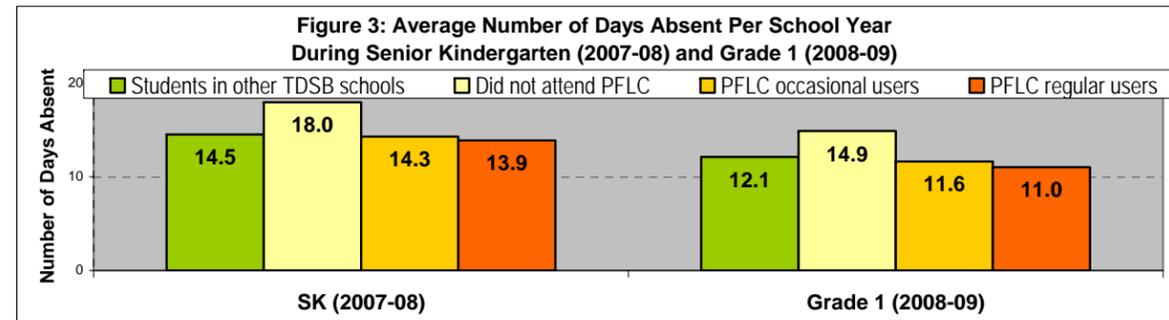


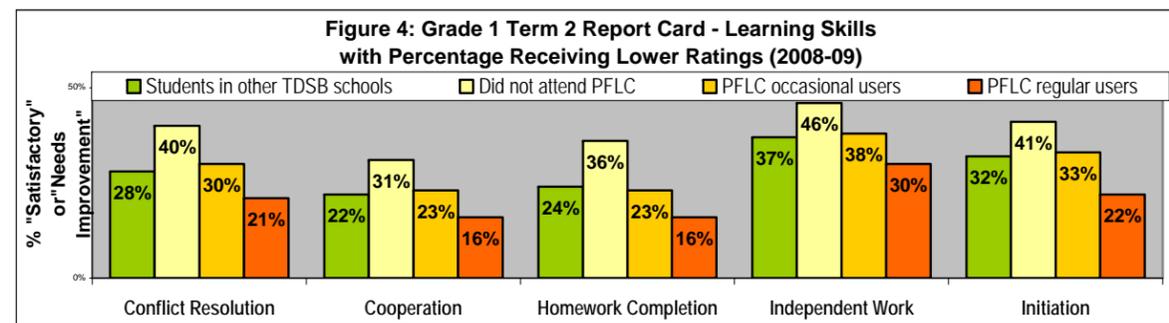
## School Attendance

Although absenteeism rates tend to decline when Kindergarten children enter Grade 1, the non-PFLC students in the 51 high-needs schools still had a higher average number of days absent than the general population. For occasional PFLC students, the absenteeism rate was comparable to the system average, and for regular attendees the rate was even lower (see Figure 3).



## Learning and Social Skills

As a group, students who attended the PFLCs also fared better than their school mates in such learning skills as taking initiative, independent work and homework completion, as well as in social skills like co-operation and conflict resolution. For occasional attendees, the proportion being rated in their Grade 1 Report Card as “satisfactory” or “needs improvement” (versus “good” or “excellent”) in these areas were about the same as that of the general population; for the regular PFLC students, the percentage was even lower. In other words, the latter generally outperformed the overall population in these learning and social skill areas.



## PFLCs work with and for families to benefit children in high-risk neighbourhoods

These recent results demonstrate the measurable difference that PFLCs can make on students in high-risk neighbourhoods. The results are immediate as they facilitate a smooth transition for pre-school children into formal schooling, as well as provide long-term benefits by developing social, learning and academic skills children need to succeed in school. These benefits are a direct result of the active participation of the parents/caregivers in the PFLCs offered in their local schools.



## PARENTING AND FAMILY LITERACY CENTRES: Making a Difference *Beyond* Early School Readiness

Prepared by Maria Y. M. Yau

*“The years before six are the most influential to a child’s development. How we care for our children during the first six years sets the stage for their lifelong learning, behaviour and health.”* Ministry of Education

### About the program

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) were first established in 1981 in five Toronto inner city schools where students were at risk for academic failure. Parents and their preschool children in these neighbourhoods were invited to take part in this local-school program aiming to engage parents positively in the school system, offer support in parenting, and to lay the foundation for successful transition for young children into kindergarten.

Currently, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has 75 PFLCs located in high density, culturally diverse neighbourhoods throughout the city. In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education adopted this model, and since then more than 140 PFLCs have been established in 15 School Boards across the province.

