2020 pandemic crisis necessitated only virtual data-gathering during shelter-in-place regulations and prevented paper-and-pencil surveys from being administered to parents, greatly inhibiting the spring response rates.

multiple regression) were used to examine children’s status and growth during the intervention year and the year prior. Survey data were organized into figures for analysis with other data. Parent survey responses were evaluated for each item three ways — by whether the parent self-reported attending an APTT meeting or not, by whether the survey was completed in the fall or spring, and by whether parents reported speaking multiple languages or only one language at home. Teacher survey responses from fall and spring survey administrations were compared. Appendix B reports figures representing parent and teacher survey responses. Relationships among findings emerging from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis were examined through thematic synthesis to identify implications, considerations, limitations, and areas for future evaluation or research.

Results

Parent and Teacher Participation in *Growing Strong Learners*

Parent participation in Fairsite Preschool’s *Growing Strong Learners* parent engagement events was robust. Nearly all Fairsite Preschool families attended at least one APTT parent meeting or APTT individual meeting with their teacher or an administrator during the year (97%), and the majority of families attended at least two APTT events (72%). The data show that participation levels in APTT meetings were similar for parents of EL and non-EL students. In addition, nearly all Pre-K families participated in Ready4K (92%), and most remained active in Ready4K throughout the school year (81%). Ready4K participation levels were similar for parents of EL and non-EL families.

Teachers participated in all APTT trainings and parent meetings in the first and second trimester. All teachers participated in district professional development activities, including training in ELD, literacy and early mathematics professional development, dialogic reading and early literacy development training, and professional learning communities.

Results for Students

- a) Academic and social and emotional outcomes for EL students
- b) Level of kindergarten preparedness for EL students compared to previous year

Summary of Results for Students

- Children classified as ELs learned and developed as much as, or more than, their Non-EL peers during the intervention year, depending on the particular area of learning and development assessed.
- Some evidence suggests that ELs had more equitable opportunities to learn during the intervention year than in the prior year. For example:
 - Although the statistical evidence was mixed, assessment results show that kindergarten readiness gaps between ELs and Non-ELs generally narrowed during the intervention year, whereas gaps generally widened during the prior year.
 - ELs showed greater levels of learning and development at the end of the intervention year than ELs did at the end of the prior year — though the groups had similar assessment scores at the beginning of the year.

Examining Student Learning and Development

The first child-level evaluation question explores the one-year academic and social and emotional outcomes for EL students. Data were collected from children in the fall semester, less than one month after the intervention had started, and again in the spring, around the time when the preschool closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Descriptive and correlational research methods were used to examine children’s learning and development during the intervention year.

Students classified as English Learners were a key target group for the evaluation: the analysis focused on understanding the similarities and differences between the learning and development of ELs and Non-ELs. The assessments provide a snapshot of development as of the fall, and again in the spring. The analyses made comparisons between ELs and Non-ELs in the fall and the spring, and then in the gains between fall and spring for ELs and Non-ELs.

Assessments

Student learning and development was measured in the fall and the spring using the current version of the Desired Results Developmental Profile Assessment – Preschool Version (DRDP), and a Galt district assessment of early mathematics and literacy skills. The DRDP is a well-studied observational assessment of child learning and development (see DRDP Collaborative Research Group [DCRG], 2015). The assessment is administered in natural settings through teacher observations, family observations, and examples of children’s work. When teachers use the DRDP, they assess each child using several-dozen criteria, called measures, that are grouped into developmental domains. Each DRDP measure contains between five and nine rating categories. The rating categories form an ordered sequence: each category represents a developmental milestone in a research-based sequence of child development that spans early infancy through the end of kindergarten (Figure 1).

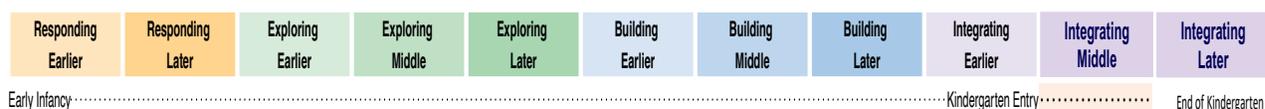


Figure 1. DRDP Developmental Categories

Preschool students assessed with the DRDP can receive scores for up to 15 developmental domains, but the current analysis examined students’ scores on the five major DRDP domains described in Table 2. These domains align with the five domains of school readiness described in Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (2014), the California Preschool Learning Foundations (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>), and the goals of *Growing Strong Learners*. A corpus of research provides evidence that the DRDP is fair, reliable, and valid

for uses that include accurately measuring child learning and development over time (DRCG, 2018).

Table 2. *DRDP Domains*

Major DRDP Domain	Description of the Domain
Approaches to Learning-Self Regulation (ATL-REG)	Assesses attention maintenance, engagement and persistence, and curiosity and initiative. Self-Regulation skills include self-comforting, self-control of feelings and behavior, imitation, and shared use of space and materials.
Social and Emotional Development (SED)	Assesses a child’s development towards understanding, interaction, and forming positive relationships with nurturing adults and their peers. Knowledge or skill areas include identity of self, social and emotional understanding, relationships and social interactions with familiar adults, relationships and interactions with peers, and symbolic and sociodramatic play.
Language and Literacy Development (LLD)	Assesses foundational language and literacy skills, demonstrated in <i>any language</i> and in any mode of communication. Skill areas include receptive and expressive language, letter and word knowledge, and phonological awareness.
Mathematics (MATH)	Knowledge areas include spatial relationships, classification, number sense of quantity, number, sense of math operations, measurement, patterning, and shapes.
Physical Development (PD)	The skill areas in this domain include perceptual-motor skills and movement concepts, gross locomotor movement skills, gross motor manipulative skills, fine motor manipulative skills, active physical play.

Student learning was also measured using a GJUESD teacher-developed and teacher-administered assessment of preschool mathematics and literacy (Appendix C). The assessment evaluated the following areas: color recognition (10 colors), letter recognition (upper and lowercase), number recognition (one through 10), rote counting (up to 10), object counting (up to 20), and shape recognition (circle, triangle, square, rectangle, trapezoid, oval).

Comparing ELs’ and Non-ELs’ Learning and Development During the Intervention Year

This section examines learning and development for EL and Non-EL Fairsite Preschool students. Table 3 contains the analytic sample sizes for the analyses in this section. The table reflects the number of students with DRDP assessment scores in either the fall or the spring. The table shows that there were fewer ELs than Non-ELs. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of the sample was assessed with the DRDP in both the fall and the spring semesters. All students were included in the analyses.

Table 3. *Analytic Sample Size for Galt Preschool Students in the Intervention Year*

	ATL-REG		SED		LLD		MATH		PD	
	Fall	Spring								
	<i>n</i>									
EL	36	35	36	36	33	35	35	36	36	36
Non-EL	102	97	102	98	99	97	100	97	102	97

In the first analysis, descriptive statistics were used to examine the average DRDP scores in the fall and spring of the intervention year. Figure 2 contains the mean DRDP scores for ELs and Non-ELs.³ Each of the five DRDP dimensions was analyzed independently. The results show that both ELs and Non-ELs grew during the year. In addition, for each DRDP dimension, ELs had lower mean scores in the fall than Non-ELs. For example, ELs had a lower mean ATL-REG score in the fall than Non-ELs (440 vs. 474). However, the results from independent samples *t* tests show that, for all DRDP domains, the fall differences between ELs and Non-ELs were not statistically significant. The lack of statistical significance in the EL versus Non-EL comparisons is partly a sample size issue: 33 to 36 ELs is a reasonable sample but it does not provide a great amount of statistical power. In the classroom, the types of differences between ELs and Non-ELs observed in the current results would likely manifest as subtle group level differences in

³ The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

children's learning and development. Appendix A1 contains complete descriptive statistics and results from *t* tests.

In the spring of the intervention year, the relationship between ELs and Non-ELs was the opposite of the fall: ELs had higher mean DRDP scores than Non-ELs for four out of five DRDP domains (LLD being the lone exception). The results from independent samples *t* tests with spring DRDP scores, comparing ELs to Non-ELs, show that the differences between the group means were not statistically significant for all DRDP domains. Practically speaking, the groups would likely present as possessing equal levels of learning and development (with each group showing a distribution).

In sum, ELs grew more than Non-ELs during the intervention year in all DRDP domains. However, the statistical results show that differences between ELs' and Non-ELs' DRDP scores were not statistically significant in either the fall or the spring. These statistical results may underappreciate the gains made by ELs in relation to Non-ELs. Although the sample of ELs is adequate for the current evaluation, the size of the sample does not provide strong statistical power to detect educationally relevant differences of relatively small magnitude. Whereas these analyses provide snapshots of learning and development, the multiple regression analyses presented in the next section offer a more direct comparison between ELs' and Non-ELs' relative gains during the year.

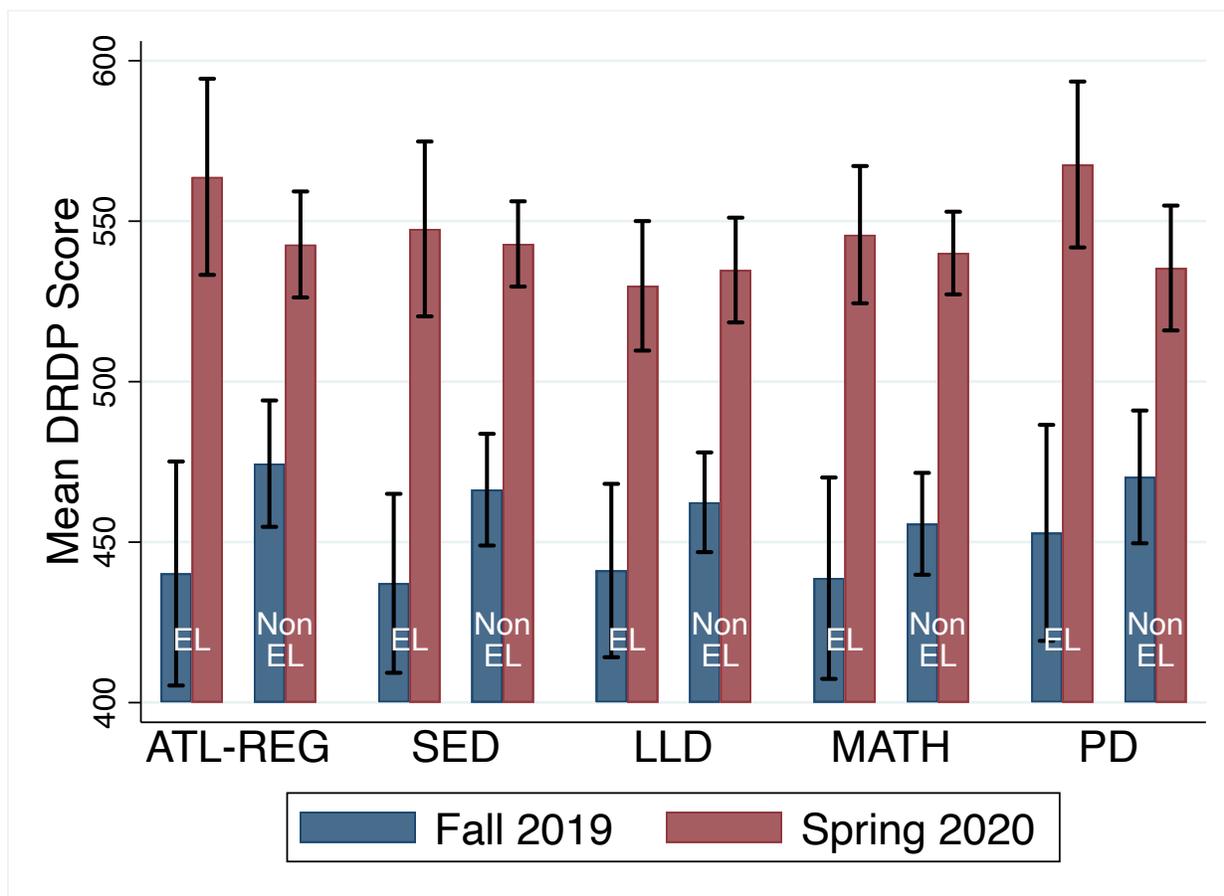


Figure 2. Mean DRDP scores for ELs and Non-ELs in fall 2019 and spring 2020

Second, multiple regression was used with DRDP scores to compare the relative growth of ELs and Non-ELs during the intervention year. Again, each DRDP domain was analyzed independently. The results show that after controlling for each child’s pretest scores, ELs’ scores were predicted to increase more than Non-ELs’ scores in all DRDP domains. The difference between ELs and Non-ELs was statistically significant for two DRDP domains (ATL-REG, PD) and was not statistically significant for three DRDP domains (SED, LLD, and MATH). In sum, the multiple regression results show that ELs learned and developed more than Non-ELs in some areas during the intervention year; ELs and Non-ELs grew similarly in the remainder of the areas (statistical power was unlikely to be a major issue here). Appendix A2 contains complete results for the multiple regressions.

