

A Meta-Perspective on the Evaluation

of Early Childhood Education Programs

First Two Years of Implementation

Emis Akbari, Ph.D

The Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development

Informed by:

Ministry of Education – Government of Ontario

The Social Program Evaluation Group – Queen's University

The Offord Centre for Child Studies – McMaster University

Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) Milestones

Full-day kindergarten for all 4 and 5 year olds in Ontario is being phased in over a 5-year period (2010-2014)

September 2010 35,000 four- and five year olds participated in the program (15% of Ontario's total kindergarten population).

September 2011 50,000 four- and five year olds participated in the program (20% of Ontario's total kindergarten population).

September 2012 122,000 four- and five year olds participated in the program (49% of Ontario's total kindergarten population).

September 2013 184,000 four- and five year olds participated in the program (75% of Ontario's total kindergarten population).

September 2014 Full-day kindergarten will be fully implemented and available to all of Ontario's four- and five year olds. Estimated that 265,000 children will be enrolled.

Program Goals of the FDK

To establish a strong foundation for the early years by providing an integrated day of learning

To provide a play-based learning environment

To help children make a smoother transition to Grade 1

To improve children's prospects for success in school and in their lives beyond school

Evaluation of FDK

Implementation of FDK in 2010 was accompanied by the launch of a 2year evaluation strategy focusing on 2 objectives:

- 1- To identify early indicators of effective practices related to the impact of FDK
- 2- To inform program delivery moving forward through to full implementation

Evaluation is a collaborative partnership:

The Social Program Evaluation Group – Queen's University

The Offord Centre for Child Studies – McMaster University

The Ministry of Education – Government of Ontario

Purposes of the Reports

There are three different reports all with different purposes

Queen's – Observational analysis of the implementation challenges during the first year of the FDK roll out – to help identify obstacles/challenges. Also looked at EDI scores but only during the first year of implementation

McMaster's – Descriptive analysis (EDI) across year 1, year 2 and a cross-sectional design for both years.

The Ministry evaluated child outcome using the EDI and had longitudinal data on 690 participants

METHOD

125 schools participated from 18 school boards for the evaluation

42 began offering FDK in 2010-2011 (**2-YR FDK**)

41 began offering FDK in 2011-2012 (**1-YR FDK**)

42 did not offer FDK during the two year evaluation period (**0-FDK**)

16 (of 125) case studies were selected

Due to the constraints in the way FDK was implemented, a random selection methodology was not possible.

School Selection

All schools in the Phase 1 of FDK were identified and sorted by their Ministry of Education (EDU) region.

The address, size, and percentage of families in the school neighbourhood with income below national average were noted.

MEASURES

EDI Data Collection

Year 1- EDI data collection from 4008 children (JK = 2424; SK = 1584)

Year 2-

MEASURES

Qualitative data was secured using the below measures for the 16 case studies

Measure	Purpose
Classroom activity with children	Children participated in a classroom activity geared to elicit student perspectives on kindergarten and its role in their lives.
Interviews with teachers, ECEs and principals	In year 1, semi-structured interviews were used to elicit the perspective of educators and administrators on FDK impact. In year 2, information was secured through site visits and through online surveys
Focus groups with parents	Parent volunteers provided their perspectives on the impact of FDK in focus group formats
Telephone interviews with community education partners	Through semi-structured interviews

Sources of information for the 16 case studies included the following:

