

PreK On My Way Case Study Report

Presented by:

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the PreK On My Way™ (PKOMW) case study. The PKOMW curriculum supports PreK students in developing math, literacy, and language skills through research-based, standards-aligned, interactive, and scaffolded instructional practices. It is designed to center purposeful play, socioemotional supports, hands-on activities, and culturally relevant reading materials. The PKOMW curriculum is also designed to support multilingual learners through authentic, culturally relevant, Spanish language texts and asset-based language supports. Authors of PreK On My Way include leading researchers and educators: Tricia Zucker, PhD, of the Children’s Learning Institute at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth; Linda Mayes, MD, of the Yale Child Study Center; and Jie-Qi Chen, PhD, of the Erikson Institute. Its research-based approach is designed to meet individual state standards and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes. The case study is the first of four phases in the evaluation of the PKOMW curriculum.

Each of the phases has its own set of goals and objectives that build to a rigorous impact evaluation. The objective of the case study is to highlight the successful implementation of PKOMW in four classrooms within two school districts across two different states.

1	2	3	4
Case study	Pilot study	Implementation study	Impact study
			

To do this, we interviewed teachers, district staff members, and center directors. We also conducted classroom observations to address the following four research questions:

1. How Is PKOMW implemented?
2. What Are PKOMW’s strengths and areas for improvement?
3. How engaging Are the PKOMW curriculum materials for children?
4. Why did school districts select the PKOMW curriculum?

*“PKOMW has **rich diverse literature** that makes for wonderful, **interactive read-alouds**.... All of the center materials are provided for [teachers] for math, language, and literacy... that the program is scripted but it still leaves you with a sense of **autonomy**. And it’s very **teacher-friendly** because everything is already planned out for you so you don’t have to do any lesson planning. It’s **aligned with the early learning developmental standards for preschool.**” - PreK Teacher*



Key Findings by Research Question

1. How Is PKOMW implemented?

- Early successes include positive feedback from teachers on curriculum and training, active student engagement, and hands-on and interactive curriculum.
 - Teachers described Scholastic’s in-person coaching as especially helpful for working out how to implement PKOMW in their classrooms.
- Early challenges include fitting the PKOMW curriculum activities into a school day, learning different curricular components, and differentiating the curriculum for children with different needs.
- Both districts worked with a Scholastic Professional Learning coach to address these implementation challenges.

2a. What Are PKOMW’s strengths?

- Extensive guidance to teachers (e.g., coaching)
- Access to new high-quality and diverse reading materials (e.g., *Fire Drill*, *How to Help a Dinosaur Get Well Soon*, *Follow that Garbage*)
- Both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate

2b. What Are PKOMW’s areas for improvement?

- Read-alouds that are developmentally appropriate for the beginning of the school year
- Better alignment between read-alouds and teaching points
- Training before districts begin curriculum implementation

3. How engaging Are the PKOMW curriculum materials for children?

- Children enjoyed the:
 - Hands-on, interactive nature of small-group activities
 - Diverse read-alouds
 - Using the different manipulatives (e.g., picture cards, geoboards, different shapes)

4. Why did school districts select the PKOMW curriculum?





- Culturally and linguistically diverse reading materials and racial representation in curriculum materials

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from the PreK On My Way™ (PKOMW) case study. In this report, we present the experiences of districts and classrooms implementing the PKOMW curriculum. The PKOMW curriculum supports PreK students in developing math, literacy, and language skills through research-based, standards-aligned, interactive, and scaffolded instructional practices. It is designed to center purposeful play, socioemotional supports, hands-on activities, and culturally relevant reading materials. The PKOMW curriculum is also designed to support multilingual learners through authentic, culturally relevant, Spanish language texts and asset-based language supports. Authors of PreK On My Way include leading researchers and educators: Tricia Zucker, PhD, of the Children’s Learning Institute at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth; Linda Mayes, MD, of the Yale Child Study Center; and Jie-Qi Chen, PhD, of the Erikson Institute. Its research-based approach is designed to meet individual state standards and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes.

The case study is the first of four phases in the evaluation of the PKOMW curriculum.