Third, descriptive statistics and multiple regression were used to examine students’ performance on the district assessment during the intervention year. Figure 3 contains the

mean district assessment scores for ELs and Non-ELs in fall 2019 (first trimester) and spring 2020 (third trimester).⁴ The district assessment domains contained in the figure are color recognition (Colors), letter recognition (Letters), number recognition (Numbers), rote count (RoteCnt), object counting (ObjCnt), and shape recognition (Shapes). Similar to the DRDP results, the district assessment results show that both ELs and Non-ELs grew during the year. Statistical results from multiple regression with each domain showed that ELs typically grew as much as Non-ELs during the year (see Appendix 3). The results from the district assessment agree with the results from the DRDP assessment: ELs’ growth was supported during the intervention year.

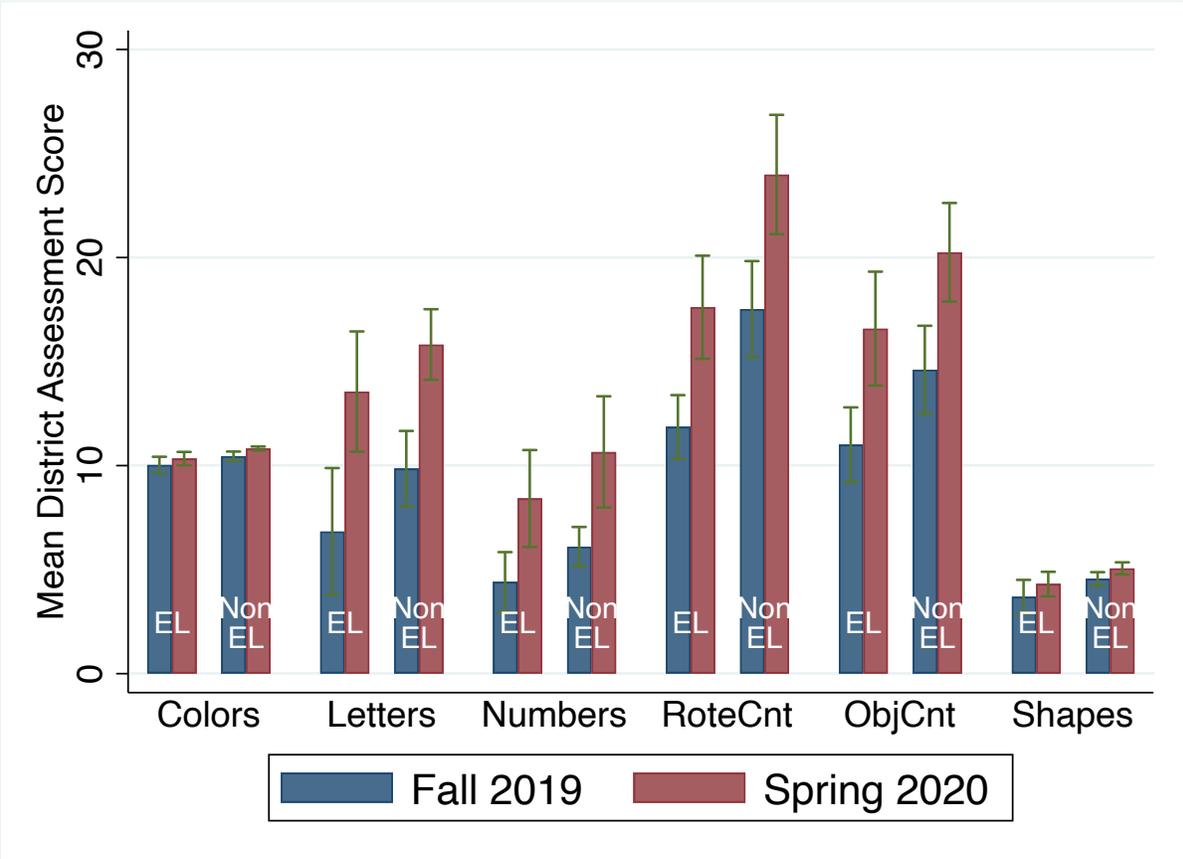


Figure 3. Mean district assessment scores for ELs and Non-ELs in fall 2019 and spring 2020

⁴ The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Comparing EL’s Kindergarten Readiness in the Intervention Year vs. the Prior Year

The second student-level evaluation question explores Fairsite students’ levels of preparation for kindergarten in 2019–2020 compared to the cohort from the previous year. To address this question, DRDP scores from the prior year, collected in the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019, were analyzed and compared to the DRDP scores from the intervention year. The same descriptive and correlational research methods used to address the first student-level evaluation question were used here to facilitate comparisons between the prior year and the intervention year results. In addition, an analysis based on the DRDP’s developmental levels was used to compare students’ levels of kindergarten readiness at the end of the prior year with their levels of kindergarten readiness at end of the intervention year.

The prior year sample contained $n = 179$ students with DRDP assessment scores in either fall 2018 or spring 2019. However, only 79% of the sample ($n = 141$) students had DRDP scores for both semesters. Including the 38 children with only one assessment score materially changed the group mean assessment scores. Therefore, only children with complete DRDP data were included in the analyses. Table 4 contains the analytic sample sizes for the prior year analyses. Similar to the intervention year sample, the prior year sample contained fewer ELs than Non-ELs. The consistent sample size across DRDP domains shows that teachers assessed all students in each of the 5 domains (i.e., there were no missing assessment scores in this sample). The sample of ELs in the prior year was smaller than the sample of ELs in the intervention year, which gives the prior year analyses less statistical power than the intervention year analyses.

Table 4. *Analytic Sample Size for Galt Preschool Students in the year prior to the intervention*

	ATL-REG		SED		LLD		MATH		PD	
	Fall	Spring								
	<i>n</i>									
EL	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23
Non-EL	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118	118

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the average DRDP scores in the fall and the spring of the year prior to the intervention. Figure 4 contains the mean DRDP scores for ELs and Non-ELs in the fall and the spring (2018–2019).⁵ Again, each of the five DRDP dimensions was analyzed independently. The results show that, for each dimension, ELs had lower mean scores than Non-ELs in the fall and in the spring. For example, in fall 2018, ELs had a lower mean ATL-REG score than Non-ELs (459 vs. 472). Results from independent samples *t* tests for each DRDP domain, comparing ELs to Non-ELs in the fall, show that the differences between the group means were not statistically significant. The fall differences between ELs and Non-ELs in the prior year are generally smaller than those in the intervention year. Hence, the differences are less likely to be educationally meaningful, with possible exception of the SED dimension, where the average difference between ELs and Non-ELs may be noticeable in the classroom (even though the *t* test was not statistically significant).

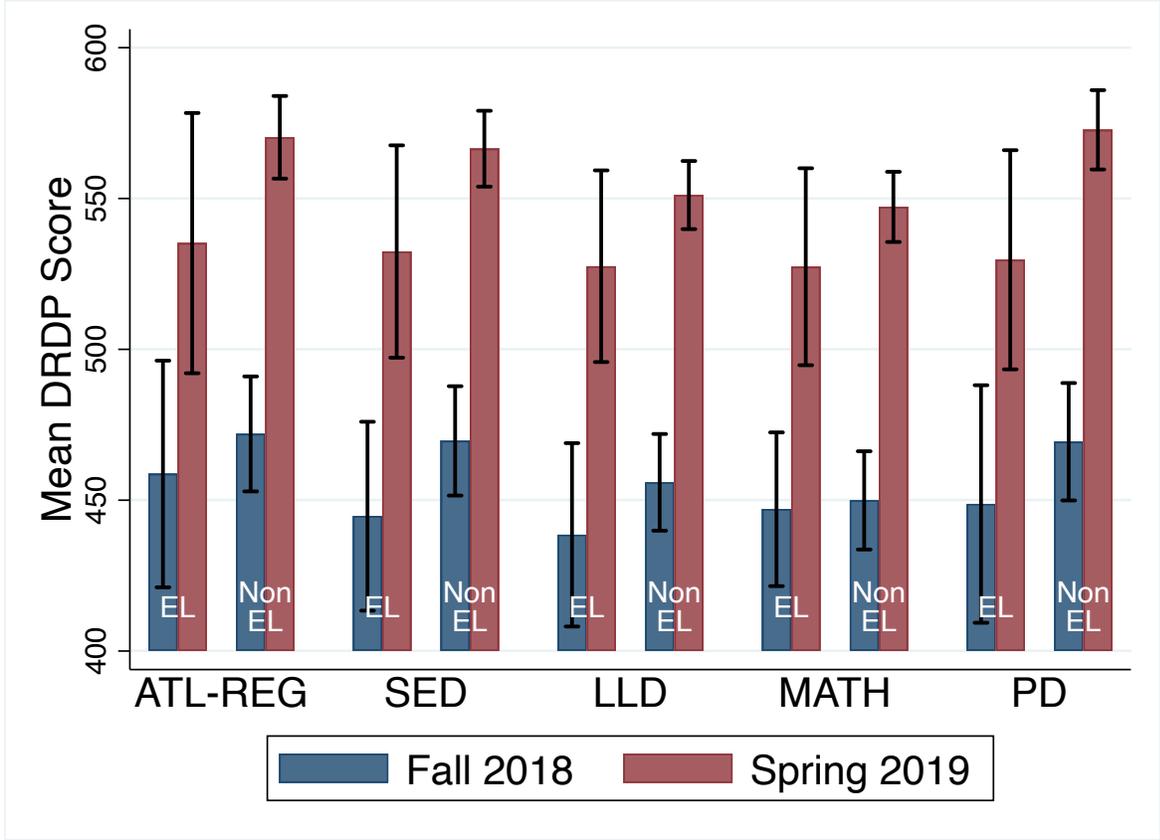


Figure 4. Mean DRDP scores for ELs and Non-ELs in the year prior to the intervention

⁵ The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Both ELs and Non-ELs grew during the year in all DRDP domains. However, the average gap between ELs and Non-ELs widened during the year in all DRDP domains (Figure 4). For example, the difference between ELs' and Non-ELs' mean ATL-REG scores was 13 points in fall 2018 and 35 points in spring 2019. The *t* tests that compared spring ELs' to spring Non-ELs' mean scores show mixed results. For the ATL-REG domain, the difference between ELs and Non-ELs was just outside the criterion of statistical significance ($p = 0.053$); the difference between ELs and Non-ELs was statistically significant in the SED and PD domains, and the difference was not statistically significant for the LLD and MATH domains. The results are suggestive of widening of readiness gaps between ELs and Non-ELs during the prior year. Appendix A4 contains descriptive statistics and the *t* test results.

Next, multiple regression was used to compare the relative changes between ELs and Non-ELs during the prior year. Each DRDP domain was analyzed independently. The results show that, after controlling for each student's fall scores, ELs were expected to grow less than Non-ELs in all domains of the DRDP. However, the differences were statistically significant for only one of the five DRDP domains (PD). For the remaining four domains, the difference between the estimated growth ELs and Non-ELs was not statistically significant. However, the statistical tests appear underpowered. The point estimates of the mean differences between ELs and Non-ELs in ATL-REG and SED are also large enough to imply the possibility of educational significance. Although point estimates must be interpreted with caution, it is likely that the 33 point ATL-REG difference and the 28 point SED difference between the growth of ELs and Non-ELs would manifest in the classroom as greater learning and developmental gains over the year for Non-ELs than ELs. Appendix A5 contains complete results for the multiple regressions with the prior year data.

Next, cohort effects were investigated in greater detail. The learning and development that occurred during the prior year was compared with that in the intervention year. The goal was to contrast each cohort's changes in readiness gaps between ELs and Non-ELs during the year. Baseline analyses suggested that it was reasonable to compare cohorts: independent samples *t* tests for each DRDP domain showed that the differences between fall DRDP scores in the prior

year and the fall DRDP scores in intervention year were not statistically significant and generally small in magnitude (Appendix A6). Thus, multiple regression was used to examine how much the two cohorts differed in terms of the yearly change in readiness gaps between ELs and Non-ELs. Figure 5 contains a graph of selected coefficients from the multiple regression models⁶. Each bar represents the estimated difference between the growth of ELs and the growth of Non-ELs in a given year. Negative values indicate that ELs grew less than Non-ELs during the year, whereas positive values indicate that ELs grew more than Non-ELs during the year. Error bars that cross zero indicate coefficients that are not statistically significant versus a baseline model. However, the current analysis focuses on different statistical tests that contrast estimates for the prior year and the intervention year.