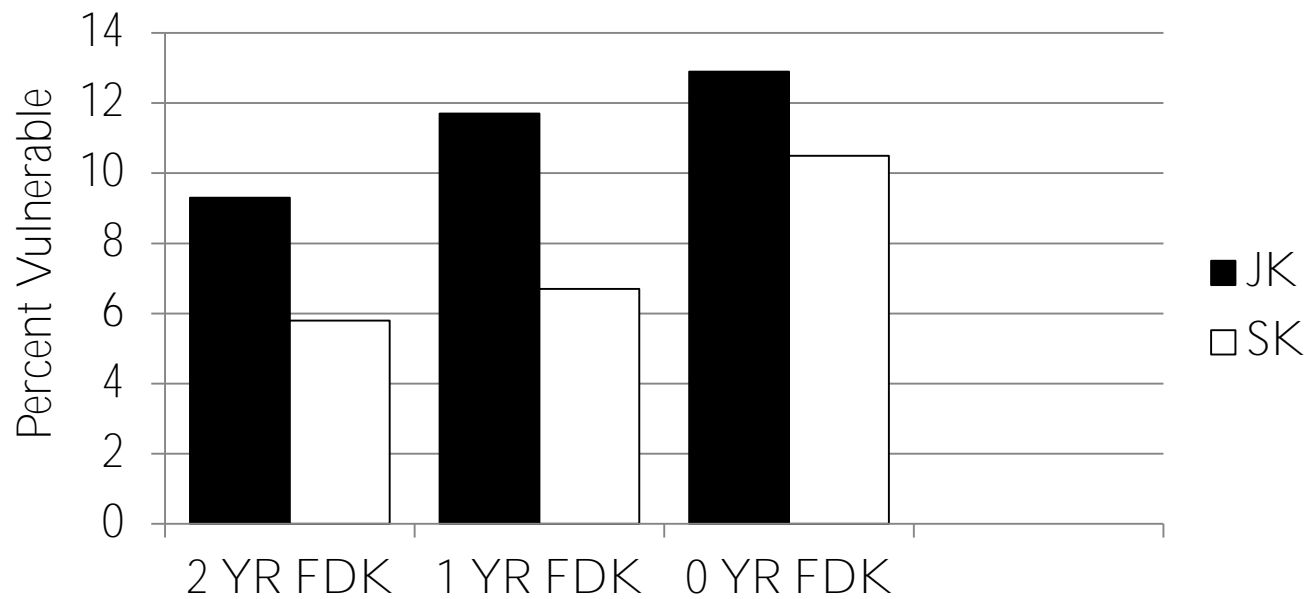
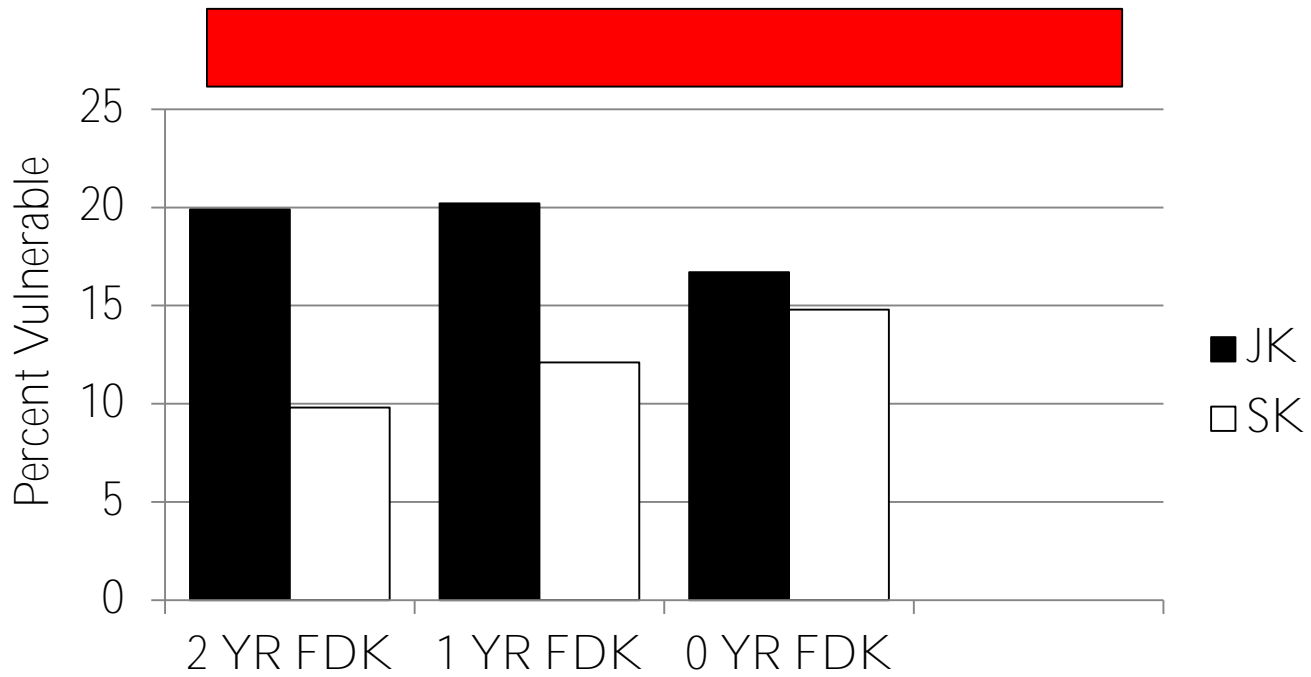
- Interviews with 35 school administrators
- Interviews with 91 educators
- Surveys from 42 educators (year 1 only)
- Online surveys from 125 educators (year 2 only)
- Review of 500+ classroom documents
- Visits to 48 kindergarten classrooms
- 60 classroom observations
- Responses from 300+ kindergarten children
- Review of 1000+ photos
- Interviews with 80 parents
- Interviews with 19 community partners

