

A Longitudinal Study of the Pinellas County Schools Early Success Program (ESP)  
1999-2000 ESP Cohort  
Results for 2000 through 2004

Pinellas County Schools  
Research and Accountability  
April 2005

## *Executive Summary*

The Early Success Program (ESP) is an early intervention program for first graders who are not successfully learning to read. It was first implemented in a few Pinellas County Schools in 1990-91 and went district-wide by 1994-95. Early studies showed that ESP students performed as well as or better than average students and better than a control group on all posttest assessments at the end of first grade. However, a longitudinal study had never been conducted.

In this study, the 1999-2000 cohort of ESP participants was compared to a matched sample of their non-ESP peers. Analyses were conducted investigating grade-level retention rates and end-of-year assessment results throughout the elementary school years.

In terms of retention, the ESP group consistently had a higher percentage of students retained than did the matched group (Non ESP). The difference ranged from one to six percentage points.

For the end-of-year assessment results, the matched group (Non-ESP) consistently had a higher percentage of students on grade level (proficient) on both PIAP (Grades 1 and 2) and FCAT (Grades 3-5). This difference ranged from 11 to 16 percentage points. Additionally, the matched group (Non ESP) consistently had an approximately 100-point higher mean developmental scale score than did the ESP group.

Even though yearly progress monitoring demonstrated that ESP students performed higher than a control group in the first four years (1990-1994), the results of this study do not support the effectiveness of the program. These results are likely influenced by the evolution and dilution of the program that took place over time as it was expanded throughout the district.

### ***Background Information***

The Early Success Program (ESP) is affiliated with the Accelerated Literacy Learning Program (A.L.L.) at the University of South Florida. The program is based, in part, on the work and theories of Marie Clay. In 1990-91 Pinellas County Schools began implementing ESP in three Chapter 1 (Title I) schools. More schools were added each year until the program became district-wide in 1994-95, serving all Pinellas County elementary schools.

### **Program Description**

ESP is an early intervention program for first graders who are not successfully learning to read. One-on-one instruction is based on each child's individual strengths and needs. Each daily thirty-minute lesson consists of authentic reading and writing activities.

The assessment used in ESP is the Running Record which is a systematic way of recording a student's reading behavior and measures the reading accuracy. Students are selected for the ESP program based on the Running Record score; those with the lowest Running Record scores are selected to receive ESP services.

The main goals of the Early Success Program are to provide intensive teacher training and to help first graders become strategic, independent readers. ESP also claims to improve the students' self-concepts by enabling them to become successful readers.

The ESP program began with a two-teacher model in which two ESP teachers share one first grade class. Each teacher works one half-day serving individual students in ESP and the other half-day as a classroom teacher. The number of students impacted by the program is not limited to the students who receive one-on-one instruction. All students in the shared classroom benefit from the strategies and techniques that the ESP teachers learn in training. As the program began to evolve, a one-teacher model developed in which one ESP teacher spends the entire day working with at least eight ESP students.

ESP teachers receive a year of intensive training. The ESP teachers act as resource personnel for other teachers in their schools by sharing knowledge and techniques that help students learn to read. The Early Success Program also offers workshops, components, and school-based training for other primary teachers in the county to help them support and improve the reading abilities of struggling students.

### **Early Program Results**

Early results (1991-1994) showed that ESP students performed as well as or better than average students and better than a control group on all posttest assessments at the end of first grade. In the following years, the program was monitored closely on an annual basis – each year about 50-60% of students who completed the ESP program have been reading on or above grade level by the end of first grade. However, participants have not been compared against a control group and a longitudinal study has never been conducted.

### **The Current Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of ESP over time. The students who participated in ESP in 1999-2000 were selected since they recently completed elementary school. They were compared to a matched sample of students who did not participate in ESP. Grade

level promotion/retention and end of year assessment results were examined for each year of elementary school (2000-2004).

