

The article highlights the rise in reading achievement for all students involved in the program, with low-income students making the most progress. In these 17 schools, 51 percent of the most disadvantaged children met reading benchmarks at the end of first grade while only 45 percent of poor children in the rest of the county did. Students made gains of over 50 percentage points in all ethnic groups, also narrowing the achievement gap by as much as 11 percent on some measures. Superintendent Weast attributes the program's success to additional training for teachers and principals.

We must address the needs of our youngest students before our lack of attention compounds the disadvantages that many of them already bring to school. If children do not read fluently by the end of third grade, we know that many of them never will. We should do all we can to support further success. The results in Montgomery County show that we can make a difference to children's lives.

I ask unanimous consent that an article entitled "All-Day Kindergarten Posts Big Gains in Montgomery" be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

[From the Washington Post, Oct. 1, 2002]

ALL-DAY KINDERGARTEN POSTS BIG GAINS IN MONTGOMERY

(By a Washington Post Staff Writer)

An intensive and expensive all-day kindergarten program in Montgomery County has produced significant gains for poor children and helped them begin to catch up with higher-performing peers, a new study to be released today shows.

In tracking the reading progress made by 16,000 youngsters over two years in kindergarten and first grade, the report found that not only did achievement rise for all students involved in the program in high-poverty schools, but low-income students showed bigger gains.

Further, the report found that both poor and middle-class students in high-poverty schools—contrary to expectation—either matched or outperformed their peers in schools elsewhere in the county, many of whom were in half-day kindergarten programs.

The most significant exception was for children who do not speak English, a finding that has prompted Superintendent Jerry D. Weast to pledge intensive phonics instruction at schools with the most children living in poverty. "We are getting some emerging success," said a cautious Weast. "We're learning that you can attack poverty, that you don't have to have low expectations just because a child is poor."

The findings come at a time when the General Assembly has mandated full-day kindergarten for all Maryland schools as part of a new state aid formula. Montgomery's "kindergarten initiative" combines the longer day with smaller class sizes, a revised curriculum and additional teacher training.

Weast, who has won both praise and criticism for implementing the program first in the county's high-poverty schools, said the report vindicated his strategy and could prove a model for schools across the nation dealing with a vexing achievement gap that divides students along racial and poverty lines.

Indeed, the report found that the gap between higher-scoring white and Asian students and their African American and Latino peers had narrowed by as much as 11 points on some measures.

Other county and national studies have found that the achievement gap that largely divides middle-class and poor or non-English-speaking students is apparent on the first day of kindergarten and generally widens through the years, with one group of students on track for rigorous, college-prep courses and others for lower-level or remedial course work.

The Montgomery study found that the kindergarten initiative appears to be working well for children who live in poverty. In the 17 highest-poverty schools, 51 percent of the children considered poor enough to qualify for a federal lunch subsidy met reading benchmarks by the end of first grade, and only 45 percent of poor children elsewhere in the county did.

Despite the progress, officials said the gap still exists. Nearly 70 percent of the middle-class students in those schools met the same benchmark—about the same levels as their peers in other county schools.

The most troubling finding, Weast said, was for the limited English speakers, whose reading scores actually dipped slightly over the two years. And some of their scores on a test last spring of oral language, hearing and associating sounds with letters were lower by half than their English-speaking classmates.

Weast today will announce plans to introduce intensive phonics instruction in 18 schools that receive federal Title I funding for low-income students, the first such instruction ever in Montgomery County.

"It won't be drill and kill," Weast said, referring to often-maligned, repetitive basic skills programs. "But it makes a lot of sense for kids who are hearing a different language at home and hear the intonations and sounds of words differently. They need to be able to unlock words so they can pronounce them and then read them."

The kindergarten initiative began in 17 of the poorest schools in the fall of 2000. Seventeen more schools with large numbers of poor students were added in the fall of 2001. The report found impressive gains in both groups. This year, 22 schools have been added.

Research has found that if a kindergartner meets foundational benchmarks—such as recognizing letters and the sounds they represent and identifying simple words—they will be on track to read text by the end of first grade and able to read fluently by the end of third. Scientists have found that if children do not read fluently by then, many never will.

"We believe that is the key to academic rigor as they go up the grades," Weast said. "Reading."

Beyond touting results for poor children—a national dilemma that provided much of the impetus behind the federal No Child Left Behind law that took effect July 1—Weast said his report addresses middle-class parents' worries that their children will suffer academically at higher-poverty schools. The report found that such children scored on par with middle- and upper-middle-class students throughout the county.