Results

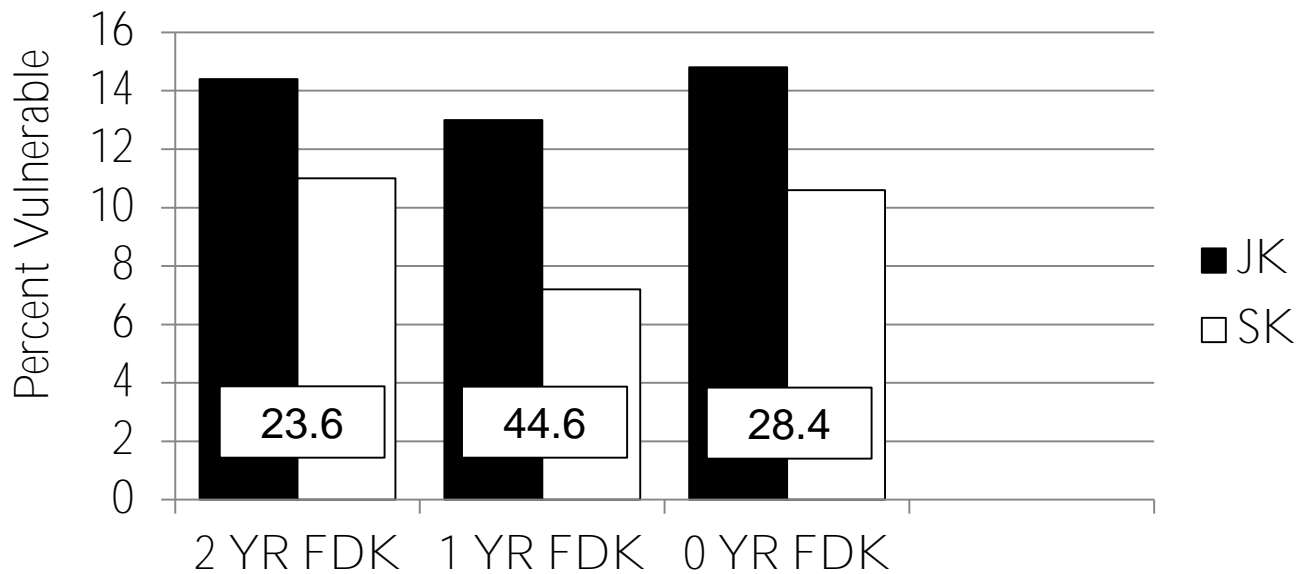
Findings from the EDI

Children were classified:

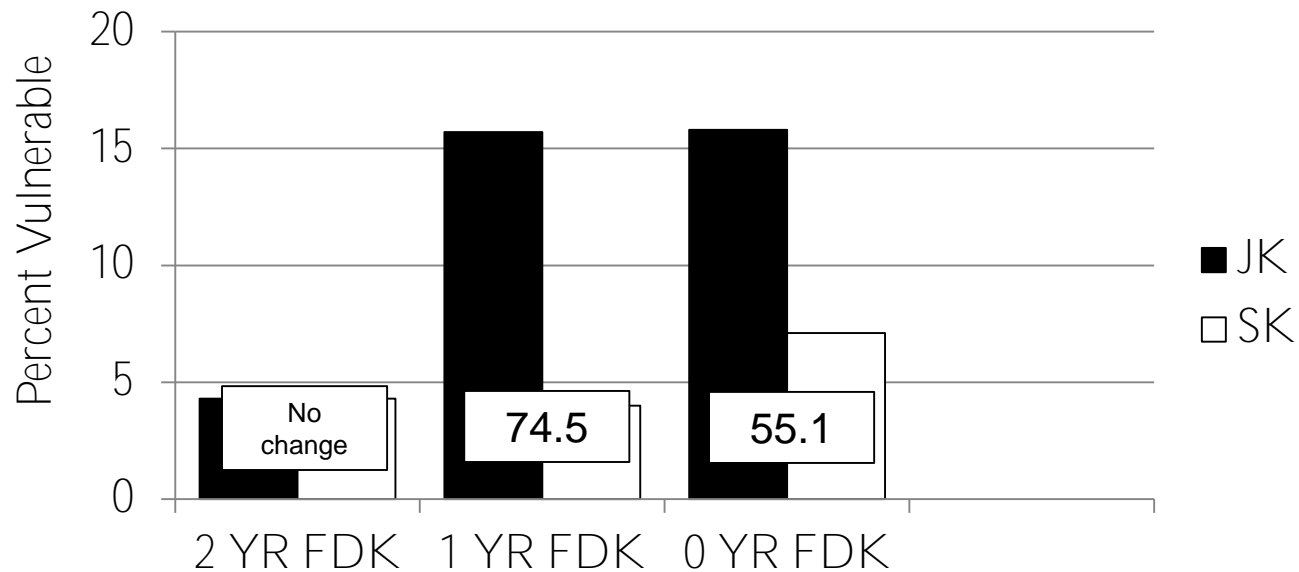
- 1- <10 percentile classified as vulnerable on each of the domains
- 2- On at least 1 or more/On at least 2 or more EDI domains
- 3- Frequency with which children were identified as scoring below 10th percentile
- 4- Percent difference between JK and SK
- 5- Percent change for each of the 3 groups



