



# **AN EVALUATION OF PROJECT CHILD'S IMPACT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN 19 SCHOOLS**



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**INSTITUTE FOR SCHOOL INNOVATION**

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**[WWW.IFSI.ORG](http://WWW.IFSI.ORG)**

## 2007 PROJECT CHILD FCAT REPORT

### Executive Summary

This report compares Project CHILD® students' achievement in reading and mathematics with the achievement of students not in Project CHILD as measured by the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). This 2007 Project CHILD Evaluation Report continues the commitment of the Institute for School Innovation (ISI) to track and document Project CHILD student achievement across multiple sites.

Project CHILD is a transformational instructional system that restructures the traditional elementary school that is noted for single grade and single teacher instruction. CHILD on the other hand, employs a triangulated design with three teachers working as a team across three grade levels with three years to work with students. CHILD also moves beyond textbook teaching to incorporate technology and hands-on active learning at differentiated learning stations.

This report examines FCAT scores for 19 Florida elementary schools for students in grades 3-5. The total population of Project CHILD students included in this study is approximately 2,442, with approximately 7,326 non-CHILD students.

Overall there were 90 favorable comparisons for CHILD classes, and 14 favorable comparisons for the non-CHILD classes. Of these there were 45 favorable reading comparisons for the CHILD classes, and 6 favorable reading comparisons for the non-CHILD classes. There were 45 favorable mathematics comparisons for the CHILD classes, and 8 favorable mathematics comparisons for the non-CHILD classrooms.

These positive outcomes for CHILD students in 2007 add to the historical record of more favorable academic performance for the hundreds of thousands of CHILD students tested since 1989. The CHILD model continues to pass the test of time as an effective teaching and learning system.



### **2007 Project CHILD Evaluation Report**

This report compares Project CHILD® students' achievement in reading and mathematics with the achievement of students not in Project CHILD as measured by the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). The FCAT is given annually in March to all Florida elementary students in grades 3-5. It is graded on a scale of 1-5, with 3 considered being on grade level.

The FCAT is a high stakes test, in that school grades (A-F) that result in monetary awards or sanctions are tied to FCAT results. Furthermore, third grade students who score Level 1 on the reading portion of the test may not be promoted to fourth grade, and must be given intensive remediation to try to catch up.

This 2007 Project CHILD Evaluation Report continues the commitment of the Institute for School Innovation (ISI) to track and document Project CHILD student achievement across multiple sites. For a summary of research since 1989, visit the ISI website at [www.ifs.org](http://www.ifs.org), or contact ISI to request a printed report.

### **About the Institute for School Innovation**

The Institute for School Innovation (ISI) is a private nonprofit educational organization located in Tallahassee, Florida. Founded in 1995, its mission is to redefine classroom instruction through technology and active learning. Its vision is to create and sustain a commanding network of innovative CHILD educators whose students will achieve academic success and cultivate lifelong personal growth.

The primary focus of its work to date has been to disseminate and support Project CHILD (Changing How Instruction for Learning is Delivered), an innovative instructional model that dramatically improves student achievement in grades K-5. For 15 years, ISI has been quietly building a network of innovative teachers and school leaders who are creating world class learning environments that fundamentally reshape the status quo in elementary schools.

ISI is governed by a volunteer board of directors, including faculty members from Florida State University and Florida A&M University, as well as business and community leaders. Dr. Sarah (Sally) Butzin is the founder and serves as President & Executive Director. A former classroom teacher, she is the developer of the Project CHILD system and continues to serve as the senior author. Her book titled *Joyful Classrooms in an Age of Accountability: The Project CHILD Recipe for Success*(1) reflects Dr. Butzin's philosophy that teachers and children will thrive in classrooms where there is joy and pride in success.

ISI supports educators through an annual conference, regional workshops, an interactive web site ([www.ifs.org](http://www.ifs.org)), awards & recognitions, and various publications that help CHILD teachers connect and share ideas. ISI also provides opportunities for CHILD teachers to enhance their professional status and earn supplemental income by training to become ISI consultants who serve as the coaches and mentors for new CHILD teachers.



**About Project CHILD (Changing How Instruction for Learning is Delivered)**

Dr. Butzin conceived and designed the CHILD instructional model in 1988 at Florida State University as a framework to bring technology and active learning into elementary classrooms. The model continues to survive and thrive, which is highly unusual for innovative educational projects which historically have a three to five year life span.

One reason for its longevity is that Project CHILD moves beyond theory and platitudes by providing teachers with a replicable model of best practices, called the CHILD 20 Essential Components (2). ISI provides extensive professional development and coaching along with the tools and techniques that enable teachers to successfully engage today’s students. Over the years, ISI has developed and refined a wide array of materials for teachers and students alike. ISI continues to update and refresh the model and materials each year. The most recent innovation incorporates a technology-based personalized assessment system for reading, writing, and mathematics.