### *Sample*

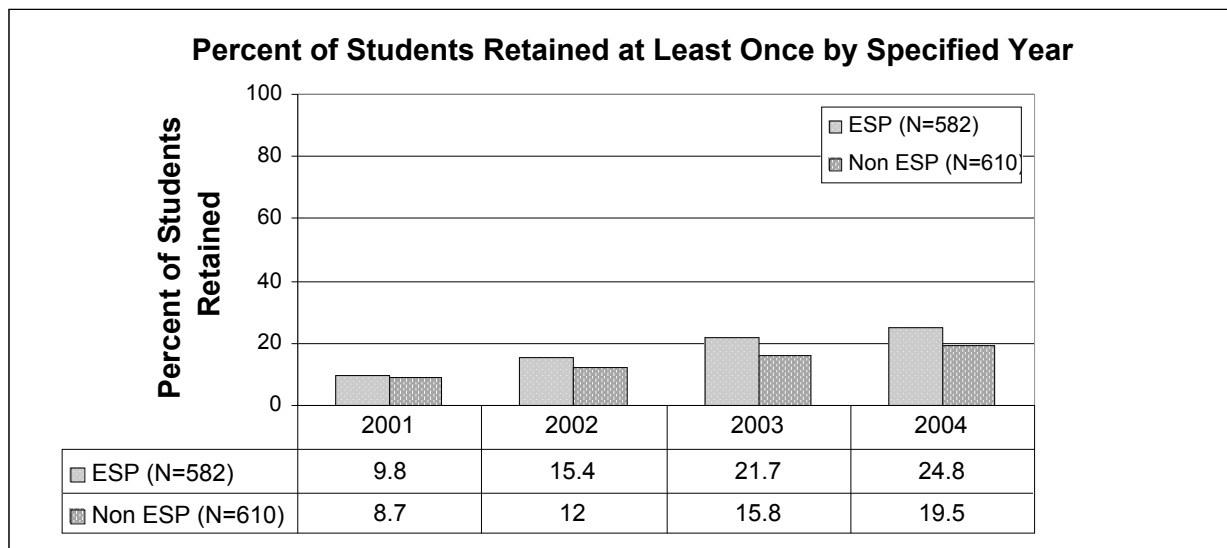
The original sample consisted of the 1032 students who participated in ESP in the 1999-2000 school year. The students (N=277) who did not complete at least 40 lessons or who scored below a Level 16 on the running record (the criteria used to define a complete ESP program) were dropped from the sample. The remaining 755 ESP students were then matched with non-ESP students based on gender, race, school, lunch status, ESE status, and the result of Pinellas Instructional Assessment Plan( PIAP) in the September of First Grade. If an exact match could not be identified, a student at a different school with a similar free and reduced lunch population was used for the match. Sixteen students had no matches.

For the analysis of grade level retention/promotion, only those students from the sample who were enrolled in Pinellas County Schools all five years (N=610 for ESP group and N=583 for Non-ESP group) were selected. For the test performance analysis, only those students who had test scores at the appropriate grade level all five years (N=380 for ESP group and N=373 for Non-ESP group) were selected.

### *Analysis*

#### Retention

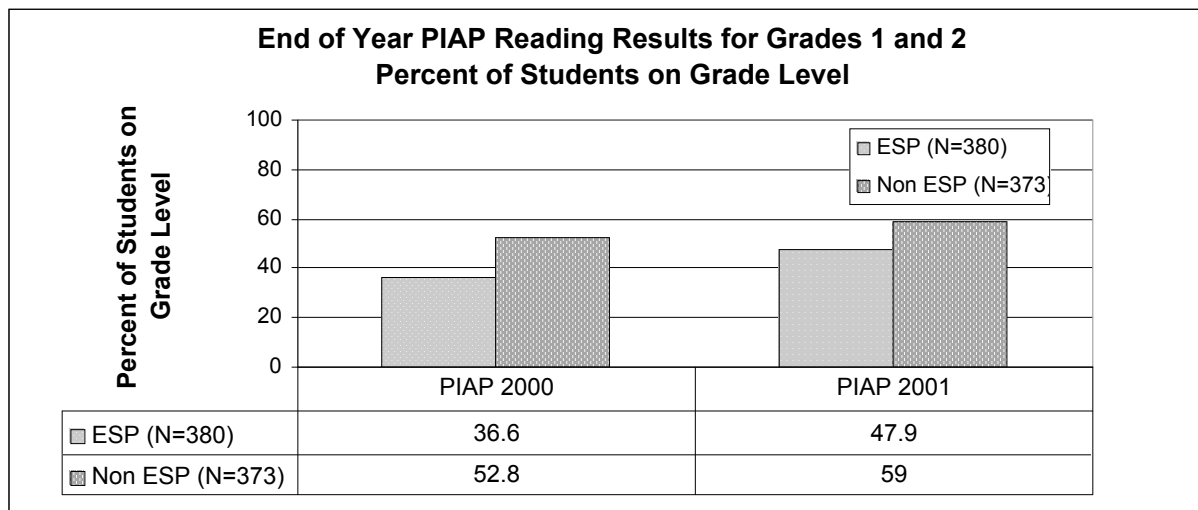
Student grade levels each year were used to determine rates of retention for both the ESP group and their matched group (Non ESP). This analysis was designed to determine how successful ESP was in preventing students from being retained. The results are presented in the graph below and represent the percent of students in each group that was retained at least once by the year specified. For example, by 2003, the entire cohort of students should have been in fourth grade, but 21.7% of the ESP group and 15.8% of the matched group (Non ESP) had not yet reached fourth grade (they had been retained once or even twice during the previous 3 years). The ESP group consistently had a higher percentage of students retained than did the matched group (Non ESP). The difference ranged from one to six percentage points.