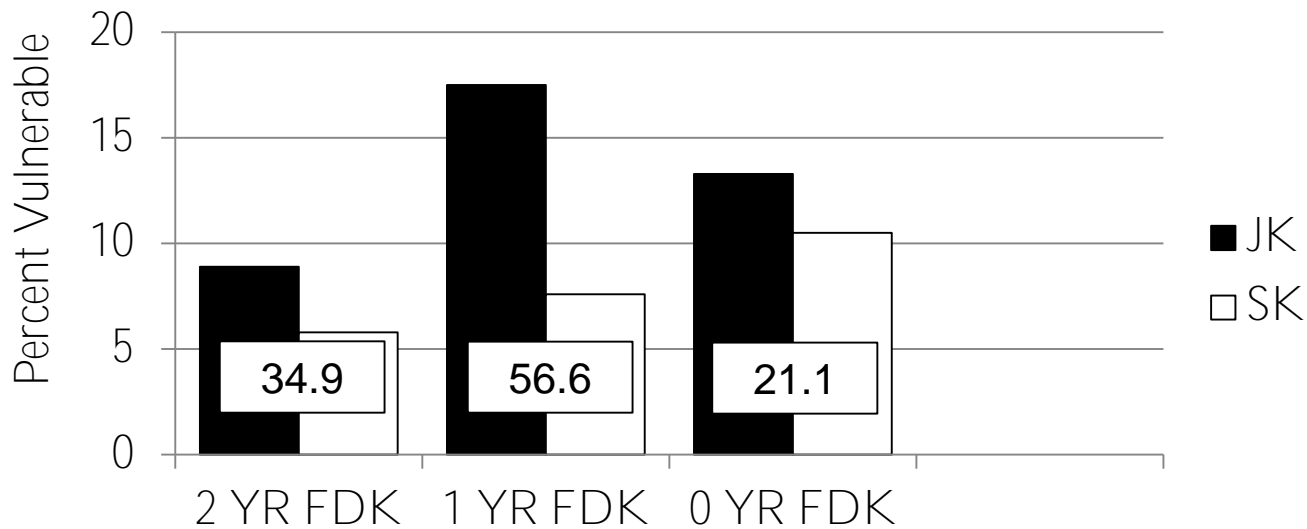
Emotional Maturity

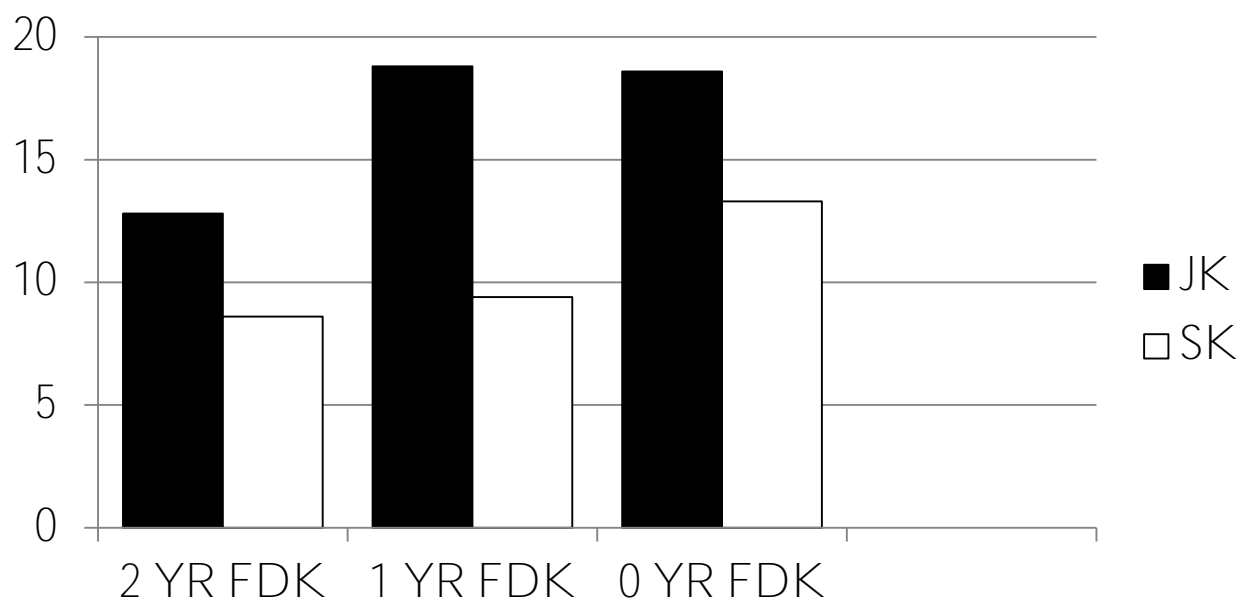
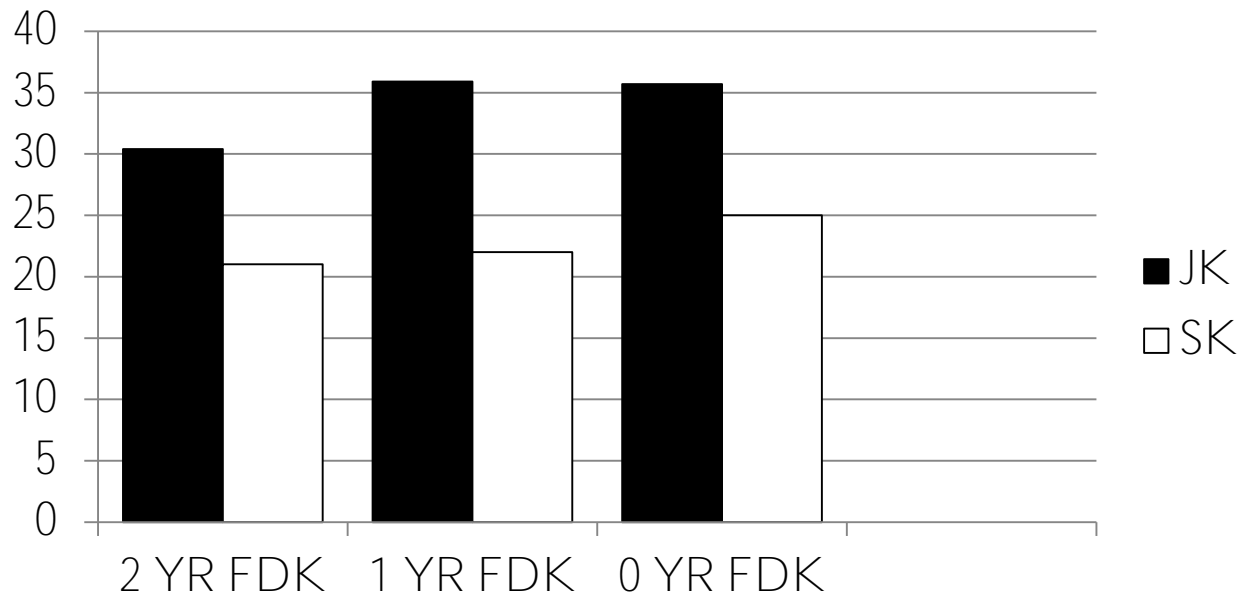