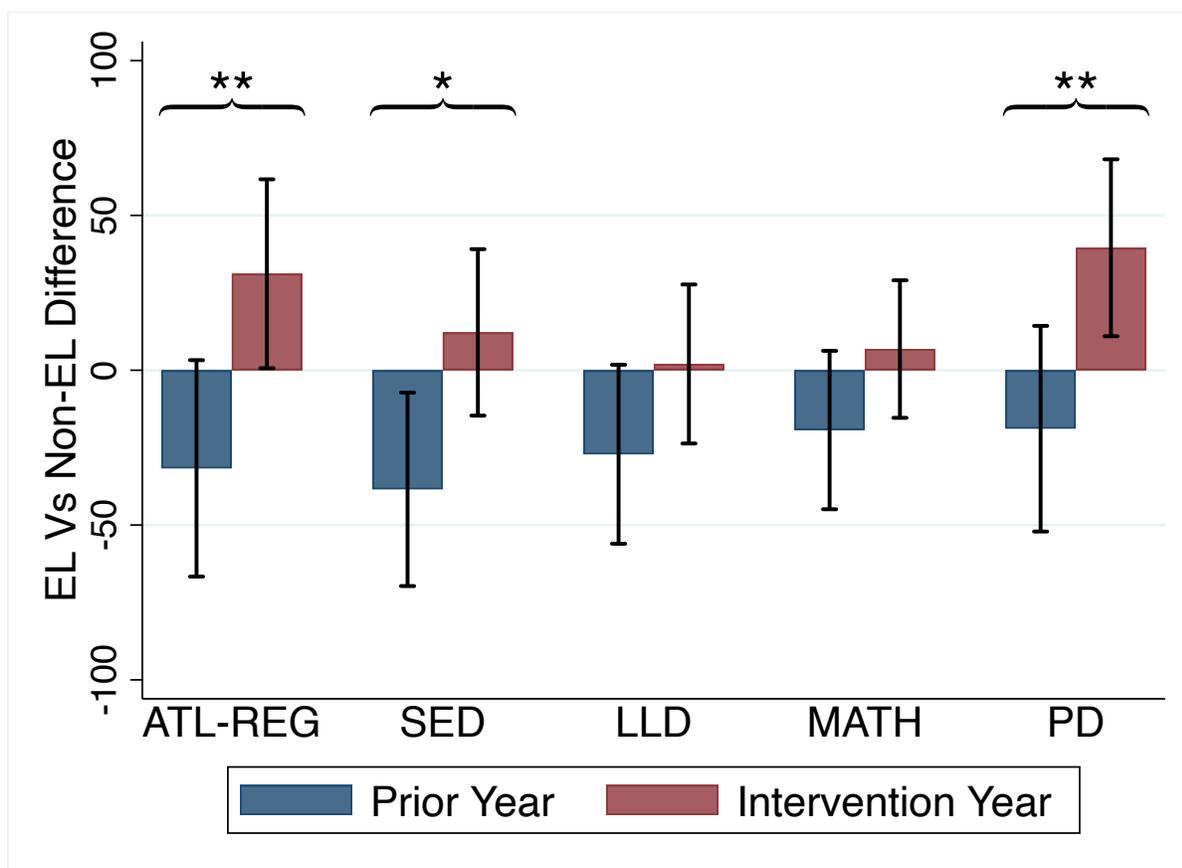


Figure 5. Differences between ELs and Non-ELs in the intervention year and the prior year. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

⁶ This model estimates a common slope for the intervention year and the prior year and thus the results from the current model differ slightly from the results of the prior multiple regression models using data from each cohort. See Appendix A7 for additional information.

In Figure 5, each of the bars for the prior year (in blue) take negative values, indicating that the gap between ELs and Non-ELs widened during the year. In contrast, each of the bars for the intervention year (in red) take positive values, indicating that the gap between ELs and Non-ELs narrowed during the year (or was eliminated). The brackets and asterisks in Figure 5 mark statistically significant differences between the prior year and the intervention year coefficients. The brackets show that the between-year differences were statistically significant for the ATL-REG, SED, and PD domains of the DRDP. For these three domains, the statistical evidence indicates that the intervention year supported more equitable outcomes for ELs than the prior year. Although the results for LLD and MATH showed similar trends as the other dimensions, the estimated differences between the prior year and the intervention year were small in magnitude and were not statistically significant. In sum, the results show that, relative to Non-ELs, ELs fared better during the intervention year than the prior year. Appendix A7 contains results from the multiple regression.

Next, ELs' DRDP levels at the end of the prior year were compared with ELs' DRDP levels at the end of the intervention year. The DRDP was designed to place children (and groups of children) within research-based developmental levels that reflect important developmental behaviors, skills, and capacities. Table 5 contains a list of the DRDP levels available to preschoolers (assessed using the DRDP-Preschool Version).

Table 5. *Developmental Levels for the DRDP- Preschool Version*

Level	Abbrvn.	Description
RESPONDING		<i>Responding:</i> Knowledge, skills, or behaviors that develop from basic responses (through using senses and through actions) to differentiated responses. Children generally engage in back-and- forth interactions with familiar adults and communicate through nonverbal messages.
Responding Earlier	RE	
Responding Later	RL	
EXPLORING		<i>Exploring:</i> Knowledge, skills, or behaviors that include active exploration including purposeful movement, purposeful exploration and manipulation of objects, purposeful communication, and the beginnings of cooperation with adults and peers. Children generally
Exploring Earlier	EE	
Exploring Middle	EM	
Exploring Later	EL	

begin this period by using nonverbal means to communicate and, over time, grow in their ability to communicate verbally or use other conventional forms of language.

BUILDING

Building Earlier	BE	<i>Building:</i> Knowledge, skills, or behaviors that demonstrate growing understanding of how people and objects relate to one another, how to investigate ideas, and how things work. Children use language to express thoughts and feelings, to learn specific early literacy and numeracy skills, and to increasingly participate in small group interactions and cooperative activities with others.
Building Middle	BM	
Building Later	BL	

INTEGRATING

Integrating Earlier	IE	<i>Integrating:</i> Knowledge, skills, or behaviors that demonstrate the ability to connect and combine strategies in order to express complex thoughts and feelings, solve multi-step problems, and participate in a wide range of activities that involve social-emotional, self-regulatory, cognitive, linguistic, and physical skills. Children begin to engage in mutually supportive relationships and interactions.
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Note. Not all levels are represented in all dimensions.⁷

ELs' developmental levels were compared between the end of the prior year and the end of the intervention year. Recall that ELs had similar mean scores at the beginning of their respective years (Appendix A6). Figure 6a-e compares the distribution of ELs' developmental levels in spring 2019 (prior year) with ELs' developmental levels in spring 2020 (intervention year) for all five DRDP domains. Each set of horizontal bars represents the percent of children in the sample at the developmental level indicated in the legend; each set sums to 100 percent. The results show that, for all DRDP domains, ELs were more likely to be in the higher developmental levels at the end of the intervention year than they were at the end of the prior year. These results show that intervention year ELs were able to reach higher levels of learning and development than prior year ELs. Appendix A8 contains graphs that compare Non-ELs' developmental levels

⁷ Readers interested in translating the DRDP developmental levels into specific behaviors, skills, and capacities that comprise each level, can refer to the DRDP Preschool Manual (https://www.desiredresults.us/sites/default/files/docs/forms/DRDP2015PSC_090116.pdf).

between cohorts. The graphs show either no discernable difference between the prior year and the intervention year or a slight advantage for prior year Non-ELs. Although the current results suggest that the *Growing Strong Learners* intervention may support equitable early education for ELs, the results cannot be interpreted as incontrovertible evidence for the efficacy of the intervention's ability to support ELs' learning and development. The comparisons (e.g., between prior year and intervention year), though useful, are non-experimental. Thus, the observed trends may be due to factors that cannot be controlled, such as differences in the cohorts or other educationally and developmentally supportive experiences that students had during the year.