Project CHILD enhances and extends a school’s existing curriculum for reading, writing, and mathematics in grades K-5. Project CHILD transforms the temporal, social, and physical aspects of the standard classroom -- traditionally comprised of one teacher teaching all subjects to a single grade of students for one year, using a predominantly textbook-driven delivery system.

The standard approach also limits articulation between grade level teachers, and precious learning time is squandered each year as each new group of students and teachers settle in. More learning time may be lost as well at the end of the year after “the test” as many teachers go into relax mode, knowing that the students will soon be moving on to a new teacher.

Project CHILD is different. Three teachers work together as a team clustered across three grade levels. A primary cluster consists of a K-2 team, and an intermediate cluster for grades 3-5. Each teacher in the cluster picks a subject in which to specialize and intensify – reading, writing, or mathematics.

Each cluster classroom offers 6 differentiated learning stations to keep students actively involved in a variety of learning modes...

- Teacher Station for small group instruction;
- Computer Station for using instructional software, Internet resources, and projects;
- Exploration Station for creative learning;
- Challenge Station for activities in game formats;
- Construction Station for hands-on learning; and
- Textbook Station for written work and assessments.

CHILD students follow a highly structured, yet transparent classroom management system...

### Classroom Management Tools

**Passports** for setting goals, recording station work, reflecting on learning in order to solidify understanding, and communicating with parents;

**Daily Station Assignment Boards** for showing students where to begin working each day;

**Station Task Cards** for giving directions and connecting the activity to the learning objective tied to state standards.

There is no wasted time in a Project CHILD classroom. When students finish their first assigned station activity, they check their Passport and immediately move to the next appropriate station, review the Task Card and get to work. The CHILD system also empowers students to work cooperatively and assist one another if they need help when the teacher is busy at the Teacher Station.

Students move to each cluster classroom for 60-90 minute periods throughout the day. The lesson begins with whole group direct instruction from the teacher before station work begins. After station work, the students gather together again in whole group to review and reflect.

Throughout each week, CHILD students will work at six different reading stations, six different writing stations, and six different mathematics stations as they move from class to class. This assures a variety of modalities (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic) to accommodate each child's unique learning style for all subject areas.

CHILD students stay within their cluster for three years. Thus CHILD teachers have three years to assess each child's needs, and nurture each child's growth in their subject specialty. They can begin lessons each year with minimal start-up time, and continue productively to the last day of school, knowing they are responsible for three year's growth.

One of the teachers serves as the homeroom grade level teacher, so students will have a different homeroom teacher each year. The homeroom teacher is also responsible for the content instruction in science and social studies, although many CHILD teachers now incorporate science and social studies into station activities throughout the day.

Numerous program evaluations since 1988 have documented that CHILD students outperform their peers within the same school settings in reading, writing, and mathematics(3). CHILD has been shown to close achievement gaps for minority and high poverty students(4), and to significantly reduce third grade retentions(5,6). CHILD students also have far fewer discipline problems, and parent satisfaction is very high as evidenced by the long waiting lists at most CHILD sites where CHILD is an option.

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### Population

During the 2006-2007 school year there were 49 schools in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania with Project CHILD classrooms. Because the majority of the CHILD schools are in Florida, this evaluation focuses only on the 42 Florida schools. Within those schools there were 65 primary CHILD clusters (grades K-2) and 67 intermediate CHILD clusters (grades 3-5) for a total of 396 classrooms. Schools chosen for this evaluation were those with grade 3-5 intermediate clusters that took the FCAT, as well as those having both CHILD and non-CHILD classrooms so that reasonable comparisons could be made.

Since most of the CHILD schools select students randomly using the same criteria as for the non-CHILD classrooms, this evaluation comprises a semi-experimental design. There is a control group (non-CHILD classrooms) and experimental group (CHILD classrooms). However, a few schools do allow parent request, so that precludes a purely experimental design with randomized subjects.

Of the 34 schools with CHILD in grades 3-5 and with CHILD/non-CHILD comparison classrooms, 21 schools provided the data requested by ISI. This is a fairly robust response rate of 62%. Of the 21 schools, 19 were considered to adequately represent faithful implementation of the CHILD 20 Essential Components. The two rejected had not fully implemented the model throughout the school year due to high teacher turnover, as well as one school opening a new building without computers and delayed textbook deliveries.

Nine of the 19 selected schools, or 47%, were Title One schools meeting the Federal poverty requirements as measured by students receiving free or reduced lunch. The 19 schools had a broad range of experience with CHILD implementation, ranging from one to 12 years.