Language & Cognitive Development



Communication Skills & General Knowledge

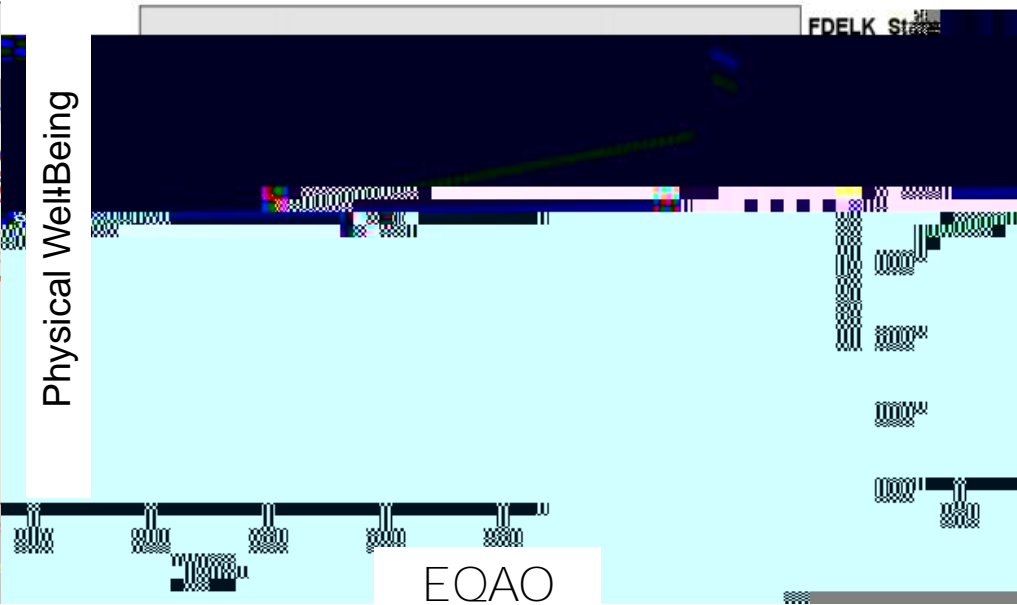
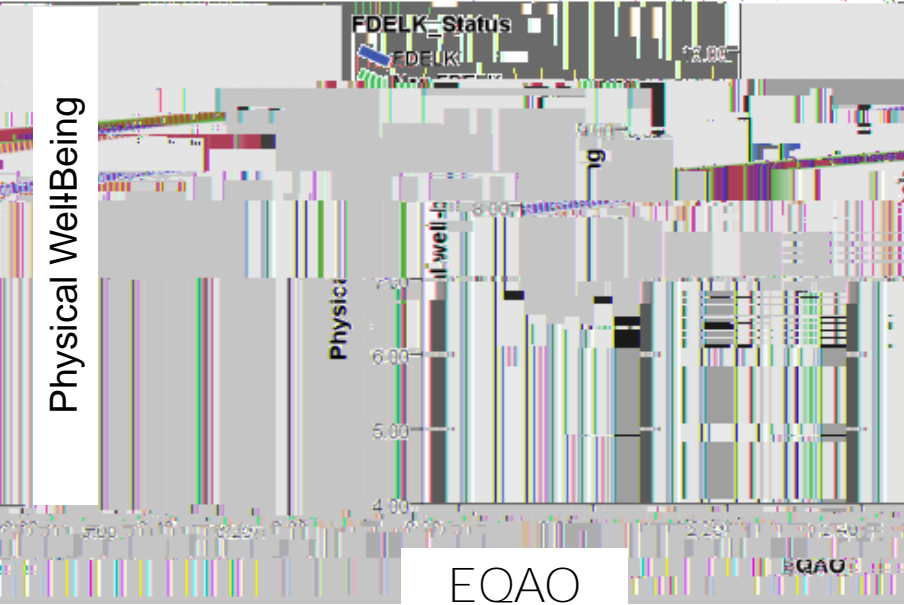