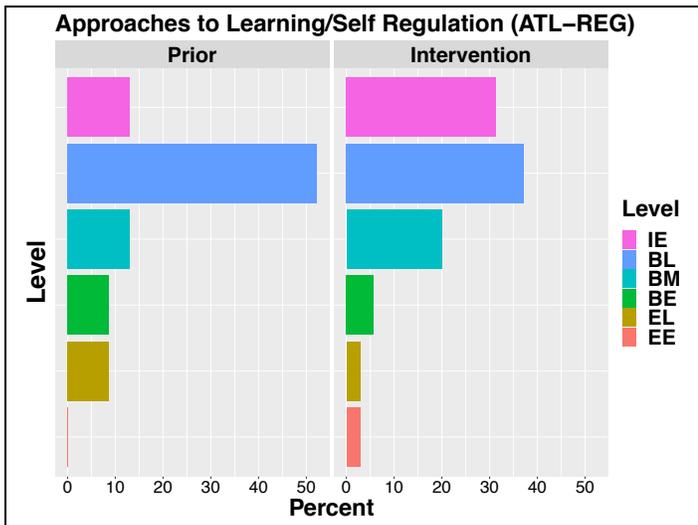


Figure 6a

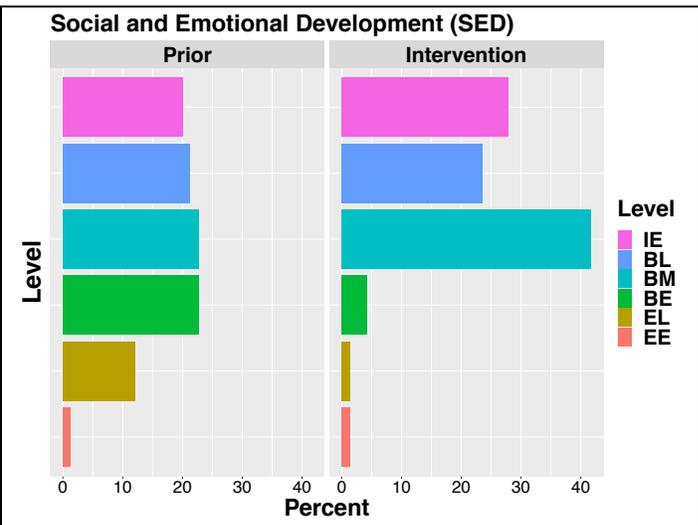


Figure 6b

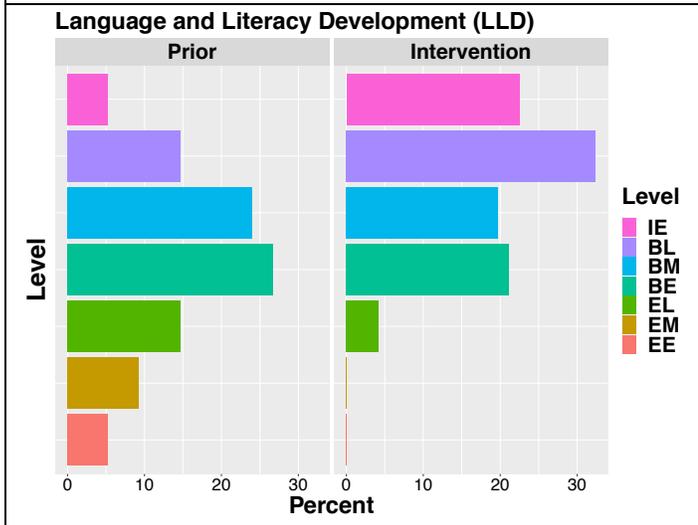


Figure 6c

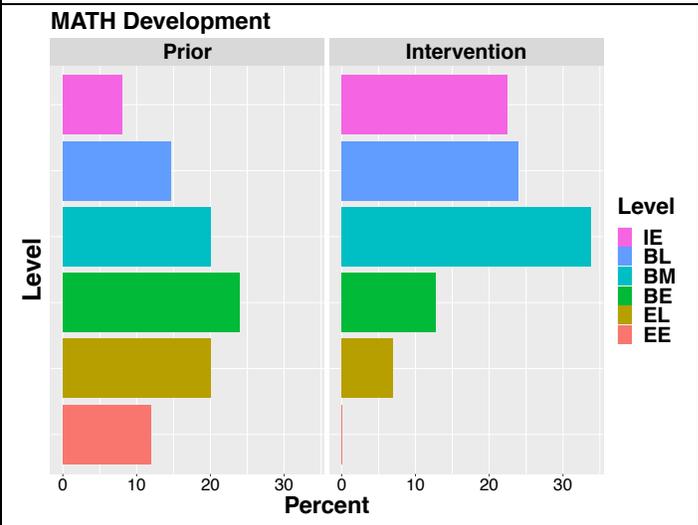


Figure 6d

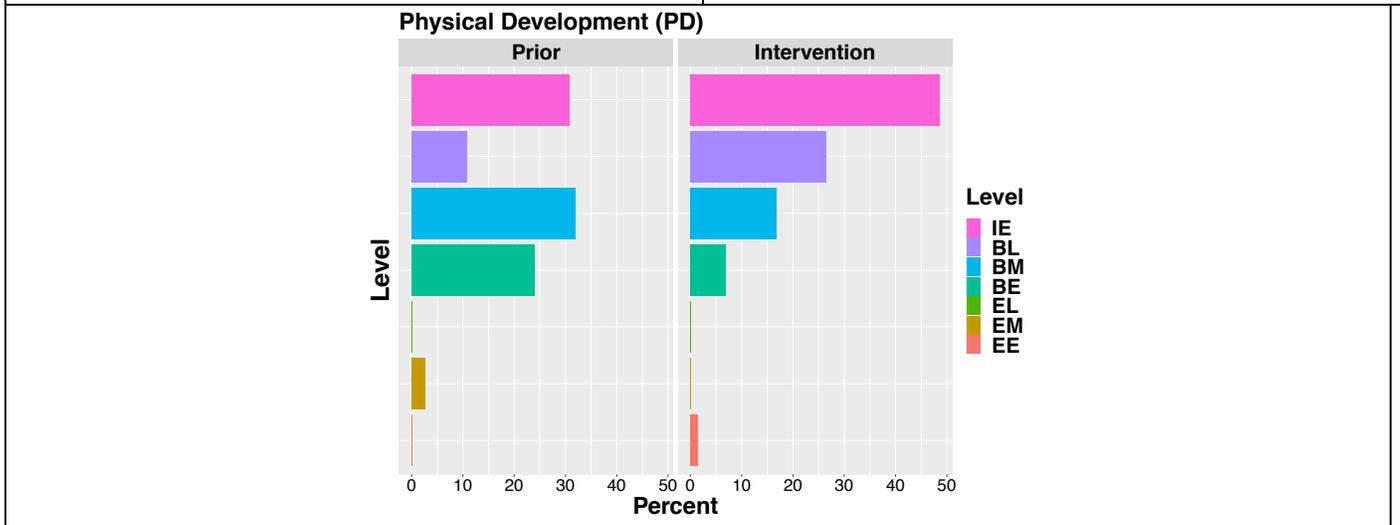


Figure 6e

Figure 6a-e: Comparing ELs' Developmental Levels in the Spring of the Prior Year and the Spring of Intervention Year

Results for Parents

- a) Capacity to support students' kindergarten readiness
- b) Connectedness to school
- c) Capacity to support child's learning at home
- d) Leadership development

Synthesis of data from parent, teacher, and administrator surveys, focus groups, and interviews yielded the following overarching findings around growth in parent capacity related to GJUESD's *Growing Strong Learners* project.

Parent Capacity to Support Kindergarten Readiness

Parent survey responses⁸ and feedback provided in parent focus groups and interviews reflected broad agreement among Fairsite Preschool parent respondents that the *Growing Strong Learners* **program activities helped parents prepare their EL children for kindergarten.** As shown below in Figure 7, parents from homes where more than one language was spoken agreed much more strongly than parents from homes where only one language is spoken that APTT helped them prepare their child for kindergarten. Specifically, parents shared that they appreciated being able to see their child's progress reports at the APTT meeting and compare their progress from one meeting to the next.

"I thought it was engaging. We talked and we did some [hands-on] exercises, which helps learning." — Parent

"[The games] are entertaining and grab their attention ... [When] you spend time with your child you see what their level is—in this case math and numbers—and you see what they know about counting." — Parent

⁸ Detailed parent survey results may be found in Appendix B.

“It was nice that they sent us home with something, because [the presenter] actually had us do the game with people at the table [during the meeting] so that we would understand, versus just talking about it and saying, ‘This is what you do,’ she actually had us do it . . . and doing the stuff hands-on does help the learning process, even for adults.” — Parent

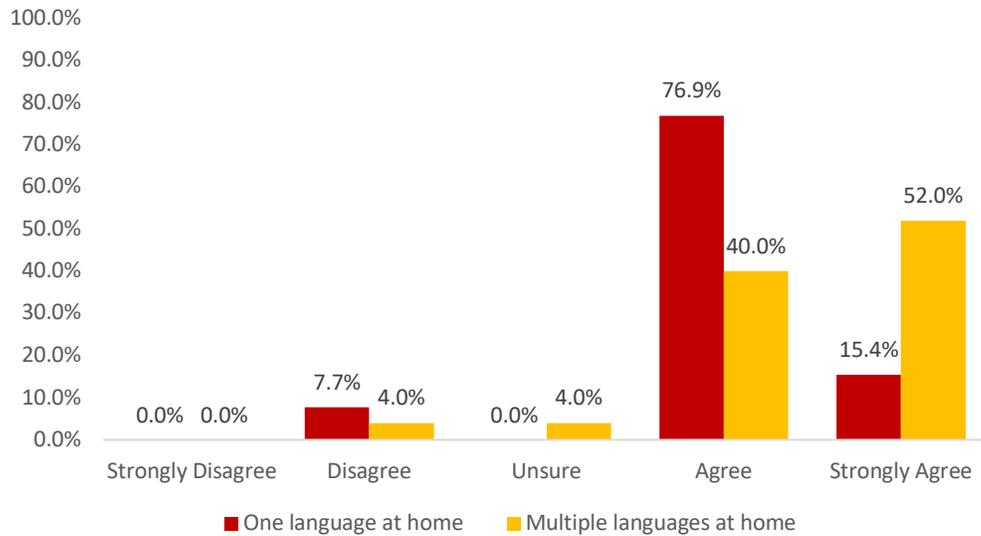


Figure 7. Parents’ level of agreement with, “The APTT meeting helped me prepare my child for kindergarten.” by whether multiple languages are spoken at home.

In addition, as shown below in Figure 8, parent survey respondents who attended an APTT meeting agreed much more strongly that their child’s **preschool provided them with information about how to help their child prepare for kindergarten** than parents who did not attend an APTT meeting.

“Years ago I had no idea, but this year, with all we have done, with the meetings we have had, and having talked about what parents need to do to prepare their children . . . now I have a better idea. Before I didn’t.” — Parent

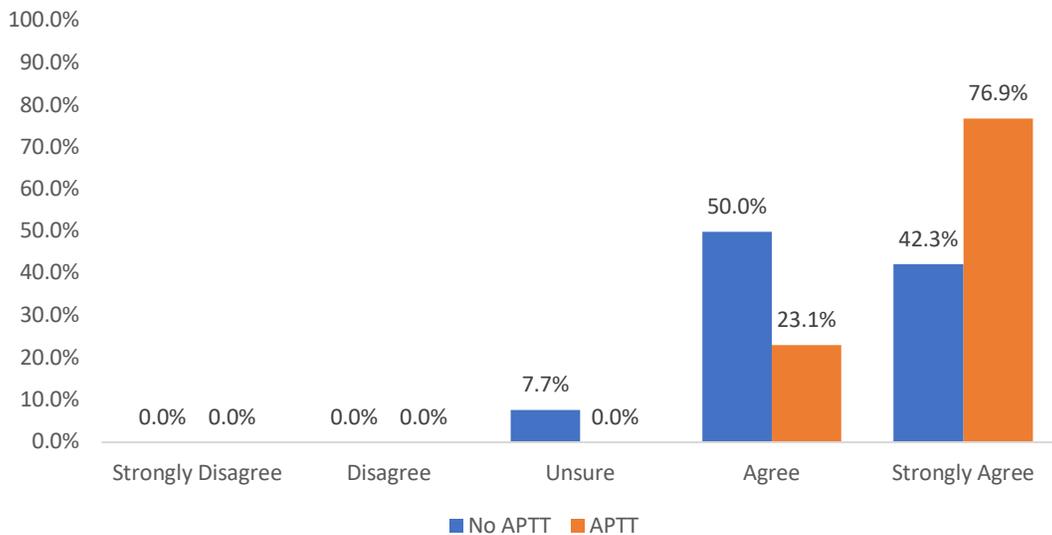


Figure 8. Parents’ level of agreement with, “My child’s preschool provides me with information about how to help my child prepare for kindergarten.” by whether they attended an APTT meeting.

Further, as shown below in Figure 9, there was stronger agreement among parent respondents to the spring parent survey than to the fall survey that the preschool provided them with information about how to help prepare their child for kindergarten, suggesting that the preschool became more adept at providing this information to parents as the intervention year progressed.

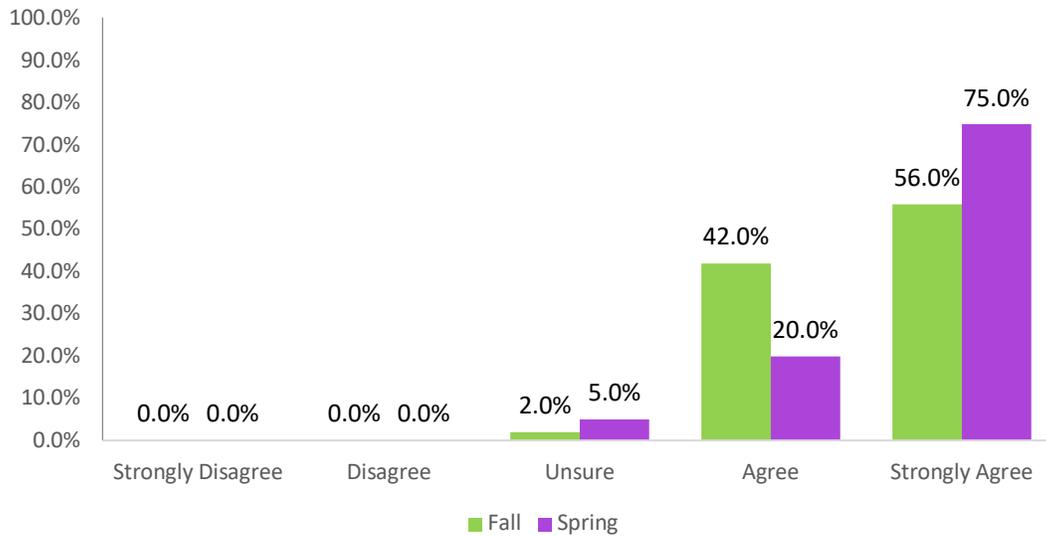


Figure 9. Parents' level of agreement with, "My child's preschool provides me with information about how to help my child prepare for kindergarten." by whether they took the survey in fall or spring.

Similarly, as shown below in Figure 10, a larger percentage of parents who attended APTT than who didn't attend **strongly agreed that they knew what they needed to do to help their child prepare for kindergarten**. And a larger percentage of parents strongly agreed on the spring survey than on the fall survey that they knew what to do to help their child prepare for kindergarten, suggesting growth in parent's knowledge in this area (Figure 11).

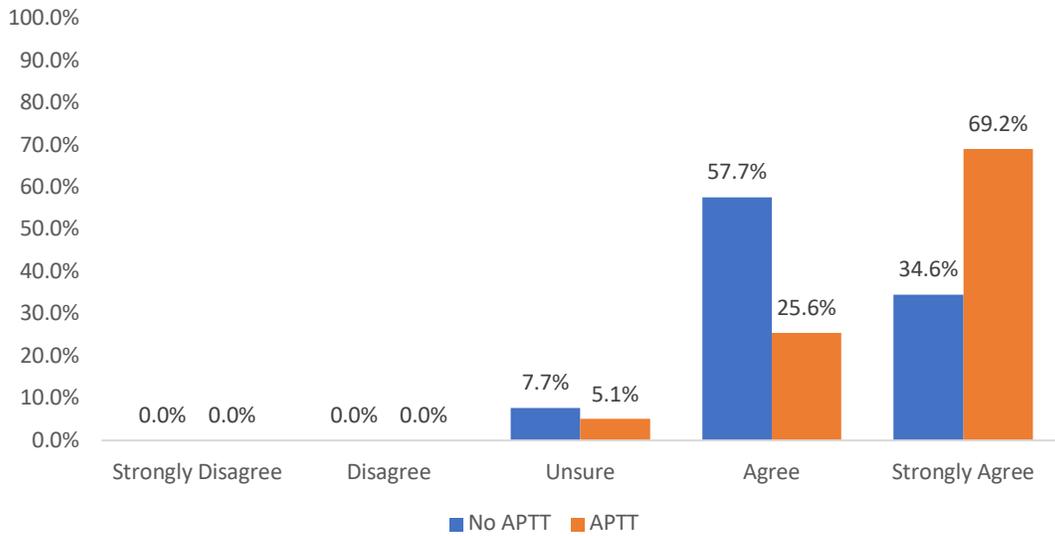


Figure 10. Parents' level of agreement with, "I know what I need to do to help my child prepare for kindergarten." by whether they attended an APTT meeting.