"The nice thing about the changes we made is, you don't have to leave those schools now," Weast said, referring to middle-class flight that has affected some schools in the county's more diverse eastern side. "This ought to give comfort to those parents to stay with us."

School officials said some of the progress made over the two years may have a lot to do with the "practice effect," the fact that

teachers and principals are becoming used to the new curriculum and training. Still, the results over time are key, and officials plan to follow these 16,000 students for several years.

Studies have found that gains made by children in Head Start, the federal program designed to help impoverished 4-year-olds, evaporate by the time the students are in third or fourth grade. They perform similarly to children who never had the benefit of such a program.

School officials in Montgomery say they want to change that with the kindergarten initiative and have followed up with smaller class sizes and a new, more focused curriculum this year for grades 1 and 2.

The report has already garnered interest from the national education community.

Michael Cohen, a former assistant secretary of education in the Clinton administration who has worked with large school districts throughout the country, said he was impressed not only that the studies were detailed and sophisticated, but that Weast was willing to make changes because of them.

"That has not been a common practice in education around the country," he said. "So it's important to note, and note when it's being done well."

Michael Ben-Avie, a researcher with the Yale Child Development Center, evaluated early drafts of the report and praised Montgomery leaders for their "willingness to undergo major change and for their willingness to really address the needs for our most vulnerable students." He found that the fact that the kindergarten initiative was a systematic overhaul and not a series of ad hoc pieces was what made it a powerful reform.

"They have been willing to take a sober-eyed view of the data and not try to cover it up, which happens a great deal," he said. "This is remarkable. And the results show they're well on their way."

GAO REPORT: FEMA'S HAZARD MITIGATION PROGRAMS

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the Federal Government's commitment to disaster mitigation and helping communities minimize the impact of natural and man-made hazards. Currently, the Senate is locked in a debate on how to help State and local officials prevent, prepare for, and respond to acts of terrorism. Homeland security will benefit from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's, FEMA, years of experience because disaster mitigation and terrorism preparedness have the same goal, helping people prepare for the worst.

FEMA's two multi-hazard mitigation programs, the post-disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, HMGP, and the pre-disaster Project Impact program, are aimed at helping States and communities identify and address natural hazard risks they deem most significant.

In March 2001 the administration proposed the elimination of all pre-disaster mitigation funding because Project Impact was "ineffective." After learning that there had been no formal review of the effectiveness of this or any multi-hazard mitigation program, I requested that GAO review FEMA's disaster mitigation efforts. I am happy to announce the release of this comprehensive and timely report.

The parameters of this study have changed in the past year. In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, and the subsequent and prudent focus on homeland security, the Nation began noticing the relationship of pre-disaster mitigation programs to proposed new preparedness efforts for homeland security. I asked GAO to expand its study to include an assessment of how the increased emphasis on preventing and preparing for terrorism events is affecting natural hazard mitigation.

In March 2002 the administration proposed to change fundamentally FEMA's disaster mitigation strategy again by eliminating the HMGP. Currently, HMGP funding is issued to States after a presidentially declared disaster as a percentage of total Federal assistance, a process deemed ineffective and not cost-efficient by the administration. The administration instead is seeking to fund all mitigation through an expanded Project Impact-like program on a nationally competitive grant basis. The administration believes that such a program will ensure that mitigation funding remains stable from year to year and that the most cost-beneficial projects receive funding. At that time, I asked GAO to include this latest proposal.

GAO interviewed hazard mitigation officials from 24 states to get their perspectives on current FEMA programs and the administration's proposals. The States range from large population States, such as Florida and Illinois, to smaller States, such as Nebraska and Utah. GAO purposely selected both small and large States, containing urban and rural communities, that have received both small and large amounts of mitigation funding. Despite geographic differences, emergency management officials view FEMA's mitigation programs as successful and effective.

Emergency management officials described how, in addition to traditional "brick and mortar" programs, such as retrofitting buildings and relocating properties, mitigation effects can be intangible. Mitigation includes outreach activities, such as increasing public awareness and support for mitigation, building public-private partnerships to pool mitigation resources, and ever-important planning and risk assessment.

We must listen to these officials, the end-users of mitigation programs, when determining program success or failure. These dedicated men and women have many concerns over the administration's proposal. They worry that FEMA will lose the window of opportunity that exists after a disaster strikes if HMGP funds are not included in Federal assistance. This is when public and community interest in mitigating against future disasters is highest. They worry that a competitive grant system might exclude some States entirely from mitigation funding.