Physical Health & Well-Being Year 1 of Implementation

SK

JK

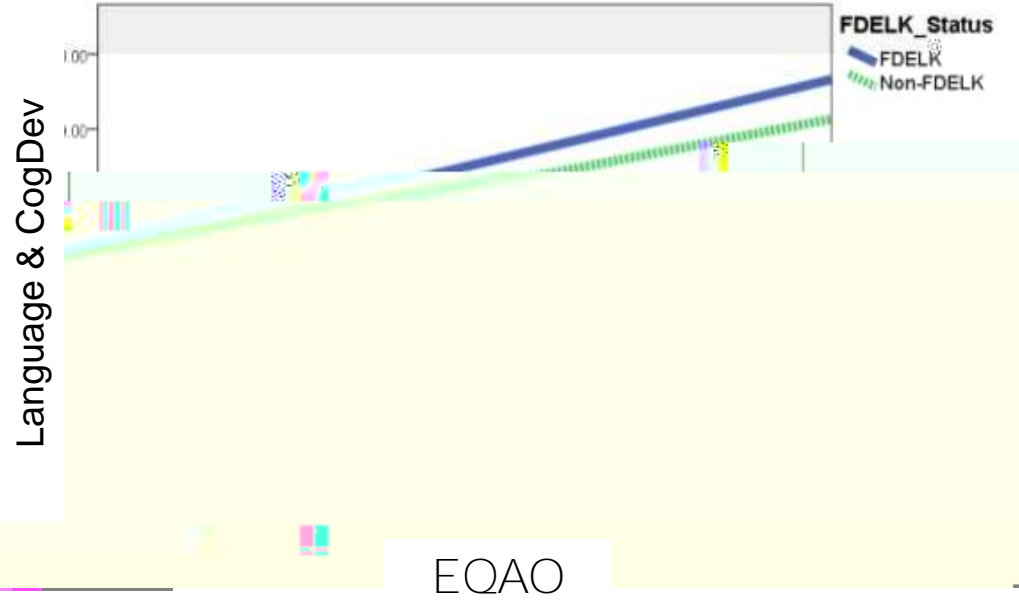
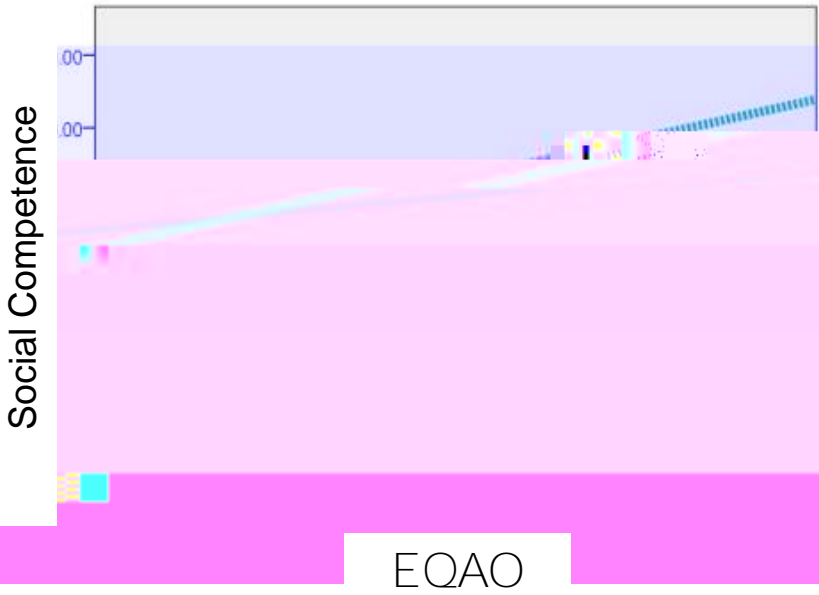