Exhibit 1. Four Phases of the PKOMW Evaluation

1	2	3	4
Case study	Pilot study	Implementation study	Impact study
			

Each of the study phases has its own set of goals and objectives that build a rigorous impact evaluation. The case study objective is to highlight the successful implementation of PKOMW in four classrooms within two districts across two different states.

To do this, we interviewed teachers, district staff members, and center directors. We also conducted classroom observations to address the four research questions:


1. How is PKOMW implemented (including early successes and challenges)?
2. What are PKOMW’s strengths and areas for improvement?
3. How engaging are the PKOMW curriculum materials for children?
4. Why did school districts select the PKOMW curriculum?

In addition, information from the case study also provides us with compelling and persuasive information that can be used to aid recruitment for the PKOMW impact evaluation, as well as Scholastic’s own curriculum marketing efforts. Educators often weigh heavily peers’ recommendations and experiences in their decision-making about the adoption of a new curriculum. This case study offers Scholastic a unique perspective on how the PKOMW curriculum is being implemented across different preschool settings and what factors differentiate PKOMW from other available curricula, based on input from school district staff members, center directors, and preschool teachers.

2. Study Sample

In collaboration with Scholastic, we selected a purposive sample of two school districts with experience implementing the PKOMW curriculum.¹ The sample included elementary and preschool center classrooms, which was beneficial in seeing PKOMW in action in different types of preschool settings, including classrooms with a sufficient number of dual-language learners. We successfully recruited schools and centers to participate in the case study. **District A** included two PreK classrooms from two elementary schools, and **District B** included two preschool centers (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Sample Characteristics

	Student population	Number of schools	% Multilingual learners	% Economically disadvantaged	Racial demographics
District A <i>Our Sample: 2 elementary schools, 1 classroom each</i>	~50,000	100	15%	No data	~22% White 53% Black ~14% Hispanic ~3% Asian ~8% Multiracial ~0.3% Other
District B <i>Our Sample: 2 preschool centers, 1 classroom each</i>	~7,000	10	18%	54%	22% White 12% Black 58% Hispanic 4% Asian 4% Multiracial

Below, we provide an overview of the two districts in our case study.

District A

District A includes more than 100 schools and serves slightly fewer than 50,000 children, with 80 percent of these children being historically minoritized children. Approximately 15 percent of the children are dual-language learners, and 78 percent are ethnic minorities.

The district began implementing PKOMW in fall 2021. In May 2021, a team of early childhood teachers, administrators, and district staff members reviewed different curricular proposals based on different criteria—including diversity and representation—and began a curriculum adoption process. They decided to adopt PKOMW due to its diversity and the racial representation of its curriculum materials,

¹ We submitted research proposals to each district describing the case study purpose and activities. Each district—which we pseudonymize as District A and District B—approved participation in the study.

among other considerations. Teachers began implementation in fall 2021. In October 2021,² Scholastic provided teachers and other staff members with online professional development, in-person coaching, and instructional walk-through coaching.

District B

District B includes less than 10 schools and serves approximately 7,000 children. Eighty percent of these children are historically minoritized children, and almost 60 percent are Hispanic/Latino. Approximately half of these children are economically disadvantaged, and 18 percent are dual-language learners.

The district began implementing PKOMW in September 2021. They decided to adopt PKOMW after their previous curriculum was discontinued and began offering training to teachers in August 2021.

Context on Case Study Classrooms

In an effort to understand how typical case study classrooms were, as compared to the average PreK classroom, we conducted classroom observations in two classrooms within each center where the PKOMW curriculum was being implemented. We used the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) PreK observation tool to assess the classroom environment (Pianta et al., 2008b). The CLASS PreK is a well-established observational measure that assesses three domains of teacher-child interactions within the classroom.

Exhibit 3. CLASS Domains and Dimensions

THREE CLASS DOMAINS		
Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support
Positive Climate	Behavior Management	Concept Development
Negative Climate	Productivity	Quality of Feedback
Teacher Sensitivity	Instructional Learning Formats	Language Modeling

² Due to delays in the curriculum adoption process, the district did not receive the PKOMW materials and professional development training until late fall 2021.