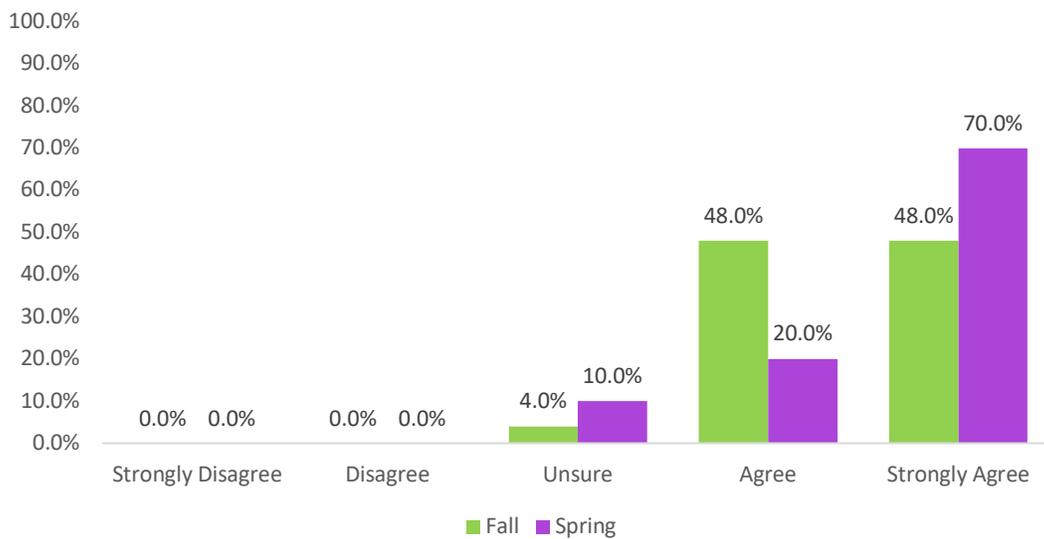


Figure 11. Parents' level of agreement with, "I know what I need to do to help my child prepare for kindergarten." by whether they took the survey in fall or spring.

Fairsite administrators agreed that parents found the APTT meetings worthwhile and that the meetings provided them with good information to help them support their children's learning

at home. Parents saw value in having the take-home game resource kits provided, as well as the training in how to teach their children using the resources.

“I think families that came [to the APTT meeting] they really enjoyed it. They walked away with good information.” — Administrator

Fairsite administrators also reported that teachers and parents saw positive growth in their students’ learning between the first and second APTT meetings. This growth was reflected in the data that teachers collected and shared with parents, and administrators attributed the growth to parents’ commitment to attending the meetings and practicing skills with their children at home.

“The feedback that we’ve been getting from the parents who have attended the first session, who also attended the second session, they were very happy with the activities. You could tell that they were actually engaged. We saw growth from the first session to the second session in some of the skills that the kids were practicing.” — Administrator

“You sit down for a parent conference and you have such a short amount of time, you can’t really teach them how to teach. And so this really lays it out for them step by step. It shows them the data of why they need to practice the skill, how to practice the skill and then to show them growth. So it was really exciting at our second APTT when they got to see the data and see the growth that their kids had made. I wish I had known about this years ago when I was a teacher. And I know that the parents really appreciate all the hard work that’s gone into it” — Administrator

Parent Connectedness to Child’s Preschool

Evaluation data triangulated across a number of sources indicated broad agreement among parent respondents that **APTT meetings helped parents feel more connected to their child’s preschool**. As shown below in Figures 12, 13, and 14, parents who attended an APTT meeting, took the survey in spring, or spoke multiple languages at home tended to agree more strongly that they felt a connection to their child’s preschool.

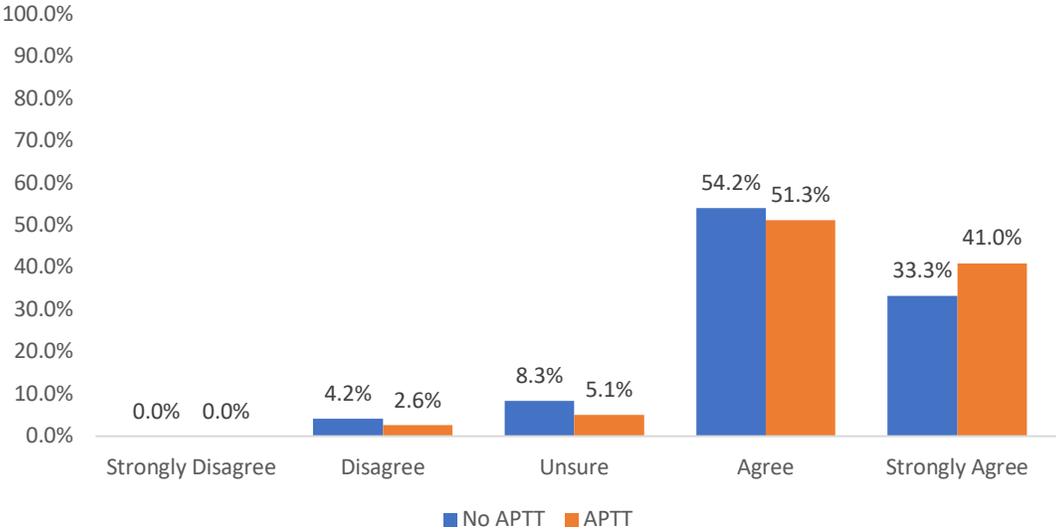


Figure 12. Parents’ level of agreement with “I feel a strong connection to my child’s preschool.” by whether they attended an APTT meeting.

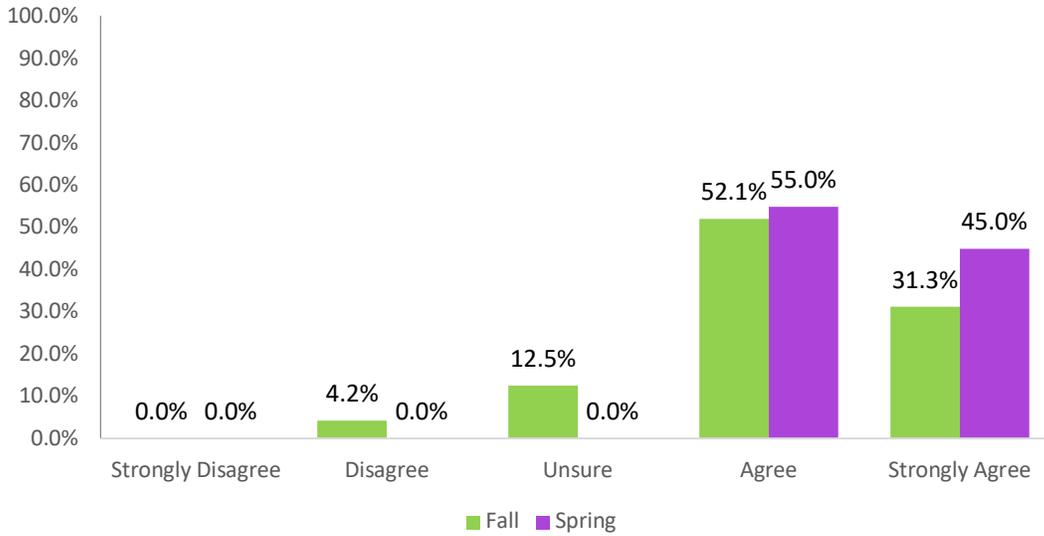


Figure 13. Parents' level of agreement with "I feel a strong connection to my child's preschool." by whether they took the survey in fall or spring.

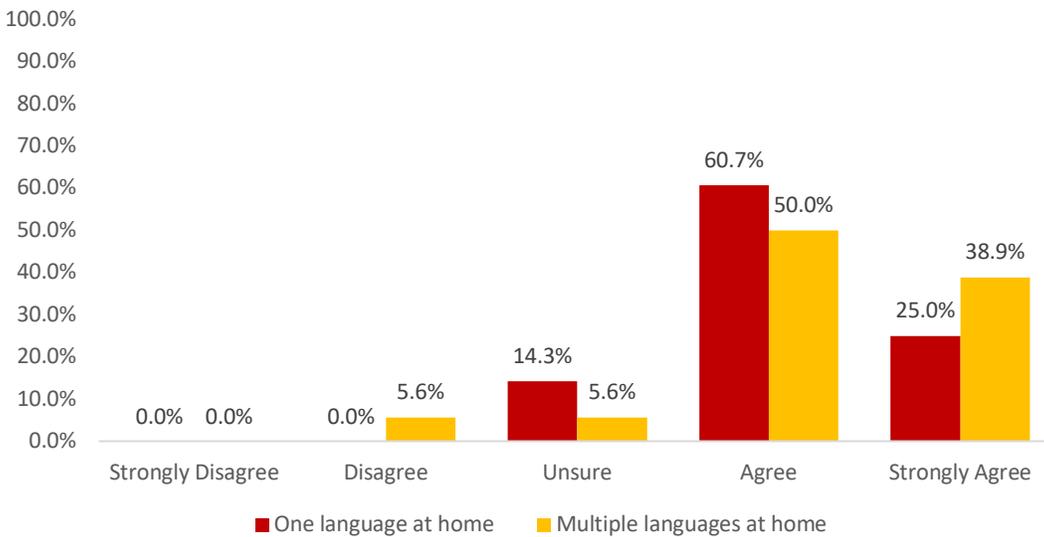


Figure 14. Parents' level of agreement with "I feel a strong connection to my child's preschool." by whether multiple languages are spoken at home.

Most Spanish-preference parents interviewed reported that they have **good communication with their child's teacher**. Some parents rely on classroom aides or bilingual teachers to facilitate communication. Parents also shared that they feel comfortable asking for help from

the BCOA coordinator. Parents expressed that they value Class Dojo as a good communication tool to receive information from school about activities and events and to communicate with teachers about their child's progress and needs. Parents also mentioned receiving information on school activities and events through flyers, phone calls, and during *Second Cup of Coffee* meetings. **Parents agreed that they are well informed of what is happening at school.** English-preference parents, most of whom shared that they are bilingual in English and Spanish, echoed these opinions, reporting good communication with teachers and satisfaction with Class Dojo.

Findings from Fairsite administrator interviews align with findings from parents. Administrators reported that the BCOAs have been extremely beneficial in supporting Spanish-speaking parents in their communications with the school — interpreting during IEP meetings or parent conferences, facilitating parent events such as APTT meetings, and building rapport with parents who otherwise might have a hard time connecting with school personnel. The *Second Cup of Coffee* meetings are run by the BCOAs and allow parents to feel more connected with one another as well as learn about community resources. Further, administrators believe that the addition of a bilingual office assistant helps Spanish-speaking families feel welcomed. Administrators also discussed the positive impact of having a Spanish-speaking teacher or assistant in every classroom, which has helped parents who would otherwise have a language barrier to connect more easily with their child's teacher. Administrators also agreed that Class Dojo has been well received by parents and helps them to stay connected to the school and informed about upcoming events. In addition, administrators reported that additional home visitors have helped to support rural families that do not have access to transportation to school. Administrators reported that home visitors have been able to build rapport with parents who are preparing to send their child to school the following year and to support them through this transition. Finally, Fairsite administrators expressed that the First 5 staff's dedicated outreach efforts to EL families have led to high rates of involvement in school activities from EL families.

