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## Terrebonne pre-K program scores well

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Published: Wednesday, March 25, 2009 at 12:10 p.m.

HOUMA - A university research center gives high marks to Terrebonne Parish's pre-kindergarten program.

A report released Friday by the Picard Center for Child Development at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette evaluates a state-funded pre-kindergarten program called LA 4, which includes nearly 13,400 students statewide.

Terrebonne's results are among the first released. Findings for Lafourche Parish are not yet available.

Its findings are based on a test given to students twice: when they first enter the program and again after the year is complete.

The report says students in Terrebonne's pre-K program "will be overall better prepared for kindergarten and future academic success."

In 2007-08, Terrebonne students began pre-K in the lowest 10 percent of national scores, but after finishing the program, their ranking more than tripled to nearly reach the national average.

It "really helps even the playing field for all children," Ouida Forsyth, early-childhood director at the Picard Center, said of the program. "Our true purpose ... is to help every child be prepared for school."

The program is paid for with money from the state and federal government. About \$4.5 million comes from a state LA 4 grant, with another \$300,000 in a separate Louisiana grant.

An additional \$1.5 million is paid in Title I federal grant money.

Carol Davis, Terrebonne's director of federal programs, said the LA 4 program develops the building blocks needed once children enter school: writing their names, recognizing letters and numbers. But other aspects give students valuable experience, including social interaction, field trips and strong parental involvement.

Teachers must all be certified and complete ongoing training programs. Each class aims to have no more than 10 students per teacher.

Davis said the program's results will begin to show once the students are old enough to take standardized tests like the LEAP. She said the program may help reduce the number of held-back, special-education and dropout students.

"We've known for years that high-quality early-childhood education experiences make a difference," Forsyth said. "And those differences are long-lasting."

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