Project Grow
2024 Program Report

Prepared for Adopt-A-Family of the Palm Beaches, Inc.

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By: Michael A. Power, Ph.D.

GEO EDUCATION & RESEARCH

GEO EDUCATION & RESEARCH

geoed@geoeducation.org | www.geoeducation.org | 206.941.6663
17027 37th AV NE, Lake Forest Park, WA 98155 USA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF TABLES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Grow (PG) is an afterschool and summer learning support program operated by Adopt-A-Family of the Palm Beaches (AAF) to provide academic and social skills support to children in kindergarten through fifth grade from predominantly low-income households who have experienced homelessness and/or chronic housing instability. Most of the students attend Highland Elementary School. In 2021, AAF contracted with Geo Education & Research (Geo) to conduct an evaluation of the short- and long-term outcomes of the program. Using data provided by the School District of Palm Beach County (the District), student achievement and progress have been analyzed annually in reference to program goals and in comparison to similar students in the District.

Geo compared the achievement of PG students on both State and District assessments and other measures to a sample of demographically similar students in a comparison group generated by the District based on gender, race/ethnicity, their eligibility for free/reduced cost lunch, and participation in special programs. For this report, three questions were addressed:

1. **Do children currently engaged in Project Grow show differences in academic achievement compared to students of similar demographics who also attend Highland Elementary?**
2. **How much growth did the Project Grow students show in the state tests of math and language arts from the fall of 2023 to the spring of 2024?**
3. **Do students who were engaged in Project Grow during their elementary school years graduate high school at higher rates than comparable students in the District? How do graduation rates differ by sub-groups of students?**

Findings

- When comparing PG students to peers who are not in PG but have similar demographics, we saw the PG students performed higher on most tests such as the State test of English Language Arts, the District tests of reading and math, as well as classroom grades. PG students performed better than their peers in English Language Arts in the fall and were at practically the same level as their peers in the spring. In math, PG students were behind the comparison group in the fall but exceeded them by the spring.
- Graduation rates, a critical academic outcome for long-term success, show that previous PG students are graduating at rates comparable to and sometimes higher than the District annual averages. **Some subgroups of PG students, including Black, Hispanic, and low income students, graduated at a higher rate than their District peers. When looked at over time, the mean graduation rate for the District students overall was 90.7% while the mean rate**

for PG students who could have graduated during the same time span was 89.3%, a very small difference. Comparing just low income students, 89.9% of the PG students graduated compared to 87.2% of the District total during that time span. Considering that PG is designed to support students who are in need of additional help with their learning, this is a very positive outcome.

- PG students, as compared to the District comparison group, had the same level of attendance at school.
- Discipline data show only one PG student was suspended in the 2023-24 school year, indicating that discipline at school is likely not an area of concern.

Conclusion

Over many years of providing academic and social skills support to low-income students who often need additional help to succeed, Project Grow has clearly contributed to the growth of the children in the program. Almost all of the academic indicators included in this study show greater or comparable levels of achievement to a demographically equivalent comparison group. Through State and District-level test scores, grades, attendance, and discipline, the program students show positive outcomes across the board, *especially considering the fact that the comparison group was not matched for the high rates of homelessness and unstable housing experienced by the PG students.*

Project Grow Student Artwork

INTRODUCTION

This report is a follow-up to the "Project Grow Student Progress Report" submitted to AAF in June 2024 by Geo Education & Research (Geo). The report will update academic data from the previous report, and present new data on the graduation rates of students who had been previously enrolled in Project Grow (PG), updated to add the graduating class of 2023-24 to the data previously reported and providing demographic details.

About Project Grow

Project Grow (PG) is Adopt-A-Family's afterschool/summer program for at-risk elementary school students. PG's goal is to "reverse the detrimental effects of homelessness and poverty through a holistic approach centering on four core areas: academic support; emotional development; parental engagement; and life-enriching experiences." During 2024, PG served 74 students in kindergarten through grade five.