“[The BCOA’s] really help to bridge that ... capacity for our parents within the community. To be able to have some voice at their child school” — Administrator

“Both [APTT] sessions we made sure we had our bilingual community outreach assistants this year, thanks to the grant. And we were able to make sure that each teacher or each session had someone bilingual. So if there was a group of parents that did not speak English, we had some available. Some of the sessions actually were only Spanish speaking parents, which was great. And the teacher in that session actually spoke Spanish, so they did the whole thing in Spanish.” — Administrator

“I think that also helps with just building those relationships with the families. Because sometimes parents don't always ... feel comfortable [if they] have that language barrier if the staff doesn't speak their home language. So, we've been working on that for the last couple years just to make sure that all families are feeling welcomed and that their child's education is just as important as anyone else's education.” — Administrator

“While we have paper newsletters, parents are now loving the fact that it's more digital era and prefer everything being alerted on their phone.” — Administrator

“We do have a lot of our families of English learners, they appear to be more engaged and more active in our school activities.” — Administrator

Teachers shared that APTT meetings provided parents with the opportunity to get to know and “team up” with one another and identify commonalities in their experiences. APTT allowed parents to communicate on a deeper level than they typically would, just seeing one another at pickup or drop-off times. The teachers shared that some of the family engagement activities are focused on promoting school readiness, but others are more focused on socialization and allowing families to connect with one another, such as the fall festival or picnic on the green.

"I liked seeing my families work together because they don't typically get to do that in class. It's just, "Good morning," and "Have a good day." And so that was fun for me getting to see them kind of team up with each other" — Teacher

Finally, parent survey results shown below in Figure 15 indicate that Fairsite parents, for the most part, did not report any school-related barriers to their involvement at school. This is particularly true for parents who participated in APTT.

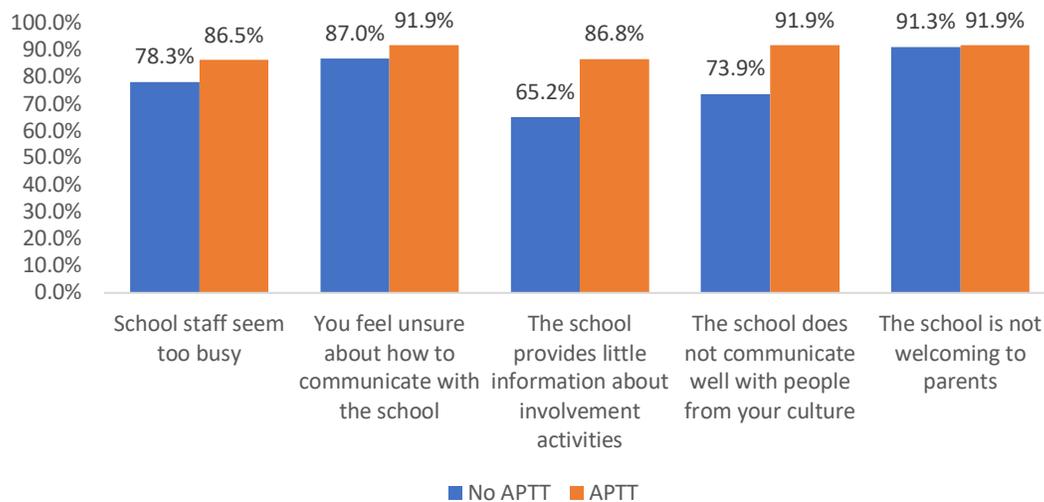


Figure 15. Parents reporting “Not a problem at all” relating to issues preventing them from being involved in their child’s preschool by whether they attended an APTT meeting in fall or spring.⁹

Parent Capacity to Support Child’s Learning at Home

In surveys, focus groups, and interviews, **most parents agreed that APTT meetings helped build their capacity and confidence to support their child’s learning.** As shown below in Figure 16, a higher percentage of parents from homes where multiple languages are spoken expressed strong agreement that APTT helped them support their child’s learning at home.

⁹ Similar positive results related to parent connectedness to school were found in the 2019–2020 California School Parent Survey. These results are presented in Appendix C.

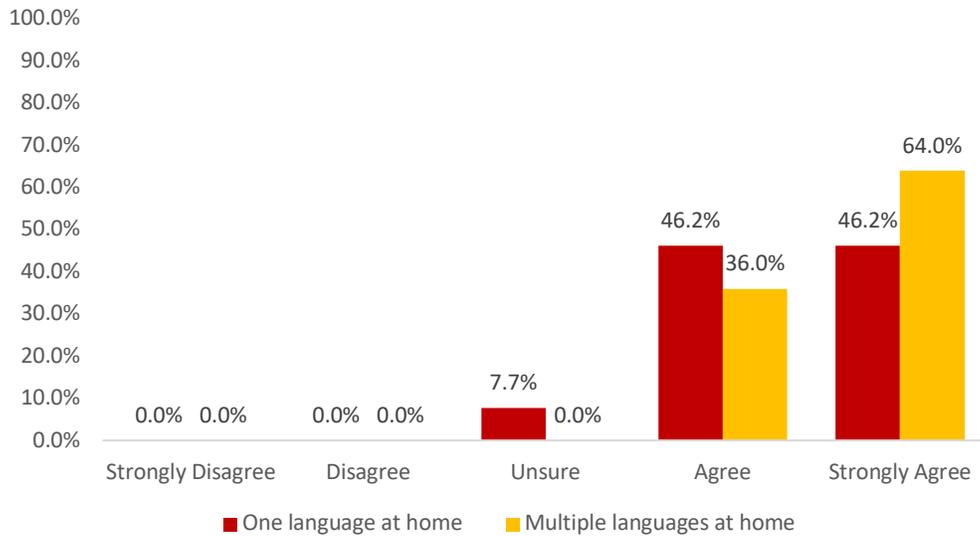


Figure 16. Parents' level of agreement with, "The APTT meeting helped me support my child's learning at home." by whether multiple languages are spoken at home.

In addition, after attending at least one APTT meeting, **most parents expressed confidence in their ability to support their children's learning at home**, with a higher percentage of parents who attended APTT reporting that they were extremely confident in this area (Figure 17).

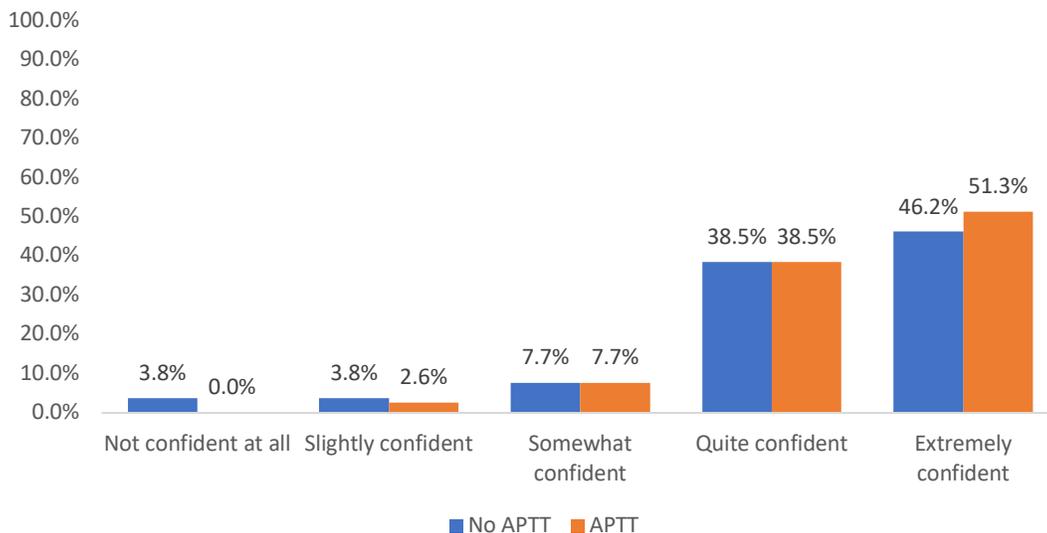


Figure 17. Parents' expression of confidence for "How confident are you in your ability to support your child's learning at home?" by whether they attended an APTT meeting.

In interviews and focus groups, Spanish-preference parents further expressed that APTT meetings were useful to them, that they appreciated the training they received around engaging in learning activities at home with their children, and that they were **making an effort to implement strategies from the APTT training at home**. Parents reported that they used the take-home games they received at APTT and found them to be fun and helpful. Some parents gave examples of how they modified the games to keep their child engaged.

“For me it’s a big help. At home we play with the cards, and he tries to be the teacher. He asks us: ‘What letter is this?’ And we pretend like we don’t know and say the wrong thing, and he says, ‘No, no—try again!’ And then we say, ‘It’s an F,’ and he says, ‘Very good!’” — Parent

In interviews and surveys, teachers reported that they received positive feedback from parents, sharing that they successfully implemented the games and activities from the APTT meetings at home with their children. Teachers stated that parents were very grateful for the materials provided to them for free, as well as for the training to be able to implement the activities at home with their children. Teachers believed that parents found it helpful to have each APTT meeting focused on a particular skill for their children to work on.

“The parents loved it. The parents very much appreciated it. My parents in my class that attended.... They loved it. They took the games home. They played the games. We played the games in class with the kids, so that part was great. They loved the take-home stuff and parents love free stuff as it is.” — Teacher

Fairsite administrators agreed that it was clear from the comments and anecdotes that parents shared at the second APTT meeting that many of them have been incorporating the activities they learned about at the previous meeting into their daily routines with their children and other family members. Administrators shared that the kits provided to parents at the APTT

meetings gave them the materials as well as the instructions to be able to engage their children in educational activities at home. Administrators also mentioned that parents expressed interest in monitoring their children’s growth in assessment scores as a result of their work at home.

“We know they were actually practicing the games at home and they were excited to share with the other parents how they had extended the games. I sat through a few of the actual APTT meetings and some of the parents were sharing how now when they go on walks they’re subitizing. Like the moms ask, “How many red cars do you see?” And kids quickly can say, “Oh, there’s two red cars parked,” or whatever. So they took what we had shown them and they extended it. And you could see how proud they were, that-... they were actually doing this with their children.” — Administrator

“[The take-home game] kits created that were part of this, [are tools for] meaningful parent engagement ... the kits have the materials, the instructions, so parents know how to engage their child on the materials that they’re taking home.” — Administrator

“We had dads there as well, in the sessions that I was there. We don’t always get to see fathers coming to these type of meetings. But it was nice, and you had both mom and dad there and they were working together and learning together... So that, yeah, it was really, really powerful to see that dynamic.” — Administrator

Parent Leadership Development

As shown below in Figures 18, 19, and 20, a larger percentage of parents who attended an APTT meeting reported that they felt **confident in their ability to carry out a parent leadership role at their child’s preschool**, compared to parents who did not attend APTT. In addition, parents who took the survey in the spring tended to agree more that they felt confident in their ability to carry out a parent leadership role at their child’s preschool than parents who took the survey in fall, suggesting progression in parents’ confidence in this area. Further, parents from homes where multiple languages were spoken tended to agree slightly more that they felt confident in

their ability to carry out a parent leadership role at their child’s preschool than parents from homes where only one language was spoken.

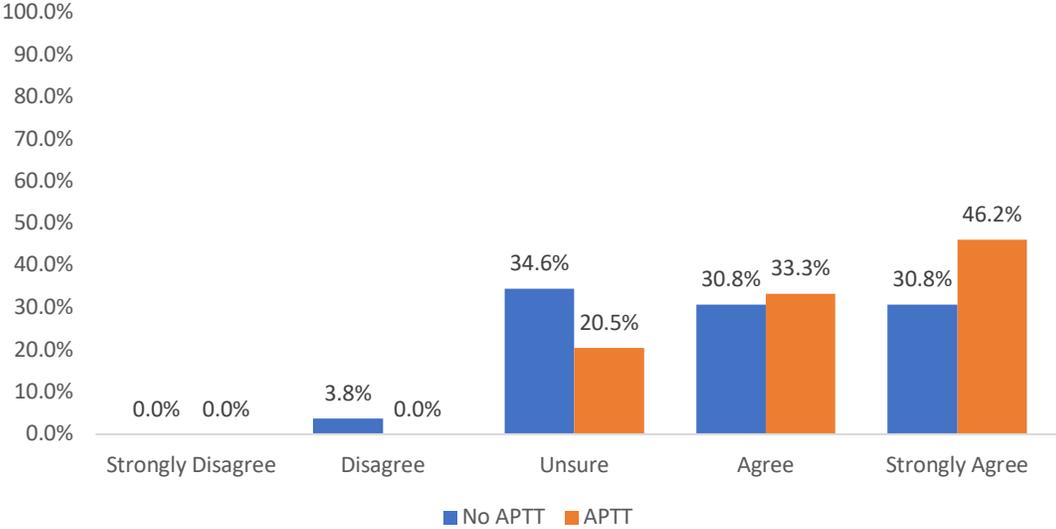


Figure 18. Parents’ level of agreement with “I am confident in my ability to carry out a parent leadership role at my child's preschool.” by whether they attended an APTT meeting in fall or spring.