These PFLCs help prepare children for starting school and to encourage families to be a part of their children’s learning by:

- supporting children’s early learning through a play based program that promotes the optimal development of the child
- helping children build essential literacy and numeracy skills through stories, music, reading, and playing
- encouraging families to engage in their children’s learning
- familiarizing children and families with school routines
- giving children and families the chance to spend time with other families
- linking families with appropriate community resources for special needs, health and other related services
- offering a book-lending library in different languages so parents can read to their children in their first language



## About the research

Since 1999, the TDSB has conducted three phases of formal research to assess the immediate and long-term impact of the program - with each successive phase involving larger samples of students and numbers of Centres. The data collection methods used at various phases included:

- Parent User Surveys
- PFLC Worker Surveys
- PFLC registration and attendance records
- Teacher Interviews
- Grade 1 Report Card information
- School attendance records
- Early Development Instrument (EDI)<sup>1</sup>

These tools were used to gather information about:

- Parent and teacher attitudes towards the PFLC program
- Students' Grade 1 literacy levels
- Teacher observations of student learning and social skills
- Information about families' levels of use of the program (i.e., regular-, occasional-, and non-users)

*Earlier research demonstrates that "... young children who attended PFLCs were much more prepared for schooling than their peers in the same schools who had not attended the program." (Yau, M., TDSB, 2005)*

## What does the most recent research tell us about the program?

The latest analysis of data in 2008-09 validated earlier findings about the immediate positive impact of the program in preparing children for school entry. The most recent research results demonstrate that the initial gains PFLC students had made could be *extended* to their later school years and to other related areas including:

- whole-child development (physical, social, emotional, and cognitive);
- academic performance in primary years;
- school engagement (e.g., lower absenteeism); and
- positive schooling experience as a result of better learning skills and attitudes and peer relationships.

*In addition to smoother transition to Kindergarten, the latest research reveals that the benefits gained by PFLC attendees can be long term and multi-faceted.*

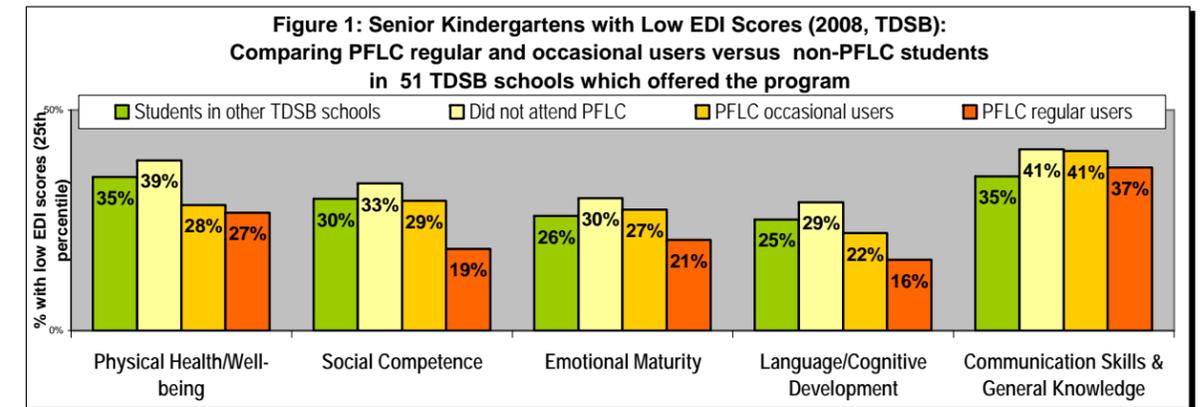
To gauge the type and the degree of long-term gains made by PFLC participants, four groups of TDSB students, who were born in 2002, were compared:

1. Regular attendees - students (and their parents/caregivers) who had participated four or more times per month in the program offered in one of the 51 TDSB schools at the time
2. Occasional attendees - students from the 51 schools who had attended the program with their parents/caregivers fewer than four times a month or very sporadically
3. Non-users –students enrolled in the same 51 schools who had *not* participated in the program
4. General population –the same age group of students enrolled in all other TDSB elementary schools

<sup>1</sup> This is a community-based measure developed by The Canadian Centre for Studies of Children at Risk (McMaster University) to gauge young children readiness in five developmental areas - physical, social, emotional, cognitive, language, and general knowledge.

## Whole-Child Development

For children who had attended PFLCs with their parents/caregivers, their odds of receiving *low* EDI readiness scores in the five developmental areas (physical well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge) was significantly smaller than their school peers who had no exposure to the program. This was especially true for those who attended the program regularly; their likelihood of being assessed *low* on at least four of the five EDI domains was also less than that of the general population (see Figure 1).



## Academic Performance in Grade 1

The latest analysis also shows that after almost three years of schooling (JK, SK, and Grade 1), the students attending PFLCs, especially the regular participants, were less likely to be performing *below* the expected reading and writing levels in their mid-term Report Cards (see Figure 2).