Below, we provide a description of each domain.

- **Emotional Support:** This domain describes the teacher behaviors that help children develop warm, supportive relationships, enjoyment, and autonomy in their learning environment.
- **Classroom Organization:** This domain describes how teachers help children regulate their own behaviors and get the most out of learning activities.
- **Instructional Support:** This domain describes how teachers use instruction to support children's cognitive development and language growth.

During our observations, we found that the three CLASS domain scores (CLASS scores range from 1–7) in case study classrooms were consistent with what is often seen in other preschool classroom settings, suggesting that these classrooms are typical preschool classrooms in terms of the quality of teacher-child interactions. In both districts, we saw high levels of emotional support and organizational support and low levels of instructional support. In District B, we saw average CLASS scores of 6.2 on emotional support, 6.3 on organizational support, and 2.8 on instructional support in the two observed classrooms. In District A, we saw average CLASS scores of 5.9 on emotional support, 6.2 on organizational support, and 2.7 on instructional support in the two observed classrooms. This is consistent with CLASS data from a few large studies conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Center for Early Development and Learning in several thousand classrooms throughout the country that showed that children in those classrooms were likely to experience moderate to high levels of effective interactions for emotional support and classroom organization, but lower levels of instructional support (Pianta et al., 2008a). This suggests that case study classrooms are similar to other preschool classroom settings in terms of CLASS scores.



The overall design of PKOMW takes into consideration many of the components that are important to improving the quality of teacher-child interactions in the classroom. CLASS's instructional support domain includes behavioral indicators such as scaffolding, predictions, back-and-forth exchanges, open-ended questions, and connecting concepts. These indicators are built into the design of PKOMW, which supports children's cognitive and language development. The PKOMW mind builders are designed to enhance children's emotional and social development, motivation, and creativity, as well as executive function skills. Additionally, different types of PKOMW activities are in line with the specific teaching behaviors found in the CLASS emotional support and classroom organization domains, such as engaging in essential skills such as managing feelings, following rules and routines, taking responsibility for materials and jobs, making plans, talking and sharing, focusing attention, taking initiative, and using tools (Pianta et al., 2008a).



3. Data Collection

All data were collected in May 2022. NORC data collection staff members were onsite for two to three days to conduct interviews.³ In total, we conducted nine in-depth interviews with teachers, district staff members, and center directors, as well as four classroom observations. Participating schools received a \$150 Scholastic Online Store Gift Card. Exhibit 4 shows the number of interviews that we conducted in each district.

Exhibit 4. Summary of Data Collection Activities in Each District

Interviews	Number Conducted	
	District A	District B
District Staff Member/Center Director Interviews	3	2
Teacher Interviews	2	2

We developed two interview protocols based on the research questions listed on page 1—one for classroom teachers and the other for district staff members/center directors. The interviews were semi-structured and asked interviewees about their early successes and challenges with PKOMW curriculum implementation, the strengths and weaknesses of PKOMW, how children engaged with the PKOMW materials, and why PKOMW was selected for the district. Interviews ranged in length from 18 to 48 minutes. As shown in Exhibit 4, we interviewed three district staff members and two teachers in District B. In District A, we interviewed two center directors and two teachers.

³ While onsite, staff members also conducted classroom observations to provide context for implementation and took photographs.

4. Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data from the interviews, we developed a code book aligned with the research questions. We used NVivo software (a package for qualitative analysis) to systematically code and analyze the transcribed interview data. These codes included PKOMW implementation, PKOMW training, key advantages of PKOMW, and child engagement during PKOMW. After categorizing these data, we then inductively coded for common themes across respondents. For example, we saw that four respondents mentioned access to new age-appropriate, relatable, and informative reading materials, or what they referred to as "high-quality materials," as a key advantage of the PKOMW curriculum. A District A teacher named *Fire Drill* and *How to Help a Dinosaur Get Well Soon* as examples of high-quality reading materials. Based on these data, we generated and used a code called "access to new high-quality reading materials."