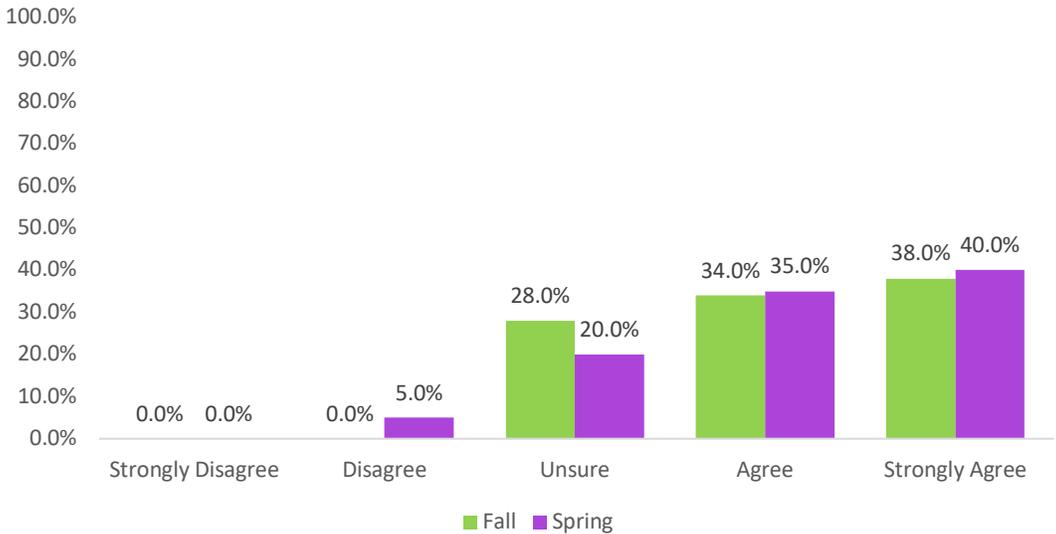


Figure 19. Parents’ level of agreement with “I am confident in my ability to carry out a parent leadership role at my child's preschool.” by whether they took the survey in fall or spring.

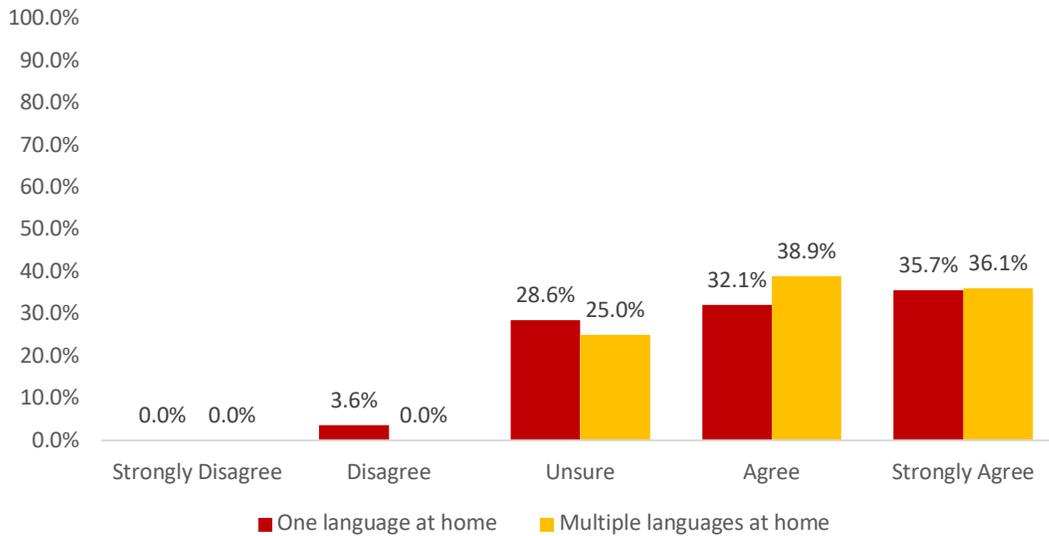


Figure 20. Parents' level of agreement with "I am confident in my ability to carry out a parent leadership role at my child's preschool." by whether multiple languages are spoken at home.

When asked in interviews and focus groups about their participation in leadership at the school, parents mentioned attending parent meetings when possible, volunteering at school events, and helping the teacher in the classroom. Parents shared that work and family responsibilities were barriers to participating in leadership. Administrators shared that they are working on strategies to make parents more aware of what leadership opportunities are available to them.

Some parents reported that they had participated in Listening Circles — an opportunity for parents to voice concerns and ideas to be addressed by school administration. The parents who participated in Listening Circles greatly valued this leadership opportunity. They felt it was a positive experience and spoke about it with enthusiasm. Parents appreciated being able to bring up concerns about the school and contribute ideas for improvement and have their voices heard, and then see changes promptly go into effect. Administrators agreed that the Listening Circles have been a success, giving parents the opportunity to voice concerns and suggestions in a forum that includes teachers and district personnel, as well as parents. Administrators reported that they have acted to make changes based on parent concerns and priorities expressed in the Listening Circles. For example, additional fencing was installed on the

preschool campus, due to concerns raised by parents at the Listening Circles about the safety of students while outside on school grounds.

The preschool's Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) was also a productive venue for parents to practice leadership skills. Fairsite administrators described the origin of the idea for the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings, developed by parent leaders who participated in Listening Circles advocating for a forum to continue discussion of concerns and priorities. Fairsite administrators reported that PAC meetings have been attended by both returning parents who participated last year and new parents joining for the first time. Returning parents have shown leadership within the group. Parents at the PAC meetings have developed new events and activities for family involvement, such as gardening and beautification days. Parents at the PAC meetings have been brainstorming ideas to get more parents involved in school events in general, as well as leadership opportunities, such as joining future PAC meetings.

"One parent was quick to say, 'You know what? At the end of the day it's up to us, it's up to the parents to be here.' I make it my priority to be here." —Administrator

"Mostly the same parents that started with us last year are still there this year because their children have moved over to our four-year-old class ... And then we have some new parents that are learning and they're getting ideas off of each other. 'Well, this is what we did when we first started.' So it's just getting them comfortable with that leadership role of, 'Okay, you've been here longer. How can you help this new parent just barely coming in?' That's been really powerful as well." — Administrator

"One of the things that I absolutely love about our listening circles is that things that come out of these, the questions or the conversations, there're things that we can put into play immediately. And the other thing is that obviously it will be added into our tasks and what we need to grow in at Fairsite." — Administrator

Results for Teachers

- a) Capacity to develop genuine relationships with families of EL students
- b) Capacity to effectively facilitate family engagement activities
- c) Capacity to support kindergarten readiness for EL students

Teacher Capacity to Develop Genuine Relationships with families of EL students

As shown below in Figures 21 and 22, **most teachers reported that they were confident or very confident in building relationships with EL families** that lead to partnerships to support children’s kindergarten readiness. In their open-ended survey responses,¹⁰ teachers expressed that they have seen a more approachable environment for collaboration and an increase in communication between teachers and parents throughout the *Growing Strong Learners* project.



“I think that they got to know me on a little bit more of a personal level, and I think that that really helped with them feeling comfortable afterwards to share with me that what activities they were continuing to do at home.” — Teacher

“I have learned how to make activities more accommodating for my EL families and what they needed from me by reaching out and asking them what they needed.” — Teacher

“[APTT] made me more aware of the need to work with parents.” — Teacher



¹⁰ Detailed teacher survey results may be found in Appendix B.

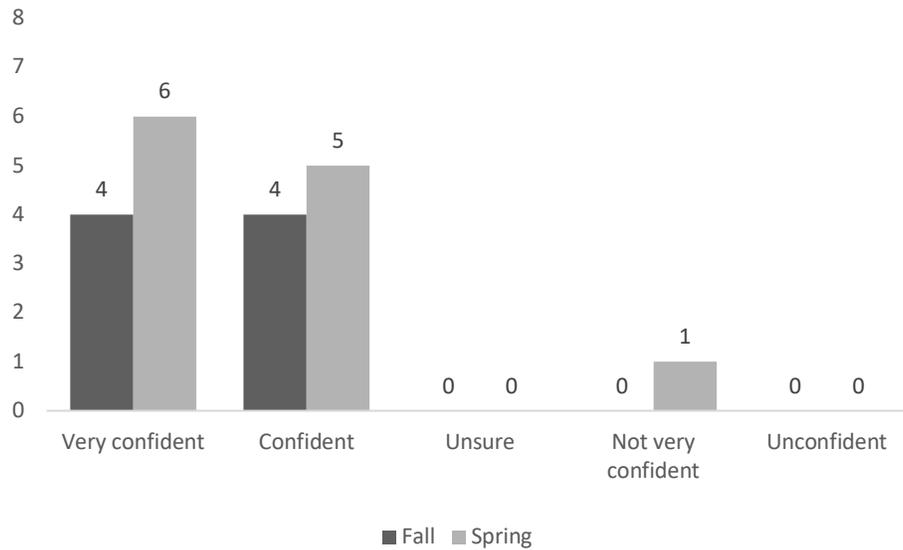


Figure 21. Teachers' levels of confidence around "Building genuine relationships with EL families."

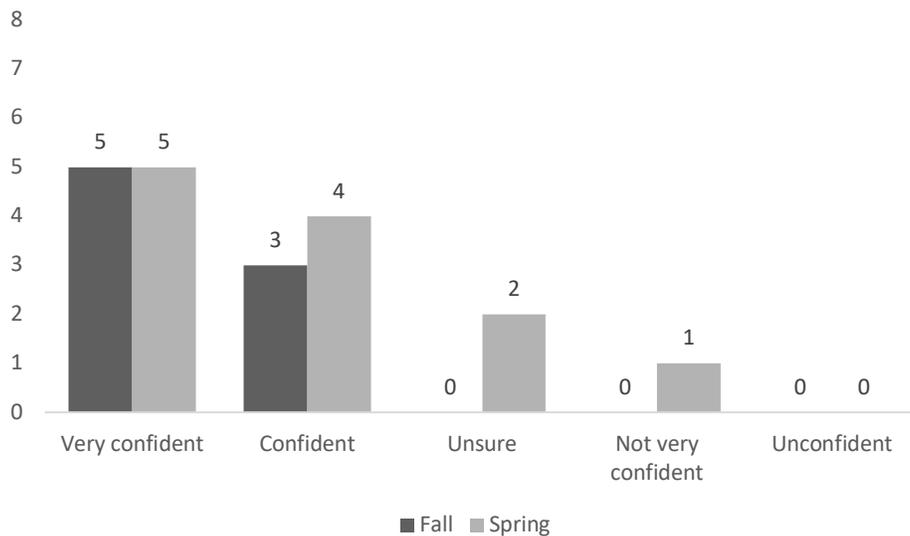


Figure 22. Teachers' ratings of confidence in "Partnering with EL families to support kindergarten readiness."

In interviews, teachers noted the difference that APTT made in the confidence of EL parents to engage in learning with their children at home, teachers building personal relationships with families, and helping families connect with each other. In addition, skills parents learned through APTT were put into practice when preschool switched to a distance learning model in

March. The relationships teachers built with families through APTT helped them maintain communication and partner more effectively with parents during distance learning.

Teacher Capacity to Effectively Facilitate Family Engagement Activities

In their survey responses, most teachers were positive about the training they received to facilitate the APTT meetings. They were very complimentary of the trainer and appreciated the individualized support they received throughout the process. Teachers reflected that presenting at the APTT meetings became easier after they had gained experience in the first meeting. Teachers stated that they relied more heavily on the APTT trainer for presenting at the first meeting, and then felt more comfortable presenting more independently at the second meeting. Teachers expressed in their survey responses that the APTT training helped them to recognize the importance of increasing parent involvement at school. Teachers also shared that the training gave them specific ideas of how to get parents involved but still make it fun and enjoyable.

Teachers cited moments in which they were able to personally empower parents to feel more confident in supporting their children's learning at home in preparation for kindergarten. For example, one teacher invited parents to volunteer in the classroom so that the parents could observe their child's progress in the classroom setting. Another teacher who doesn't speak Spanish collaborated with her Spanish-speaking instructional assistant to show parents how to play learning games at home with their children during distance learning.