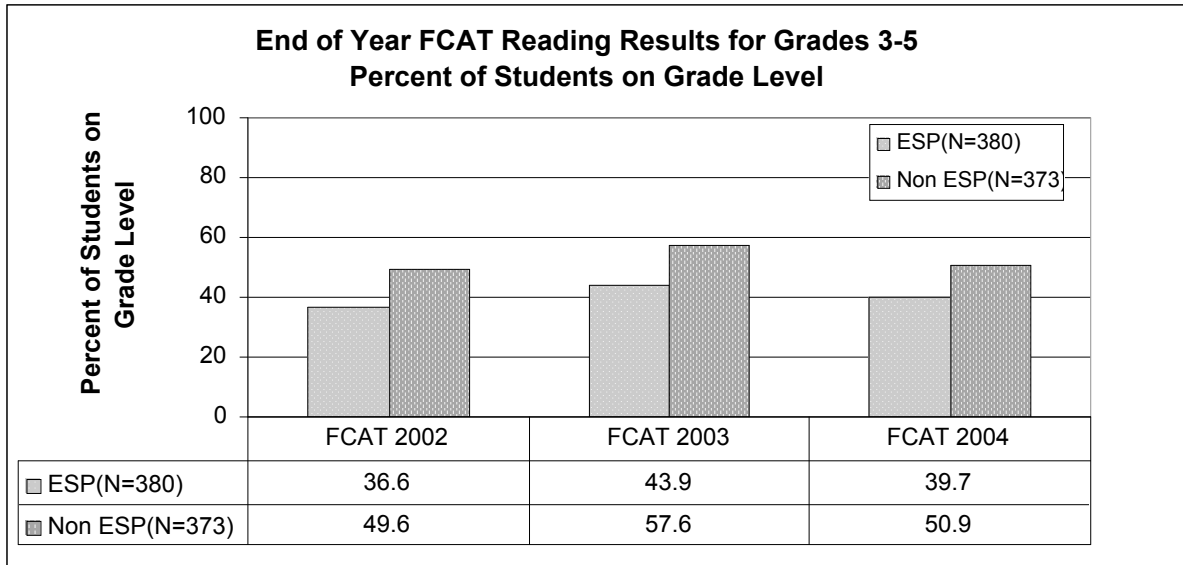


### End-of-year Assessments

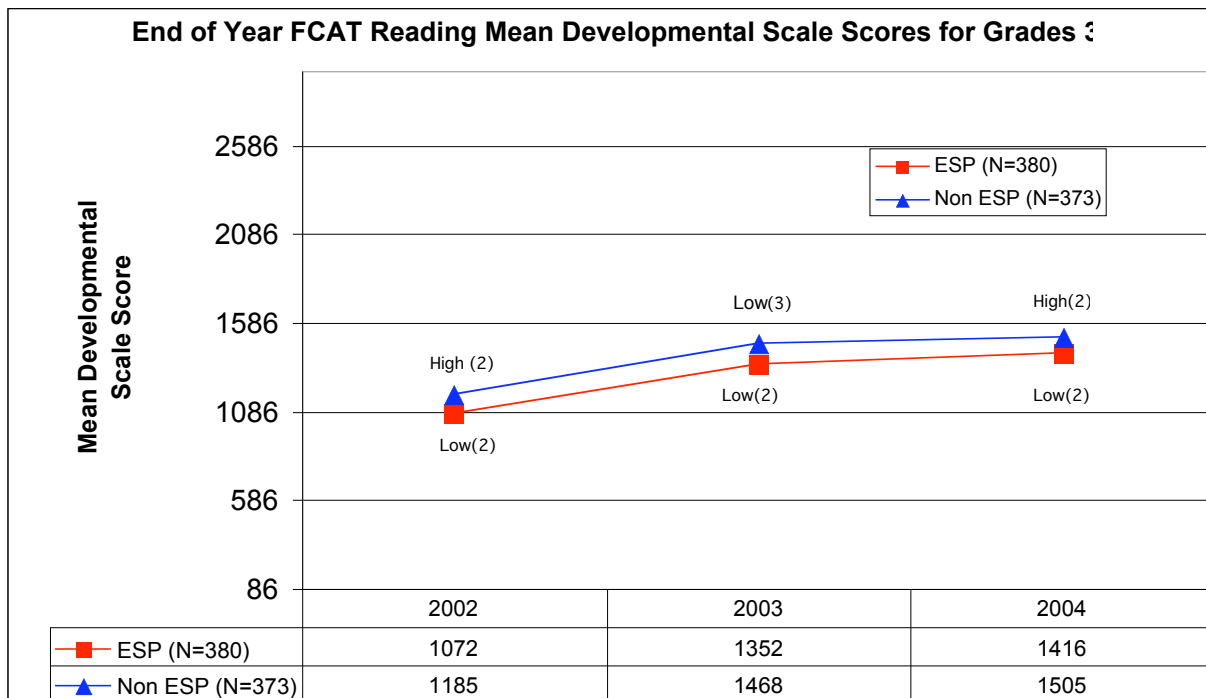
End-of-year student assessment results were examined to determine proficiency (the percent of students performing at or above grade level expectations). For first grade, Pinellas Instructional Assessment Plan (PIAP) Running Record scores were used. A score of 17 was considered to be on grade level. For second grade, PIAP PR-FCAT(Parallel Reading FCAT) scores were used. A score of 8 out of 14 was considered to be on grade level. For third, fourth, and fifth grades, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) Sunshine State Standards Reading Achievement Levels were used. Level 3 is deemed to be on grade level.