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**Schools Included in the Study**

**Table 1**  
**Number of Years of Project CHILD Implementation**

\*Denotes Title One School

District	School	Began	# Int. Clusters
Indian River	Citrus	2005	2
Indian River	Dodgertown*	2005	1
Indian River	Sebastian	2006	1
Indian River	Vero Beach*	2005	2
Indian River	Glendale	1999	2
Indian River	Pelican Island	2005	1
Leon	Buck Lake	1995	1
Marion	Dr. N.H. Jones	2003	1
Marion	East Marion*	2002	2
Marion	Ocala Springs*	1996	3
Marion	Ft. McCoy*	2003	2
Okaloosa	Walker*	2002	1
Osceola	Central Ave*	2003	4
Osceola	Partin Settlement*	2002	4
Osceola	Reedy Creek*	1999	2
Palm Beach	Cypress Trails	2001	1
Palm Beach	Golden Grove	1999	3
Palm Beach	Grassy Waters	2005	1
Palm Beach	Panther Run	1999	3

The total population of Project CHILD students included in this study is approximately 2,442. This number was derived by multiplying the number of classroom scores reported by 22, which is the mandated class size in Florida for grades 3-5.

The exact number of non-CHILD classrooms at some schools could not be determined because

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the data were reported by average scores rather than by individual classrooms. Therefore the total population of non-CHILD students was derived by extrapolating an average of three times more non-CHILD classrooms across the schools, or approximately 7,326 non-CHILD students.

**Table 2: Number of Students**

FCAT Comparisons Grades 3-5	CHILD	Non-CHILD
(N) Number of students included in this study	2,442	7,326



**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

ISI sent a letter and data collection sheet to each CHILD school that met the criteria for the study. The directions asked the school to record in the appropriate CHILD or non-CHILD sections the percent of students class by class who scored at Level 3 and above on the FCAT. Teacher names and student names were specifically not requested so as to maintain anonymity.

Classes identified as being special needs classes such as ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages), ESE (Exceptional Student Education) and inclusion classes were not included. The CHILD and non-CHILD classroom data were then averaged and rounded to the nearest whole number.

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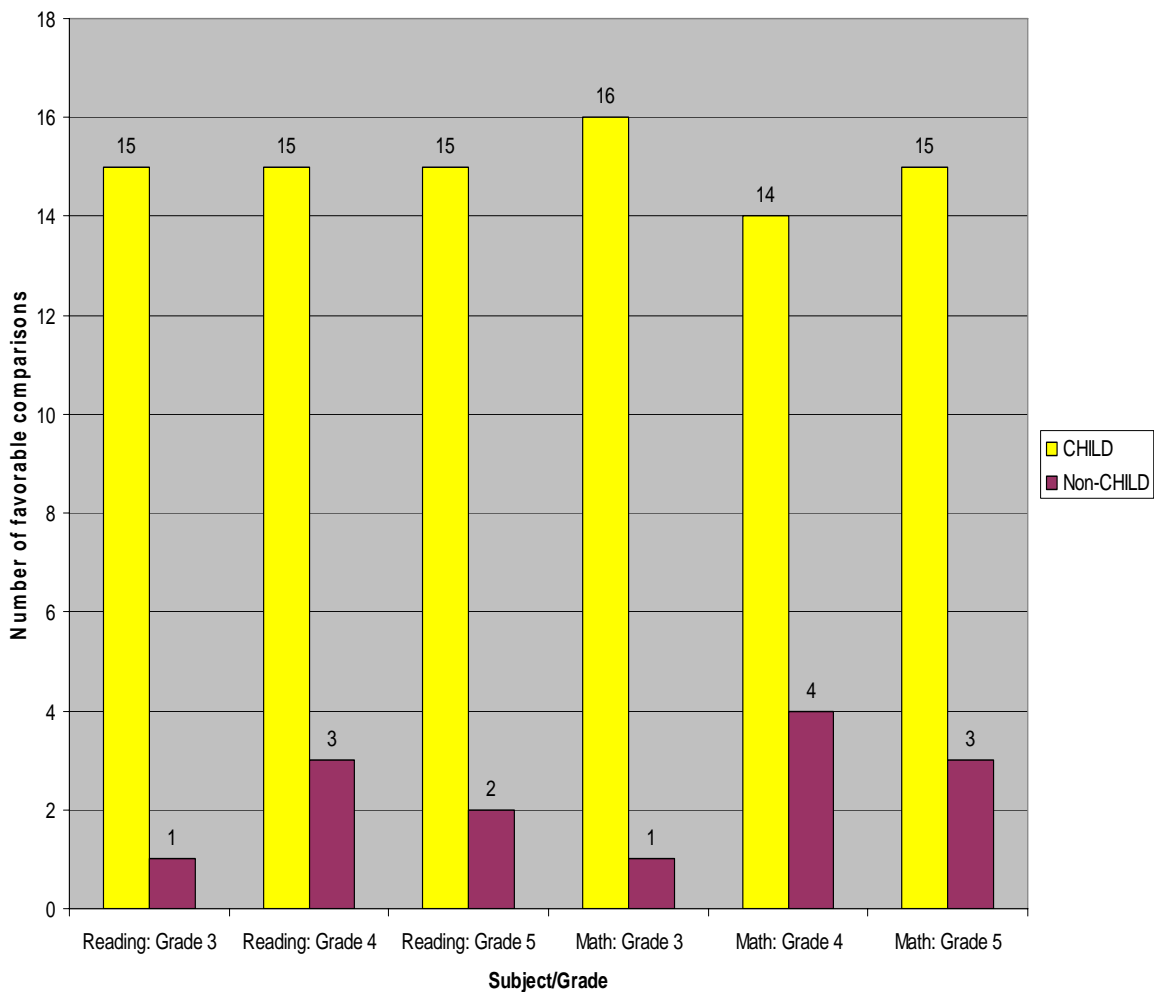