5. Findings

This section details the findings from the case study data collection activities and is organized by research question. The findings are not generalizable to all PKOMW classrooms; instead, we purposefully selected two classrooms from both districts so we could learn from successful PKOMW implementation.

Key Successes

- Positive feedback from teachers on PKOMW curriculum and training
- Active child engagement with the curriculum
- Hands-on and interactive nature of the curriculum

RQ1. How Is PKOMW Implemented?

In this section, we share the perspectives of teachers, center directors, and district staff members of their experiences implementing the PKOMW curriculum. We describe teachers’ early successes and early challenges with implementation, in addition to their strategies for working around challenges. We conclude this section with information on the training received.

Implementation Successes

Both districts started PKOMW implementation in fall 2021. Teachers reported a range of early successes during implementation. District B staff members reported that they valued how literacy-rich the curriculum was and the access to diversity and representation in the stories. District A staff members mentioned receiving positive feedback from teachers on the PKOMW curriculum and training. “We had staff that were really excited about the literature in the program and were really excited about the stories that they were reading. We got a lot of feedback about those.... It was just the different titles of the stories..., some really good books and new stories... the diversity in the literature.”

“[During large-group activities students] are hearing other students participating and sharing, they want to do that more, they want to hear their friends to hear their thoughts. I think it’s helped with participation.”
 - PreK Teacher

Teachers reported active child engagement with the PKOMW curriculum, with students participating with, and eager to learn from, the PKOMW curriculum in small- and whole-group activities. One teacher reported that her children were using the PKOMW vocabulary words in conversations throughout the school day and were very successful in answering questions about the text. She shared that her children heard the word *stump* in a PKOMW lesson and would point out tree stumps

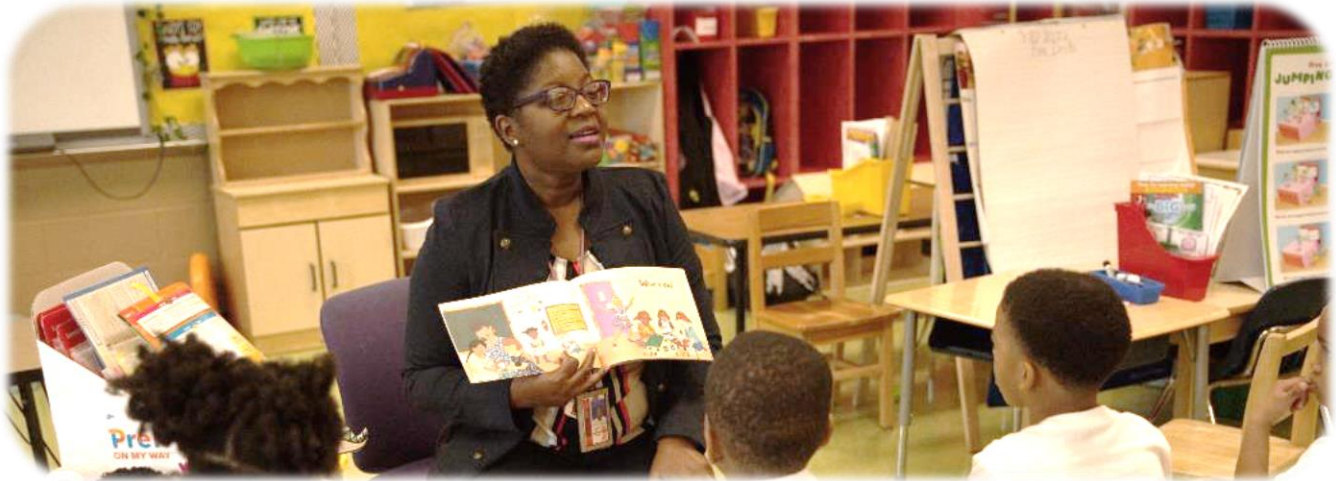
outside. Another teacher reported that children were more engaged during large-group discussion, especially those who previously participated less in large-group discussions. She explained that children who did not normally participate heard other students sharing during a PKOMW lesson and wanted to participate more themselves.