“The fact that we were teaching them how to do the activities went very well and I got a really good feedback with that because again, for those that attended the second APTT meeting, again, we gave them another packet, and so they were still something different than the first one. And so, I got really good feedback with that” — Teacher

“At least three parents came and they told me, “Oh my gosh, I wasn't aware that I could do that.” And so I think that..., even if I can get through to one, to just one [parent], I think that that's very important.” — Teacher

Specific strategies teachers reported implementing for more successful family engagement activities included:

- Engaging with parents individually and in large and small groups
- Translating information into Spanish
- Demonstrating and modeling activities for parents
- Reaching out to parents of EL students to ask them what they need
- Answering parents’ questions and learning from them

“At first the concept of more meetings for parent participation felt overwhelming. With all that is required of teachers it felt like just one more thing to do. But.. after the second APTT meeting and a little more parent participation I feel that it can really be beneficial to parents.” — Teacher

“I think that my APTT [presentation] went really well. I felt very comfortable with the material that I was presenting . . . I liked the bonds that I made with my parents during this whole thing. I got to meet parents that I never get to see because babysitters drop off and pick up, and so it was a nice connection with the family doing this.” — Teacher

“I had positive feedback from my families. All of my families liked it, enjoyed it, they felt that they got benefit from it. I felt that was a positive thing.” — Teacher

“I had really good feedback too. . .The APTT meeting itself I think it performed well, the parents did get a lot from it and they were telling me that the games were really fun and they were still playing with them at home . . .” — Teacher

Teacher Capacity to Support Kindergarten Readiness for EL Students

The first year of the *Growing Strong Learners* project brought new learning opportunities for teachers. In addition to learning new ways to connect with and work their EL students’ parents to support learning at home via APTT, teachers continued to grow in their ability to support ELs in the classroom through professional development training and their professional learning communities.

As shown below in Figure 23, a large majority of **teachers reported confidence in their ability to support kindergarten readiness for ELs.**

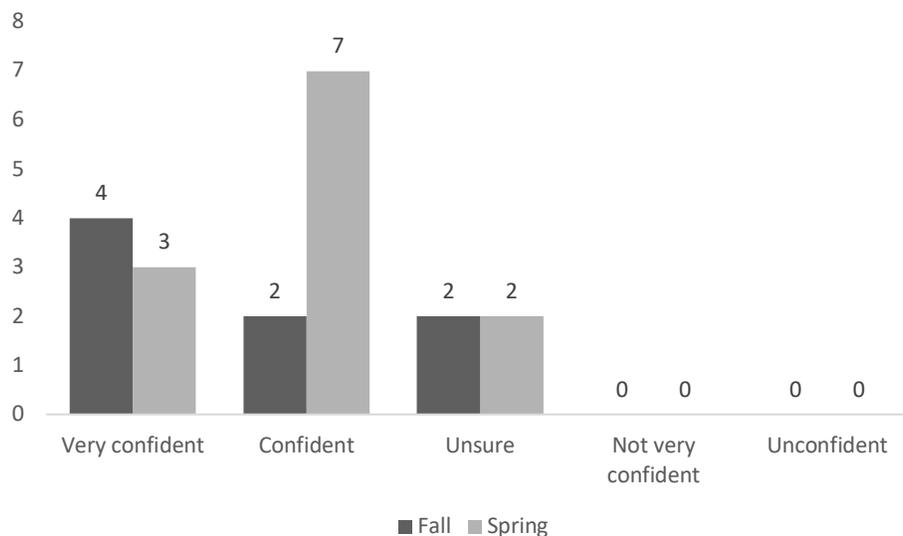


Figure 23. Teachers’ ratings of confidence in “Supporting kindergarten readiness for ELs.”

In addition, several teachers shared that they have learned the importance of social emotional learning in preparing their students for kindergarten. Teachers shared that the foundation of social-emotional learning is perhaps even more important than academic milestones in preparing for kindergarten.

“I learned more about the need for a strong foundation in social-emotional skills before pushing academic requirements on them.” — Teacher

Teachers provided many examples of how they were able to help parents prepare their child for kindergarten through more effectively supporting at-home learning. One teacher reflected on her experience with a parent of an EL student during APTT meetings, and another mentioned that she was excited so many parents wanted to increase learning at home, since she appreciated the opportunity to continue coaching parents.

“The parent] came to both meetings and she was surprised to find out that there were different ways that she could help her child at home. She really struggles, she [says she] wants her daughter to learn English “the proper way.” She has a lot of worries that she is pronouncing her letters incorrectly to her daughter. Spanish letters are pronounced differently than English letters. With the translator, I let her know that either way is good. I said, ‘Either way she’s hearing you.’” Coming to these meetings, she has really gained a lot of confidence in herself, being able to teach her child at home..” — Teacher

“[After APTT], a lot of the parents were like, ‘I didn't realize that so much is going to fall on us to really teach our children. Normally we just think they go to school and they learn everything.’ And I had a lot of parents that ended up continually coming back saying like, ‘Hey, what can I do for this?’ It was great that they were seeking out that support. Sometimes parents are just quiet and they're scared or they just feel like they're doing something wrong. And I think that we bridged that gap. It's something we [parents and teachers] can do together.” — Teacher

Several teachers who did not speak Spanish fluently mentioned that having instructional assistants trained in ELD was helpful for meeting the instructional needs of EL students during the school day. One teacher reported that she worked closely with the bilingual instructional assistant in her classroom, teaming up to use ELD strategies to support learning for the ELs in her class. Bilingual instructional assistants with ELD training were also effective during the shelter-in-place orders when children could not attend school. Several teachers reported that their instructional assistants worked closely with Spanish-language dominant parents to more effectively implement distance learning. One Spanish-speaking teacher who had received ELD training expressed excitement in a possible dual-language immersion program currently being considered by the district. Not only had she been using ELD strategies with her EL students, but she had begun to think about dual-language learning for all her students and introduce Spanish vocabulary when working with her EL and English monolingual students.

“I not only teach my kiddos in English vocabulary, but to also introduce [vocabulary] in Spanish. I have always known that it's very important for ELs to keep their home language. And so, I read to them in Spanish and English and I have quite a few bilingual books that when I'm reading as a read-aloud in my circle time, I read them in English and in Spanish.” — Teacher

“I saw improvement with my students and being able to recognize the groups and subitizing.” — Teacher

“We are continuing to play in our classroom. I do see some major improvement.”
— Teacher

Several teachers mentioned in interviews and focus groups that more defined shared understanding of kindergarten readiness would be helpful. This was also mentioned by parents in focus groups. Administrators reported that there have been numerous efforts to increase collaboration between Pre-K, TKK, and kindergarten teachers within the district, including the opportunity for Pre-K teachers to observe kindergarten classrooms to understand the expectations for kindergarten students. Administrators also noted efforts to align Pre-K benchmarks with kindergarten benchmarks to assess students more effectively in terms of kindergarten readiness and the focus on helping teachers develop their Spanish-language skills to enhance their ability to teach EL students in both English and Spanish and to facilitate the possible launch of a dual-immersion program in the future.

“A lot of our bilingual teachers have been taking classes through [bilingual teachers professional development program at Loyola Marymount University] in academic Spanish so that they can increase their Spanish proficiency in getting ready to launch our dual immersion programs.” — Administrator

Reflections and Considerations

Building on its multi-year effort to increase systems capacity and to personalize experiences for its learners, GJUESD implemented an ambitious project to increase Pre-K English Learners’ readiness for kindergarten. The project, *Growing Strong Learners*, was implemented at Fairsite Preschool and included capacity-building efforts for parents, teachers, and administrators. The project involved coordinated efforts to increase parents’ connections to school while supporting parents in implementing learning at home with their children. Teachers received professional development focused on increasing parents’ connections to school and building

parents' ability to promote student learning at home. Teachers also received professional development in instructional strategies for supporting ELs' learning. A team of outreach staff at the preschool worked to build home-school connections and provided support to EL families as they engaged in parent and family-focused activities at school.

District staff and other stakeholders who designed the current *Growing Strong Learners* model predicted that by raising parents' awareness of their child's learning activities at school and of kindergarten readiness strategies, and by providing tools and support to parents, parents would be more likely to engage with their child in grade-appropriate learning activities at home, extending learning beyond school hours. At the same time, it was predicted that by increasing teachers' ability to build relationships with EL families and to implement English language development and other instructional strategies supportive of EL students, ELs would have greater access to the Pre-K curriculum and richer opportunities to learn.

Multiple sources of data were collected and analyzed to measure and understand the impact of the *Growing Strong Learners* project at Fairsite Preschool. The evaluation examined the effects of the program on Pre-K ELs' readiness for kindergarten. In addition, the evaluation explored changes in parents and teachers over the course of the school year. Overall, the evaluation findings suggest that the project was successful in increasing opportunities for building relationships between teachers and families, family engagement, and in increasing parents' connectedness to school. Findings also suggest that Fairsite parents grew in their understanding their child's learning needs and in their capacity to address those needs at home. Findings from data analysis further suggest that the *Growing Strong Learners* project supported kindergarten readiness in Fairsite Preschool's Pre-K EL learners. ELs growth on the DRDP assessment met and surpassed that of their non-EL peers in several domains.

Though GJUESD's *Growing Strong Learners* project appeared successful in supporting kindergarten readiness for EL students, there were some challenges with implementation that should be noted. For example, teachers felt that their buy-in was not fully obtained and initially resisted implementing APTT, citing the additional burden placed upon them to prepare for and

carry out the meetings. Preparation includes creating a unique slide deck adapted from a template provided by the APTT trainer, creating and assembling take-home learning games for parents, and assessing children on a particular school readiness skill. Teachers are also expected to practice their presentations and reach out to parents in a number of ways, such as by inviting them to attend the meetings. It became apparent during the fall trimester that, due to the structure of the school day and numerous projects ongoing at the preschool, teachers were struggling to take on and complete preparation tasks for APTT. The district, along with the teachers, responded to this problem by shifting many of the burdens of preparation from teachers to others, including administrators. In addition, the APTT coach co-facilitated many of the APTT parent meetings with teachers, relieving some of the stress of implementing the meetings. An administrator met with parents who were not able to attend an APTT meeting to convey information presented in the meeting and to pass along the take-home learning games. Teachers at Fairsite were not required to assess children for APTT purposes, nor were they required to develop assessments, as APTT teachers participants do at other sites. These tasks were performed by administrators and other staff. Despite these changes, evaluation findings suggested that parents, teachers, and students benefitted from APTT. Parents reported that they enjoyed APTT activities, felt more confident in supporting learning at home, and that they continued to implement learning games and other educational activities at home. Teachers reported that APTT meetings helped them develop richer relationships with parents and that parents were using the take-home learning games at home.

Other challenges with implementing APTT included:

- difficulty finding a time of day to hold parent meetings and ensuring sufficient staffing and childcare,
- difficulty achieving parent buy-in and turnout at parent meetings, necessitating numerous follow-up meetings, and
- lack of a clear set of kindergarten readiness standards for parents to reference.

Though the current findings are positive, some limitations of the evaluation are to be noted. The evaluation did not directly test the efficacy or impact of the Growing Strong Learners'

project. Generally speaking, impact/efficacy evaluation is rarely advisable in the first year of implementation. During the year, researchers and educators discovered, investigated, and adapted to challenges with implementation and data collection. Relatedly, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the intervention and data collection. Another limitation of this evaluation is that a specific criterion or set of criteria for kindergarten readiness was not established. The DRDP was designed to downplay categorical descriptions of kindergarten readiness (e.g., ready/not ready, etc.). Instead, the DRDP emphasizes support for children’s progress along a developmental continuum that spans infancy through the end of kindergarten. The question of whether children who participate in *Growing Strong Learners* are more or less ready for kindergarten is subject to interpretation according to specific definitions of kindergarten readiness.

GJUESD’s *Growing Strong Learners* model — including increasing parent engagement and connectedness to school, and enhancing teachers’ capacity to deliver English language development for their EL students during instruction — appears promising as a strategy to prepare ELs for kindergarten and for continued school success, to the extent that teacher buy-in can be achieved and parent participation ensured. While further evaluation is warranted, the combination of strategies implemented at the preschool appear to be valuable in promoting kindergarten readiness and in supporting EL students to achieve at similar levels as their non-EL peers. Further evaluation would provide a deeper understanding of how each aspect of the project, such as parents supporting learning at home and teacher instructional strategies, interact and contribute to outcomes. Additional impact evaluation would allow for researchers and practitioners to reproduce and scale the model to reach more EL students and their families.

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