### Results

Overall there were 90 favorable comparisons for the CHILD classes, and 14 favorable comparisons for the non-CHILD classes as represented by the graph below.

Of these there were 45 favorable reading comparisons for the CHILD classes, and 6 favorable reading comparisons for the non-CHILD classes. There were 45 favorable mathematics comparisons for the CHILD classes, and 8 favorable mathematics comparisons for the non-CHILD classrooms.

FCAT Comparisons at 19 Schools



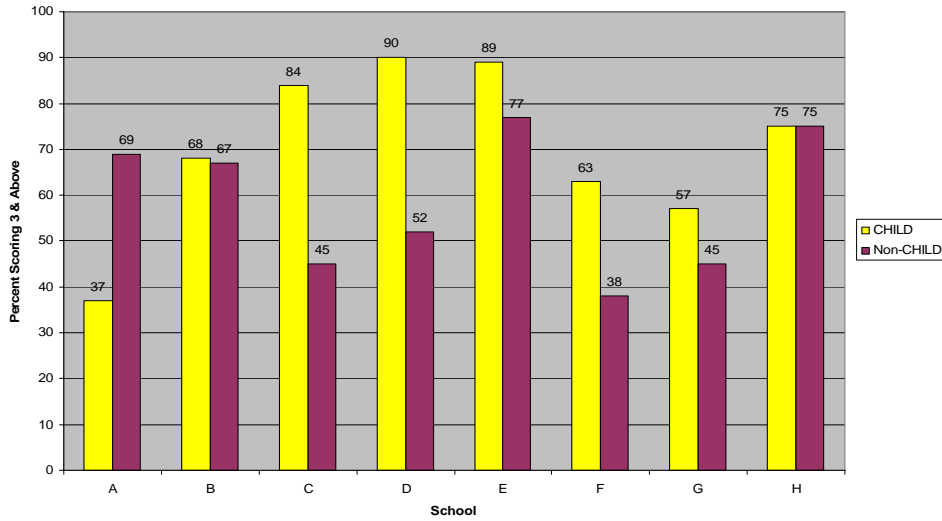
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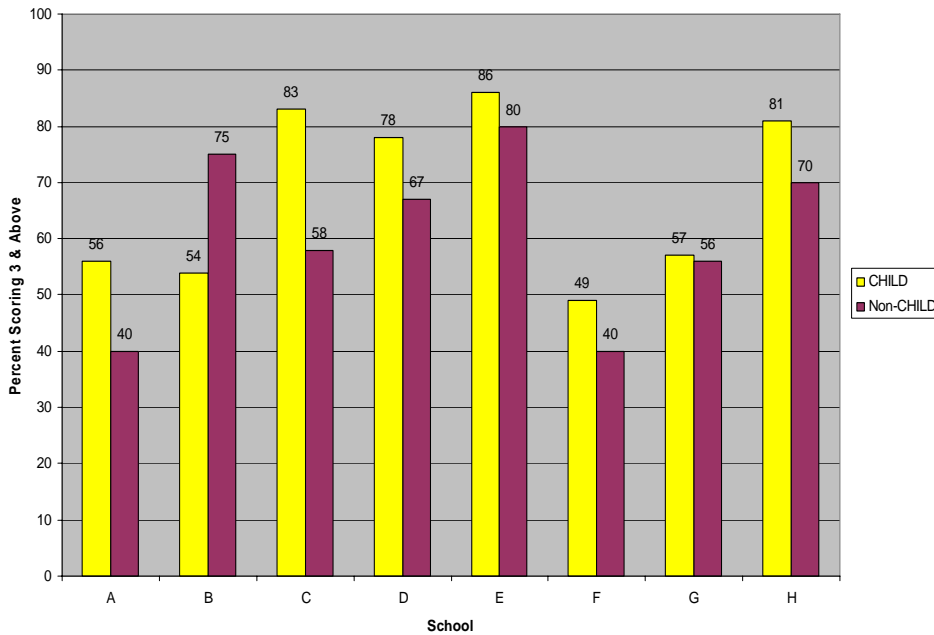
## Subset of Title One Schools

Analysis of the subset of nine Title One schools showed predominantly favorable comparisons for the CHILD classes across all grades. The following six graphs represent these data comparisons.