Teachers also reported that children enjoyed the hands-on and interactive nature of the curriculum materials, especially components of the curriculum like guided questions, small-group activities, the stories, and the vocabulary.



“The vocabulary cards; the kids really respond to those.... Then there is an activity, an interactive kind of activity, yesterday for example, let’s stand up, let’s pretend we are the seed, let’s pretend we are the stem or the trunk, let’s pretend we are the leaves with our bodies, so the kids really enjoyed the movement or action component with the vocabulary. That’s been very successful since the beginning. The small-group cards; those activities have been successful because they are really hands on.”

– PreK Teacher



Implementation Challenges

Respondents also reported some early challenges during implementation of the curriculum. Most respondents ($n = 5$) described the challenge of fitting the curriculum into a typical school day, given the other programs they also had to implement. Teachers struggled to implement all components of the curriculum, given the other programs that they also had to implement. One district staff member described how implementing the three whole-group times and small-group instruction was particularly challenging during half-day PreK programs.

*“[A challenge was] trying to fit all three lessons followed by all three small groups in the schedule of my day. On top of the other specials. I have 3 different programs in my classroom. My daycare kids come from 8–4. My UPK comes from 8:30–2:30. Students with IEPs come from 9–2:30. **Trying to fit all the lessons in so all students would feel included, that’s where I struggled.**” - PreK Teacher*

Respondents also mentioned three other main challenges during implementation. Three district staff members mentioned that teachers in their district initially felt overwhelmed learning the curriculum, given different components. The center director shared that learning the curriculum was even difficult for bilingual Spanish-speaking teachers who did not have a dual-language teaching certification. They explained that speaking Spanish and teaching Spanish were two different types of skills. In District A, two district staff members described the difficulty of differentiating the PKOMW curriculum to the needs of children with varying needs in different classroom types, including general education, special education, half-day and full-day, and inclusion classrooms.



Strategies for Working Through Implementation Challenges

Respondents reported multiple strategies for working through different challenges associated with implementing the PKOMW curriculum. To address the challenge of fitting the curriculum into a school day, District A staff members described developing their own pacing guide with teachers that was responsive to the needs of different classroom types, including half-day PreK programs.

Respondents also modified the curriculum to meet the specific needs of their classrooms and schools. For example, a PreK teacher described doing two large-group circle times rather than three during the day (per the PKOMW curriculum). A center director described finding creative ways to implement PKOMW lessons, such as breaking a lesson down into smaller pieces while keeping in mind the main goal of supporting children in answering the lesson’s essential question.

Key Implementation Strategies

- Developing a pacing guide
- Working with a Scholastic Professional Learning coach to figure out which aspects of PKOMW curriculum were most important to focus on
- Modifying the curriculum to meet specific needs
- Holding regular collaborative meetings to troubleshoot around PKOMW implementation

“Our collaboration as a school was really important because I didn’t want any teacher to feel that they were struggling to implement a new curriculum. We met quite often to brainstorm, and problem solve the struggles the teachers were having. But also, to spend time to highlight what was good going on in the rooms.”

- Center Director

Both center directors noted the importance of offering regular meetings for teachers to collaborate and troubleshoot around PKOMW implementation. In one school, teachers attended these meetings every week or every other week and shared successes and challenges.

Two respondents described Scholastic coaches as being valuable in helping implement the PKOMW curriculum in ways that were responsive to their individual classroom needs. Scholastic coaches provided in-person support to teachers, such as observing PKOMW instruction, providing instructional feedback to teachers, walking

through PKOMW lesson plans, and answering teachers’ questions. One PreK teacher described working with a Scholastic Professional Learning coach to figure out how to implement the curriculum and helping her understand what aspects of the curriculum were most important to focus on.

Experiences with PKOMW Training

In both districts, Scholastic provided training to support PKOMW implementation. This section describes the training, broken out by professional development, coaching, and other training.

Professional Development. Online professional development included an overview of the PKOMW curriculum, including the different components of the curriculum, the materials involved, and different strategies for implementation. In District A, these online professional development sessions were customized based on the district’s needs and teachers’ classroom type (e.g., general education or special education).