The results are presented in the graphs below and show the percent of students reading on grade level. For instance, by May 2000, at the end of first grade, 36.6% of the students in the ESP group were reading on grade level (as measured by PIAP), compared to 52.8% of the students in the matched group (Non ESP). The matched group (Non ESP) consistently outperformed the ESP group by 11-16 percentage points during the study years, with the widest gap being in the first grade.





Additionally, FCAT Developmental Scale Scores for the Sunshine State Standards Reading test were examined for third, fourth, and fifth-grade. For this analysis, the mean developmental scale score was determined. FCAT developmental scales scores range from 86-3008 (increasing from grade 3 through grade 10). The results are presented in the graph below and can be interpreted as follows. In 2002, the mean (average) developmental scale score for FCAT reading was 1072 for the ESP group, compared to 1185 for the matched group (Non ESP). The matched group (Non ESP) consistently outperformed the ESP group by approximately 100 points.



The FCAT Levels are presented in parenthesis

### ***Limitations of the Study***

Informal discussions with district personnel familiar with the ESP program and a review of documents regarding ESP revealed that the program has become very diluted over time. It began with hand-selected teachers, a full year of intensive training directly from USF, and the desire and locus of control to implement the program at a high level. But as it expanded to more schools, the student selection was changed to school-based, the program required more teachers, waivers were granted, exceptions were made, and trainers were pulled away from the schools and assigned to non-ESP tasks. Schools were allowed to adjust the program to their individual needs, resulting in a lower level of overall implementation. By 1999-2000, the ESP teachers were frequently pulled away from teaching for additional duties (academic designee, dual scorer, network trainer, substitute teacher) and a substitute teacher was not always available to fill in when the ESP teacher attended training or was absent. In this same year, veteran ESP teachers exited the program to allow new ESP teachers opportunity to work with the program, thus creating a large influx of new, inexperienced teachers (40% were in their first year, compared with only 19% the previous year). New teachers were provided with daytime training, which reduced their availability to administer lessons. Additionally, the selection criteria changed to include the lowest performing students (26% of ESP students were selected from the lowest 7% of Pinellas County First Grade students compared to 3% of ESP students selected from the lowest 8% of Pinellas County First Grade Students the previous year).

### ***Results***

Even with all of the efforts made to control for differences in race, gender, ESE status, lunch status, school environment, and pre-program test results, the ESP cohort consistently had more retentions, a lower percentage of students on grade level, and lower mean developmental scale scores than the matched group (non-ESP). At least for the 1999-2000 cohort, ESP does not seem to be delivering the results that were stated as its goals.

### ***Conclusion***

Even though yearly progress monitoring demonstrated that ESP students performed higher than a control group in the first four years (1990-1994), the results of this study do not support the effectiveness of the program. Changes made to the student selection process and the overall implementation resulted in a major deviation from the original goals and intentions of the program.

For the Pinellas County Schools 1999-2000 ESP cohort, the matched group (Non ESP) performed better than the ESP group. However, the limitations of the study must be considered. The results may not be a function of the program itself, but of the way the program was implemented and evolved over time. By this tenth year of program implementation, the program had become well diluted from its original intent.