

Recent Study Showcases HIPPY Success in Florida

Research continues to build the case for HIPPY's effectiveness

As part of the HIPPY community, we are well-aware of the magic that happens when parents are their children's first and most important teacher—we see the success stories every single day. And we also know from the research how well HIPPY works in preparing children for academic success in elementary school and beyond. Recently HIPPY added more data points to its arsenal thanks to research by Tracy Payne, the Director of the Florida HIPPY T&TA Center at the University of South Florida, which was published in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.

In a study she did in collaboration with colleagues Ruby Joseph, Svetlana Yampolskay and Angela Vatalaro, Tracy looked at the performance data of 730 students all over Florida during the 2013-2014 academic year—379 of which were involved in HIPPY and the other 351 were not. In order to determine the level of preparedness that HIPPY provided its students, the team of researchers looked at data from the Florida Department of Education to answer two questions:

1. Does participating in a Florida HIPPY program increase the likelihood of children from low-income households passing the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener?
2. Does participating in a Florida HIPPY program increase the likelihood of children from low-income households being promoted to the first grade?

But in order to accurately answer these two questions, the researchers needed to look at several factors, such as the children's race, age, the county they lived in, whether their household was receiving welfare assistance, and how many parents were in the home. By doing this, they were able to assign a score to the students, which would ensure that when the HIPPY and non-HIPPY children were compared, the two groups were as similar as possible in significant ways so that their academic performance could not be attributed to influences other than the program.

“You can't just look at a score and assume HIPPY works, but if you have enough data on your HIPPY children and everyone who wasn't in HIPPY, you can conduct an analysis that allows you to assign a score to each child that has certain characteristics,” Tracy said. “You're basically creating a comparison group based on qualitative, descriptive characteristics of children and families.”

After creating this comparison and looking through the data, Tracy confirmed what we already know about HIPPY: The program works and our HIPPY kids are well-prepared for school when they've completed our curriculum. Specifically, the researchers determined that HIPPY participants were 1.67 times more likely than non-participants to perform well on the kindergarten readiness test. In addition, they were five times more likely to be promoted to the first grade.

“It turns out that not only is there a statistically significant difference between the children that participated in HIPPY versus the comparison group—which means we did a really good, solid analysis—

but it's very unlikely that the difference we found between those two groups is a result of anything other than this one thing that differentiates them, which is HIPPY," said Tracy. "We've always known HIPPY was effective, but now we also know the degree to which it's effective and we know that this is a program that can be replicated. One of the biggest problems that we have in educational research in general, but especially in early childhood interventions, is you find something that works but as soon as you try to scale it up or out or move it someplace else, it loses its effects. But that's not true with HIPPY; it appears that this program is effective wherever it goes."

In addition to making the case for HIPPY even stronger, Tracy says this study is the groundwork for further research about HIPPY—and she is currently working on that research. Looking at the subsequent data for the same group of students, Tracy and her team are evaluating the long-term effects of HIPPY and how the program has influenced the students' third grade performance. In addition, the researchers are also studying the responses to a HIPPY parent survey in order to broaden our knowledge about the effects of participation even further by emphasizing data related to the parent-child relationship that HIPPY families are able to nurture. According to Tracy, this information will ultimately help teachers better serve their students.

"Children's success in school is not just about the child-teacher relationship, it has to include the parent and schools know that, but I don't know that schools have learned to successfully integrate parents in that process," she said. "HIPPY does that and teaches parents how to engage with the school in meaningful ways and partner with teachers because they've already been partnering with their home visitors. Now they go to school and instead of fighting teachers, they're partnering with teachers."