Title One: Grade 3 FCAT Reading



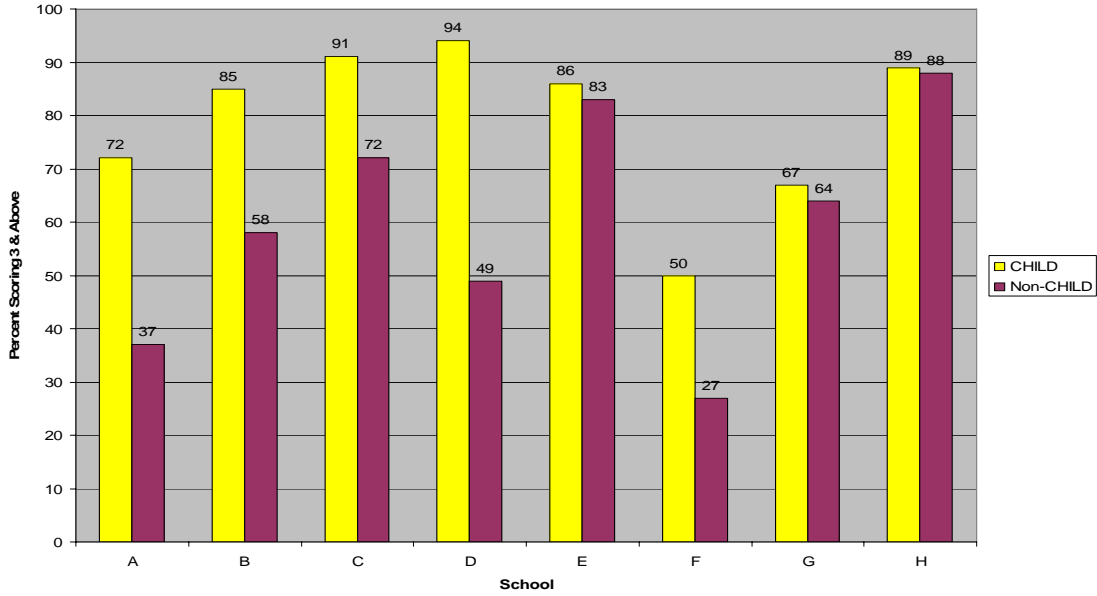
Title One: Grade 3 FCAT Mathematics



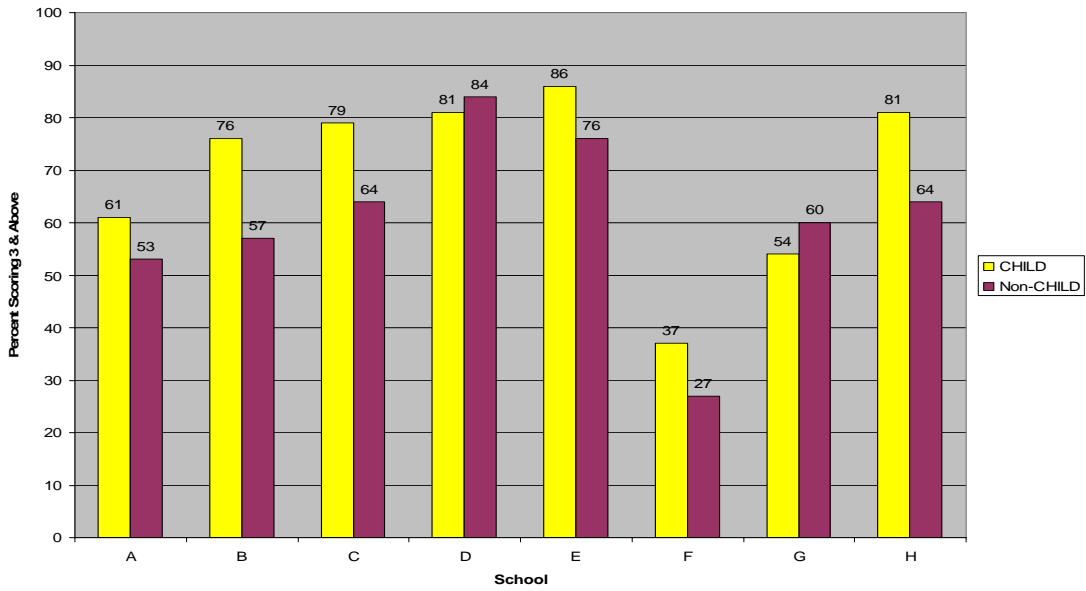
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Title One: Grade 4 FCAT Reading