AAF started PG in 1992, and it became a licensed afterschool program in 2003. Academic lessons complement the public school curriculum, often using hands-on experiential learning as reinforcement. The program provides one-on-one tutoring, promotes parental involvement, and offers free on-site mental health services to help students overcome trauma and behavioral issues. Project Grow also includes STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) activities, academic advising, field trips, and recreation on the agency's turf field and playground.[1]

COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Under the terms of a data sharing agreement with the School District of Palm Beach County (the District), the PG staff contacted all of the parents of current and former program students and asked them to complete the District's data sharing consent form in their native language. These forms were then forwarded to the District.

A roster of PG students was transmitted to the District, and they performed a match to create an anonymous group of comparable students. Subsequently, the District compiled the necessary data from their records and sent them to Geo for analysis. The data provided by the District did not have

[1] Source: https://www.aafpbc.org/project-grow

any student names but did indicate for each record if the student was in PG or the comparison group. The following section provides the results of those analyses.

The data from the District address three research questions:

1. Do children currently engaged in Project Grow show advantages in academic achievement compared to students of similar demographics who also attend Highland Elementary?
2. How much growth did the Project Grow students show in the state tests of math and language arts from the fall of 2023 to the spring of 2024?
3. Do students who participated in Project Grow during their elementary school years graduate high school at higher rates than all students in the District? Further, are there differences in graduation rates by demographic subgroups of students?

In order to create a meaningful comparison group, students in PG were matched with students in Highland Elementary by gender, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free/reduced cost lunch, and participation in special programs. Most of the PG students attend Highland Elementary, so the comparison group is composed of the other Highland students sharing the same demographic characteristics. It is worth noting that the comparison group was not matched on homelessness and therefore the PG students would presumably have a much higher percentage of children who recently experienced homelessness or housing instability. The comparison group for the graduation data was the cohort of students who, by age, would have graduated in 2023. Thus, we compare graduation rates for PG students to the District average graduation rate including breakdowns by selected demographics.

Assessment Scores

In the previous report, Geo presented data on performance of PG students and a matched comparison group on State and District testing. In spring 2025, the District provided an update on the scores of both groups based on fall 2023 and spring 2024 testing.

FAST Assessment

The Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) test is administered to all public school students in Florida in grades 3-8 in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. Scores reported in the District data showed each student's percentile score showing how they performed relative to all students taking the test *at that time*. A percentile score of 50 is the average score for the State at the time of each administration of the test.

Since the FAST is given three times a year, District data can demonstrate how the students' performance changed during the 2023-2024 school year. See **Table 1**.

Table 1 | Change in FAST Performance Fall to Spring 2023-24 School Year

	Mean Fall Percentile	Mean Spring Percentile	Change
ELA PG	34.3	30.5	-3.8
ELA Comparison	30.6	30.6	0
Low-Income ELA Comparison*	31.4	30.3	-1.1
Math PG	31.6	48.1	16.5
Math Comparison	35.6	41.8	6.2
Low-Income Math Comparison	35.9	42.3	6.4

*The fact that the Full and Low-Income groups have nearly identical averages is due in large part to the fact that 79% of the Full Comparison group is low income.

In the fall, PG students outperformed the comparison group and the low-income comparison group in ELA but were comparable to both comparison groups in the spring. In math, however, PG students were below the comparison groups in the fall but grew substantially more by the spring assessment and outperformed both comparison groups.

i-READY

In addition to the State FAST test, all elementary school students in the District take the i-Ready diagnostic assessment. The 50th percentile on i-Ready is the median performance of students in a *national sample* (see **Table 2** and **Table 3**).

Table 2 | i-READY Average Percentile Score: Reading

	2022	2023	2024
Project Grow	38	38	39
Comparison Group	31	30	34

Table 3 | i-READY Average Percentile Score: Math

	2022	2023	2024
Project Grow	43	37	40
Comparison Group	29	26	29

Although the average percentile scores are low, this masks the wide range of performance in both groups, from single digits to scores in the 90's. As in previous years, the PG students continued to outscore the comparison group, by five percentile points in reading and 11 points in math.