GAO also interviewed FEMA officials. FEMA headquarters and regional office personnel identified several challenges in implementing a national competitive grant program. Chief among them is establishing a process for comparing the costs and benefits of projects. Emergency managers around the country share FEMA's concerns that the outreach and planning activities they feel are so important will be curtailed because of the difficulty associated with assigning cost-benefit to such programs. This issue will have ramifications in homeland security when the new Department of Homeland Security is told to determine the cost-benefit of terrorism preparedness efforts.

I was heartened to learn that FEMA is working to ensure and strengthen natural hazard mitigation, response, and recovery efforts while attending to homeland security needs. FEMA officials are identifying and correcting redundancies in reporting, planning, training, and other activities across mitigation and preparedness programs. FEMA mitigation experts are working to identify terrorism mitigation activities that are also "all hazard" and address natural hazard mitigation priorities.

The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, passed by Congress 2 years ago, emphasized involvement by all States, funding for planning activities, and increased post-disaster mitigation funding for States willing to undertake enhanced mitigation efforts. FEMA has taken our directive to heart and is implementing multi-hazard mitigation programs in coordination and cooperation with State and local officials. While a focus on obtaining the most cost-effective program is well intended, I share the concerns of the emergency management community and FEMA personnel that assigning a dollar amount to the benefit of doing mitigation, or the cost of not doing it, is a difficult and ill-defined task. I share their doubts that consolidating the HMGP and Project Impact programs will make disaster mitigation more effective or successful.

After reviewing the GAO report, FEMA Director Joseph Allbaugh wrote to GAO, "I appreciate your support of my strongly held belief that funding and support of both pre- and post-disaster mitigation programs are critical to FEMA's success in leading the nation to reduce disaster losses." I agree with Director Allbaugh. We must continue to support pre-disaster mitigation as an investment for the future. I commend GAO on their insightful report, and I thank JayEtta Hecker and her team at GAO for their work.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, each year between September 15 and October 15, we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. This tradition began in 1968 when Congress set aside a week to celebrate His-

panic culture, achievements, and contributions to American culture and society. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month-long commemoration.

Gil Coronado, founder and chairman of Heroes and Heritage: Saluting a Legacy of Hispanic Patriotism and Pride, was one of the driving forces behind the creation of Hispanic Heritage Month. Mr. Coronado enlisted with the Air Force when he was just 16. He served for 30 years in Vietnam, Panama, Germany, and Spain before he retired as a colonel. During his stellar career, he received over 35 awards, including the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star. Like Colonel Coronado, countless numbers of Hispanic Americans have answered the call, defending our liberty and freedoms as members of our Armed Forces and in other capacities. Twelve Hispanic Americans were among the firefighters killed on September 11 as they tried to rescue their fellow Americans trapped in the World Trade Center's two towers.

Hispanic contributions to America date back nearly 500 years to Easter, March 27, 1513 when Juan Ponce de Leon sighted land, which he claimed for Spain and named "La Florida," meaning "Land of Flowers." De Leon and his fellow explorers such as Alvarez de Pinela and Cabeza de Vaca traversed most of what we now call America's sunbelt. Hernando de Soto was the first European to discover the Mississippi River, an event depicted in one of the great historical canvases which hang in the Rotunda of the Capitol Building. St. Augustine, FL, was founded in 1565, 42 years before the English colony at Jamestown, VA, and 55 years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts. St. Augustine is the oldest permanent European settlement on the North American continent. In 1787, St. Augustine had the first free, integrated public school.

America's diverse and vibrant Hispanic population has made enormous contributions to our Nation, its culture, and its economy. Former Senator Dennis Chavez, union organizers Antonio Pantoja and Caesar Chavez, entertainers Gloria Estefan and Jennifer Lopez, actor Martin Sheen, and baseball players Alex Rodriguez and Sammy Sosa are just a few of the Hispanics Americans who have done so much to enrich all Americans' lives.

My hometown, Detroit, has benefited greatly from Hispanic immigrants pursuing the American Dream. Southwest Detroit, known affectionately as Mexicantown by its residents, is the fastest growing part of the city. Hispanics from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Cuba, and other Caribbean nations have opened businesses, bought homes, and turned a once neglected urban neighborhood into a thriving community and one of the city's centers. Maria Elena Rodriguez, president of the Mexicantown Community Development Corporation, has been one of the primary catalysts of the turnaround.