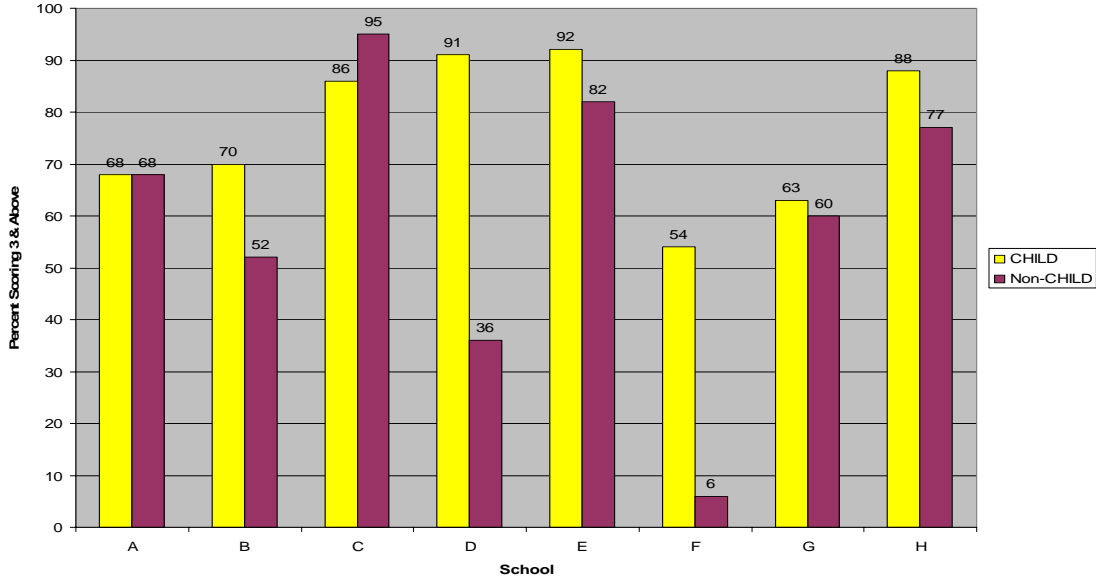
Title One: Grade 4 FCAT Mathematics



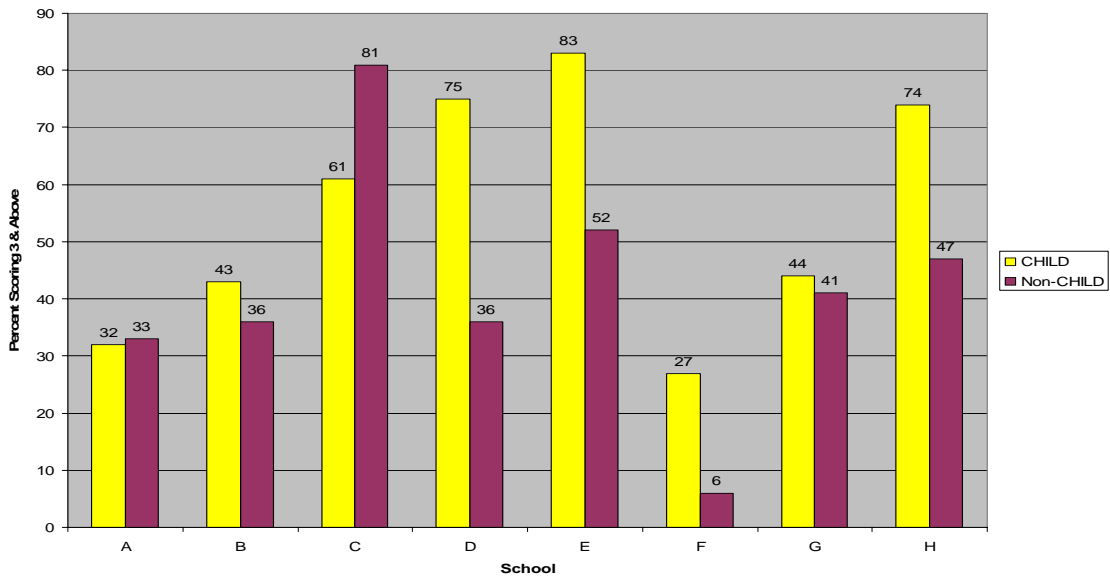
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Title One: Grade 5 FCAT Reading