Example of how FDK may be closing the educational gap for students in high need schools

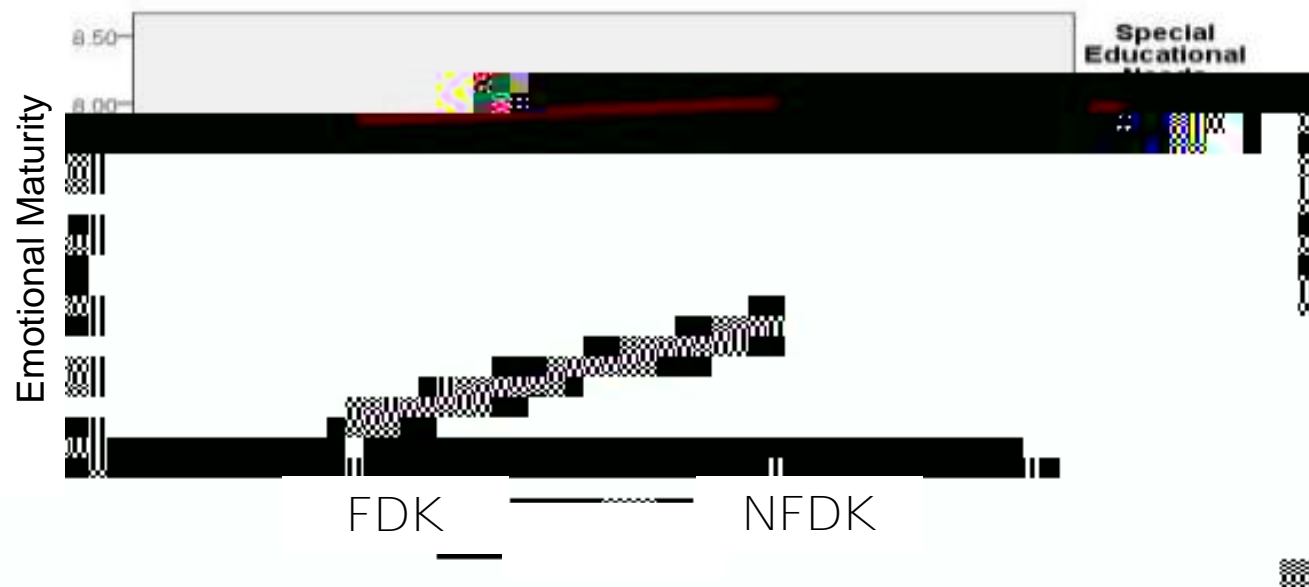
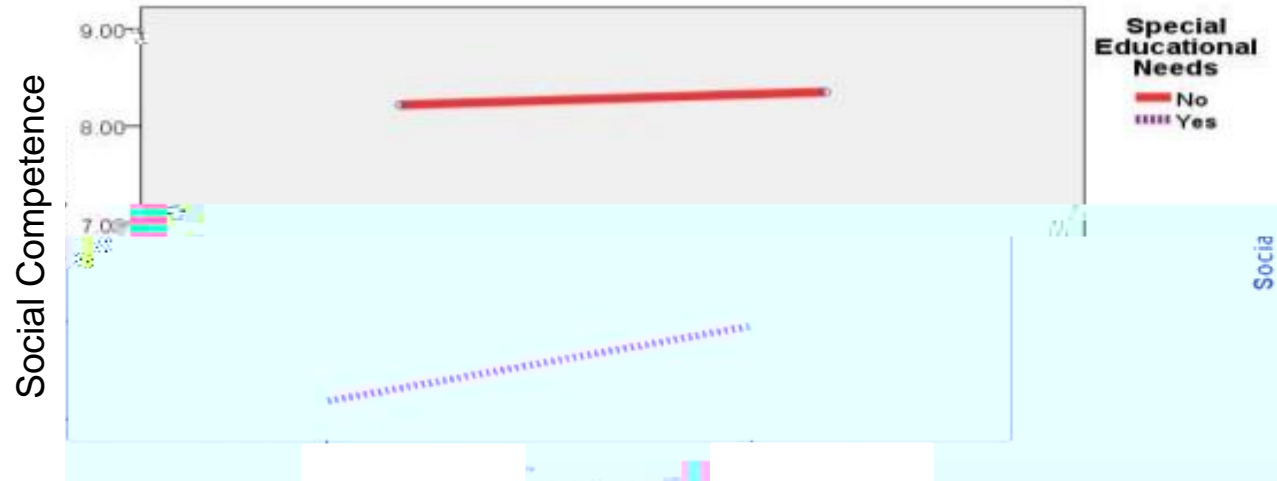
Social Competence & Language/Cog Development (in girls)- JK