Analysis

On the State FAST assessments, by the end of the school year, PG students' scores were almost the same as the comparison groups in English Language Arts, but exceeded the comparison groups in math. On the District i-Ready assessment, PG students continued to considerably outperform the comparison group. These are very positive outcomes in that had this group needed extra support and had they not gotten it, they could have been expected to have performed at significantly lower levels than the comparison group. **The fact that they were able to overcome perceived deficits (including high rates of homelessness and unstable housing) by matching or outperforming their peers, provides evidence of the benefit of the PG Program.**

Elementary Course Grades

The District reported fall 2023 and spring 2024 grades for PG and elementary comparison students in English language arts and math.

Elementary students in the District are not given A-F letter grades. The grading scale is:

- **EX** - Exemplary - Demonstrates broad in-depth skill/concept development that most often exceeds grade level standards;
- **PR** - Proficient - Demonstrates skill/concept development that meets grade level standards;
- **AP** - Approaching - Demonstrates skill/concept development that is beginning to meet grade level standards; and
- **ND** - Needs Development - Demonstrates skill/concept that is significantly below grade level standards.

Table 4 shows the ELA grades of the PG students and the comparison group for the first and third trimesters. By the end of the year, PG students were graded exemplary and proficient in assessments of English Language Arts at a greater rate than the comparison group (44% to 33%) and showed more growth in the percentage with exemplary grades (6% compared to 2%).

Table 4 | Elementary Grades: English Language Arts

Grade	Project Grow			Comparison Group		
	1st Trimester	3rd Trimester	% Change	1st Trimester	3rd Trimester	Change
EX	0%	6%	+6	1%	3%	+2
PR	28%	38%	+10	11%	30%	+22
AP	36%	41%	+5	34%	35%	+1
ND	34%	16%	-18	54%	32%	-32

In math, **Table 5** shows a higher percentage of PG students with proficient grades and over, and double the growth over the year. Overall, 47% of the PG students were exemplary or proficient compared to 38% of the comparison group.[2]

Table 5 | Elementary Grades: Math

Grade	Project Grow %			Comparison Group %		
	1st Trimester	3rd Trimester	% Change	1st Trimester	3rd Trimester	Change
EX	3%	17%	+14	0%	7%	+7
PR	13%	30%	+17	19%	31%	+12
AP	61%	40%	-21	42%	39%	-3
ND	23%	13%	-10	39%	23%	-16

Graduation Data

The data below are from the graduation data for former PG students and the District overall for the classes 2021-2024. In order to determine if previous participation in PG could be associated with success in high school graduation, AAF provided the District with a list of 188 PG students from the school years 2007-2016[3]. From these data, the District identified 121 students who were still enrolled in any one of the 32 high schools in the District by 12th grade of their expected year of graduation.

[2] For both of these and for other statistics reported in this document, the small numbers of students involved in the PG group preclude finding any measures of statistical significance.

[3] Data release consent forms for these students were not necessary because the District could not provide any individually identifiable information, just summary statistics on the PG students and the comparison group as a whole.

Since the PG students were in different grade levels while in the program, they were found in District data for the graduation years 2014-2024.

It is important to note that whether a student graduates from high school depends on a wide variety of factors, many of which are beyond the impact of any one program and are often even beyond the ability of the students or their families to control. The data below must be viewed as a very partial indicator of PG's influence on graduation and not seen as a direct impact of PG.

At the request of AAF the District provided a more detailed breakdown by demographic groups on the PG students and the District total for the class of 2024 for comparison. Given that these students had been in PG several years prior, it is likely that some of them moved out of the District and may have graduated from high school in their new district. Students who did transfer were removed from the analysis prior to summarizing the data. The data are broken down by race and participation in special programs as shown in **Table 6** below. The data on the District overall include the PG students, but there are so few students (117 out of 14,428) that they do not affect the District average.

Because few PG students would have graduated in any given year, in Table 6 the graduation rate of all the PG students is compared to the average District graduation rate from 2021-2024. The four year graduation rate is calculated based on the percentage of students who graduate within four years after starting ninth grade.