Title One: Grade 5 FCAT Mathematics

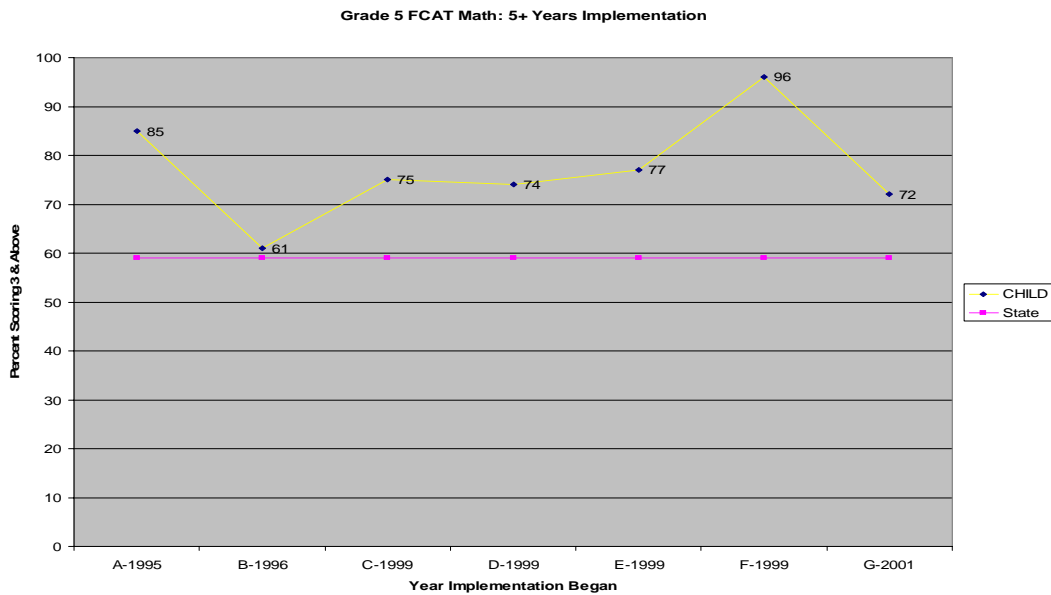
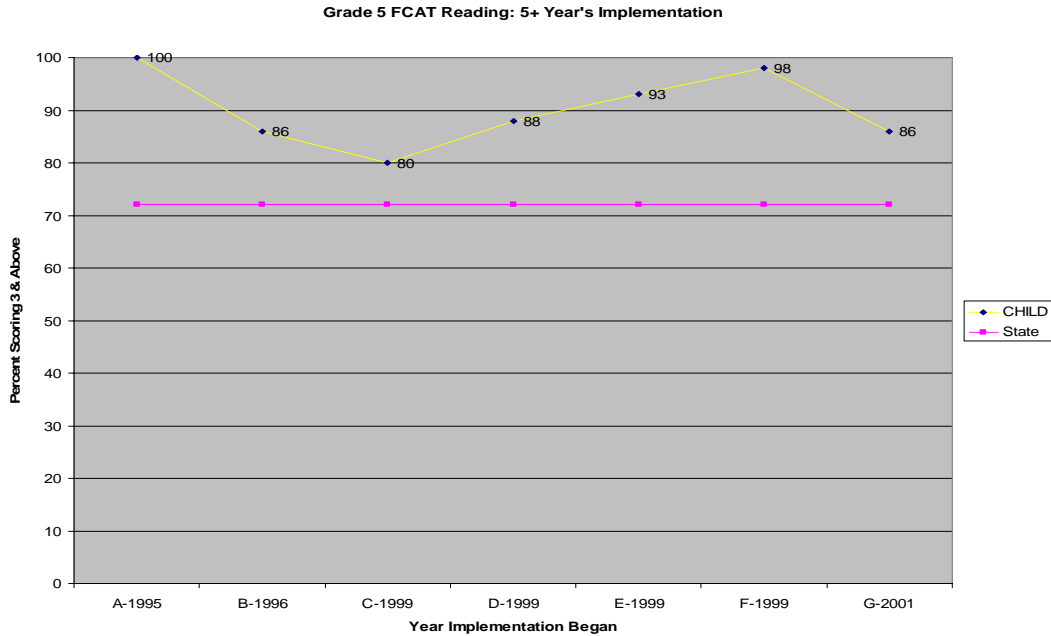


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### Subset of Fifth Grades with CHILD Primary (K-2) Experience

Analysis of the subset of schools with implementations of five years or longer was undertaken to determine whether having matriculated to 5th grade with prior CHILD experience in the primary grades made a difference. The data showed that 100% of the CHILD classrooms exceeded the state's passing rates (72% for reading and 59% for mathematics) by wide margins as represented in the graphs below.



### Discussion and Conclusion

The Project CHILD model continues to stand the test of time as an effective instructional system that improves student performance in comparison with traditional standard teaching practices. The overwhelming trend from school to school, and grade to grade for the 2007 FCAT results favored the CHILD classrooms.

In a few cases, the standard classrooms outperformed the CHILD classrooms. This is to be expected given the many variables involved in an elementary classroom – from teacher variables to student variables. Teaching and learning is a very complex process. This report therefore demonstrates that there are no silver bullets to improve student achievement.