In higher need schools FDK children perform better – In lower need schools they perform worse

In lower need schools girls perform better from FDK than higher need schools – this pattern is opposite in boys



Special Needs Children



Findings from the Case Studies

Educator Teams

Team teaching was found to be foreign and unknown

Found to not be fully leveraging the collective expertise of the 2 professions (teachers and ECEs)

Commented on the need for further role and responsibility definition

Parents echoed these concerns

Professional Development

Funding was provided to release school board staff to attend sessions, to plan at the school level and to visit other FDK programs

Summer institutes were available to teams

Ministry data indicates that 90% of eligible boards benefited from this professional development opportunity

However case studies revealed only 50% had attended

- * mostly teachers & not ECEs attended
- * supply list of qualified ECEs is a growing concern

Play-Based Learning & Pedagogy

Strong evidence that many FDK educators are moving towards PBL as envisioned in *The Full-Day Early Learning & Kindergarten Program*

Considerable variation in implementation of *The Full-Day Early Learning & Kindergarten Program* across the province

Still a large number of administrators, parents and teachers who continue to favour, push for, and demand more academic teacher directed approaches (literacy and numeracy)

Teachers having a hard time shifting to play-based learning

Having problems meeting the needs of students who only attend half day

Program fidelity

Assessment & Evaluation

Strong evidence that FDK educators are becoming increasingly more knowledgeable of and creative in their assessment of children in the classroom

Currently specific guidelines for the assessment of children in relation to learning objectives of FDK have not been established at the provincial level

Physical Environment

High enrolment in FDK identified as an area of concern for educators, administrators and parents – more problematic in urban areas

The Ministry has provided some support to address space shortage (i.e. capital funding, consultation)

Classroom space alone does not seem to provide a barrier to favourable child outcomes

Emotional Climate

Issues addressed in previous sections (educator teams, space etc) –
Educators need to be more appropriately supportive of each other

However, classrooms are described as happy, cooperative and learning
focused

Supported by EDI

Community Partnerships

FDK schools becoming hubs for community engagement

Community view the FDK implementation as presenting opportunities for a more integrated service approach

Student Progress & SelfRegulation

Grade 1 teachers are also reporting that F D K children's proficiency in grade 1 is better than those from the past years.

Summary

This evaluation of FDK during the first 2 years of implementation provides a preliminary understanding of program delivery and helps inform educators and policy makers

Accurate knowledge transfer and mobilization are central to successful implementation

The results suggest that there are early indicators of effective practice as measured by the EDI.

Children in FDK demonstrate least vulnerability across most domains

Limitations

1- Sample bias

8600 eligible to participate – 46% participation rate, 17% KPS participation rate (high needs families are underrepresented).

The more benefits to higher need schools is blurred

Schools were not randomly selected / teachers (EDI source) were not blind

2- EDI sole measure of school readiness

Limitations

4- On several measures NFDK were associated with more positive outcomes especially within low needs school
Emotional Maturity (curriculum based changes?)

These limitations along with the available data show mixed results concerning FDK effectiveness and limits the confidence of the results