TABLE 6 | Comparison Data of Project Grow and District Graduation Rates

	Project Grow			District 4-Year Graduation Average Rate	PG Difference with District Average
	Enrolled	Graduates	%		
Total	121	108	89.3%	90.7%	-1.4%
Black	42	38	90.5%	87.1%	3.4%
Hispanic	65	58	89.2%	88.4%	0.8%
White	10	8	80.0%	95.6%	-15.6%
Other	4	4	100.0%	94.2%	5.9%
SWD*	24	20	83.3%	87.2%	-3.9%
Non-SWD	97	88	90.7%	91.2%	-0.5%
FRL**	69	62	89.9%	87.2%	2.7%
Non-FRL	52	46	88.5%	96.0%	-7.5%

* SWD = Students with disabilities. ** FRL = Free or reduced lunch (low income)

For comparison, the four year graduation rate for low income students district-wide was 87.3%, slightly lower than the 89.9% for PG students.

The data in Table 6 include the count of students who remained enrolled in the School District through grade 12 and the number that graduated by demographic subgroup and overall. It is important to note that 20 students on the PG rosters supplied to the District remain active in the District and are currently enrolled in grades 8 through 12. For confidentiality reasons, the data from the District do not show why these students are still enrolled. Some of them may have been special needs students who are entitled to remain in school until age 22.

Overall, by the spring of 2024, 89.3% of PG students who could have graduated from District high schools did graduate. This was 1.4 percentage points lower than the District four-year mean graduation rate. Compared to the District average, among the demographic groups represented in the data, Black, Hispanic, Other race, and low income students exceeded the graduation rate of their peers in the District overall. The largest gap between the PG and District rates is for White students, who show a lower rate by 15.6 percentage points (based on only 10 White students enrolled in PG).

Non-Academic School Indicators

In addition to the test scores, the District supplied data on attendance and suspensions for PG students and the Highland comparison group.

Attendance

Table 7 shows that PG students continue to have a high level of attendance, although there was a 2 percentage point drop in 2024, and the PG student average attendance is now the same as the comparison group.

Table 7 | Average Daily Attendance

	2022	2023	2024
Project Grow	93%	95%	93%
Comparison Group	93%	93%	93%

Suspensions

Suspension, whether out-of-school or in-school, is uncommon in elementary schools. One PG student was suspended in 2023-2024, once in-school and once out of school. There were fifteen out-of-school suspensions in the much larger comparison group and eight in-school.

CONCLUSIONS

When comparing PG students to peers who are not in PG but have similar demographics, we saw the PG students performed higher on most tests such as the State test of English Language Arts, the District tests of reading and math, and student grades. Over many years of providing academic and social skills support to low-income students who often need this additional help to succeed, Project Grow has clearly contributed to the growth of the children in the program.

Almost all of the academic indicators included in this study show greater or comparable levels of achievement to a demographically equivalent comparison group. Through State and District-level test scores, grades, attendance, and discipline, the program students show positive outcomes, especially considering the fact that the comparison group was not matched for the high rates of homelessness and unstable housing experienced by the PG students.

Graduation rates, a critical academic outcome for long-term success, show that previous PG students have not fallen behind and are graduating at close to the high rates found in the rest of the District. Black, Hispanic, Other race, and low-income PG students graduate at higher levels than their District peers.

During a site visit to AAF in the spring of 2024, Geo staff observed PG classrooms and activities. The students were highly motivated and involved in their learning, the staff worked with the students

personally and kept everyone engaged, and the instructional materials and facilities were of high quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY GEO EDUCATION & RESEARCH

As noted in previous reports, when a program is achieving high levels of success in meeting its short- and long-term goals it is difficult to suggest changes. The success of the program depends to a large part on highly trained staff, so AAF should continue to find ways to build the skills of the teachers and support the volunteer tutors.

Likewise, partnering with the parents is critical, and PG has an opportunity to play a role beyond what their teachers at school can accomplish. The parenting class which started in 2023 is a very positive step and should be continued, with ongoing recruitment and outreach to other parents.

The staff at Highland Elementary who were interviewed during the site visit are strongly supportive of PG and see it as a strong complement to their work with the students. Therefore, it is worth continuing all efforts to build strong connections to Highland Elementary School to coordinate services to these young learners.

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