More studies need to be conducted to uncover the key elements that lead to the positive trends for the CHILD approach. Two theories that undoubtedly contribute to the outcomes are 1) the use of time, and 2) teacher effectiveness.

Time-on-task has long been associated with positive learning outcomes(7). The CHILD model reduces wasted time by employing elements of looping and continuous progress, along with the independent movement of the students at learning stations. Students do not need to wait for others to finish before moving to their next task, nor do slower students need to feel rushed if they need more time to complete the station activity. The CHILD model optimizes time-on-task.

It is also interesting to note that intermediate students with Project CHILD experience in the primary grades succeed at very high levels. The 2006 report cited earlier showed a 100% FCAT passing rate for third grade students with K-2 CHILD experience. This 2007 FCAT Report shows that 100% of the CHILD fifth graders with K-2 CHILD experience surpassed the state averages in both reading and mathematics. More longitudinal studies need to be done to assess the impact of Project CHILD as a failure prevention strategy, and to see if the gains made by CHILD students continue into middle school and beyond.

The second theory is that effective teachers are essential for getting positive results(8). Perhaps the more effective teachers are drawn to Project CHILD as a vehicle that enables them to feel more empowered and creative. Perhaps the CHILD model makes the teachers more effective by letting them specialize in a subject they prefer. Perhaps they become more effective through the professional development, coaching, and the teaching tools that CHILD provides.

Experience has shown that the CHILD model can make a good teacher even better, while a weak teacher becomes more visible. A weak teacher who cannot, or will not, fully and faithfully implement the CHILD 20 Essential Components will not achieve the same outcomes as the effective teacher. But a weak teacher can become more effective by implementing at least some of the CHILD components. In the end, it always comes down to the teacher and his or her ability to motivate, engage, and assist students in meeting learning objectives.

Another area that needs further study is the role of technology and its impact on the CHILD results. The benefit of high quality educational technology is that it provides immediate feedback and individualized instruction opportunities. Well-designed software leads students through a systematic hierarchy of skills within a patient and non judgmental format. Are CHILD teachers taking advantage of

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this powerful resource?

It remains unclear how much actual time is spent on appropriate and connected activities at the CHILD classroom Computer Station. Classroom observations have revealed some trivial and disconnected uses of the Computer Station, as well as “down time” due to technical problems and lack of available software. Tech support at many school districts has been drastically cut with the resulting teacher frustration in not having a dependable learning tool. Budget cuts have also impacted some schools’ ability to keep their software libraries current and up to date.

Although many textbooks now provide on-line activities at no extra charge, teachers report that they lack the time to plan for true integration. Also with the availability of more free Internet software applications, cost is less a concern for acquiring educational software. However, teachers may be less than skillful at discerning which free software is effective and appropriate. More work and training needs to be done in this area.

Given these constraints, other technologies may be more appropriate, such as the AlphaSmart® word processing tools, or the LeapFrog® PLT’s (Personal Learning Tools) that can operate separate from the Computer Station. ISI has undertaken a pilot project using several LeapFrog products including the Leapster®, LeapDesk®, LeapPad® and QuantumPad® to provide learner motivation and feedback at various learning stations. This new technology dimension will also need further study.

The Institute for School Innovation remains committed to reinventing classroom instruction through technology and active learning. The Project CHILD model continues to show its value in accomplishing this objective. ISI will continue to evaluate results and report them to interested researchers and policy makers in the hopes of growing and supporting a commanding network of innovative educators.



**Endnotes**

1. *Joyful Classrooms in an Age of Accountability: The Project CHILD Recipe for Success*. Sarah M. Butzin, Phi Delta Kappa, Bloomington, IN. 2005. ISBN 0-87367-542-8.
2. CHILD 20 Essential Components. [www.ifsii.org/Project CHILD/Learn More](http://www.ifsii.org/Project%20CHILD/Learn%20More)
3. Project CHILD Research Summary. [www.ifsii.org/Research & Publications](http://www.ifsii.org/Research%20&%20Publications)
4. *Florida TaxWatch Comparative Evaluation of Project CHILD: Phase IV*. Research Report, Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance & Accountability, Tallahassee, FL. March 2005. [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org).
5. *An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Project CHILD on Third Grade Retentions in Florida*. EPPC Management, Tallahassee, FL. December 2005.
6. *A Retention Prevention Strategy: Project CHILD's Impact on Third Grade Retentions at Fifteen Florida Schools*. Institute for School Innovation, Tallahassee, FL. October 2006.
7. *Academic Engaged Time and its Relationship to Learning: A Review of the Literature*. J. Graden et al, ERIC Documents, ED 214 930, 1982.
8. *Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap*. Kati Haycock, Thinking K-16, The Education Trust, Washington, DC. Vol. 3, Issue 2, 1998.

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