Teachers and instructional staff members in District A participated in more training than those in District B. In District A, online professional development was spread over five days where Scholastic provided approximately three hours of professional development each day. In contrast, in District B, teachers and staff members only received one full day of professional development.

However, teachers and instructional staff members in District B received training before teachers and instructional staff members in District A. Due to delays in the curriculum adoption process, District A did not receive PKOMW materials until after the school year started, which meant that they did not receive professional development until late fall 2021. In contrast, many (but not all) teachers in District B received training in the summer before the school year started. One district staff member mentioned that the timing of professional development is important to starting out the school year on track.

Coaching. Most teachers ($n = 3$) reported the in-person coaching as an especially valuable aspect of training. The in-person coaching session involved a Scholastic coach observing PKOMW implementation in the classroom and then debriefing with and providing feedback to teachers and district staff members/center directors. For example, a center director shared that a Scholastic coach provided feedback on how best to transition from whole-group to small-group activities so that students remained engaged with the lesson.

*“I enjoyed it [**in-person coaching**]. I found it always very helpful. It helps me organize my thoughts and next steps for my students.”*
- PreK Teacher

The in-person Scholastic Professional Learning coaching took place in spring 2022, when pandemic restrictions were lifted from having visitors in the classroom. During these coaching sessions, coaches worked with teachers to troubleshoot any questions they had about the curriculum and work out the details of implementation. For example, one teacher described how she worked with a Scholastic coach to review a PKOMW lesson plan and look at the different resources on the PKOMW online teacher hub. This helped the teacher to better understand the online resources that were available and how to use them.

Other Training. Additional training activities helped support teachers with PKOMW curriculum implementation. District A engaged in two types of training that District B did not. Scholastic provided instructional walk-through coaching sessions to teachers and district leaders to help them understand PKOMW further and what they should look for in classrooms during PKOMW implementation. District A piloted virtual coaching check-ins with teachers where they could pop in and ask questions. However, teachers did not attend these check-ins because they were optional, so District A decided to discontinue these check-ins, but planned to continue the in-person coaching sessions.

RQ2. What Are PKOMW's Strengths and Areas for Improvement?

In this section, we share the perspectives of teachers, district leaders, and center staff members on PKOMW's key strengths and weaknesses.

Key Strengths of PKOMW

Respondents described three key strengths of the PKOMW curriculum: 1) extensive guidance provided to teachers for the various curriculum activities, 2) access to new high-quality and culturally and linguistically diverse reading materials, and 3) both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate instructional materials. Each of these strengths is described in more detail below.

Key Reported Strengths

- Extensive guidance for teachers
- Access to new high-quality and culturally and linguistically diverse reading materials
- Both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate

1) Extensive Guidance Provided to Teachers. More than half of respondents ($n = 5$) valued that the PKOMW curriculum provides extensive guidance to teachers, such as providing different levels of questions on the back of the small-group cards and clearly articulating the purpose of each lesson. They reported that PKOMW lessons provide a clearly articulated script to guide teachers' instructional activities while also allowing for teacher autonomy to differentiate to the individual needs of different children within their classroom. They stated that this scaffolding was particularly helpful for new or first-year teachers.

2) Access to New High-Quality and Diverse Reading Materials. Half of respondents valued that the PKOMW curriculum provides teachers with access to new, high-quality, and culturally and linguistically diverse reading materials, especially because these reading materials included representation of different ethnic minority groups. A center director described this literature as "age-appropriate, relatable, and informative." A PreK teacher named *Fire Drill* and *How to Help a Dinosaur Get Well Soon* as books that the children particularly enjoyed. Similarly, another PreK Teacher shared that her children enjoyed *Follow that Garbage* and *I Got the Rhythm*.

"I enjoy the big books. **The diverse literature.** I like that **the illustrations represent the students in the classroom...** In the illustrations, some of the children have the skin color that we do." – PreK Teacher

These respondents described cultural and linguistic diversity as being key to the success of the PKOMW curriculum. A PreK teacher mentioned that she liked that the illustrations were representative of the diversity of children within the classroom.

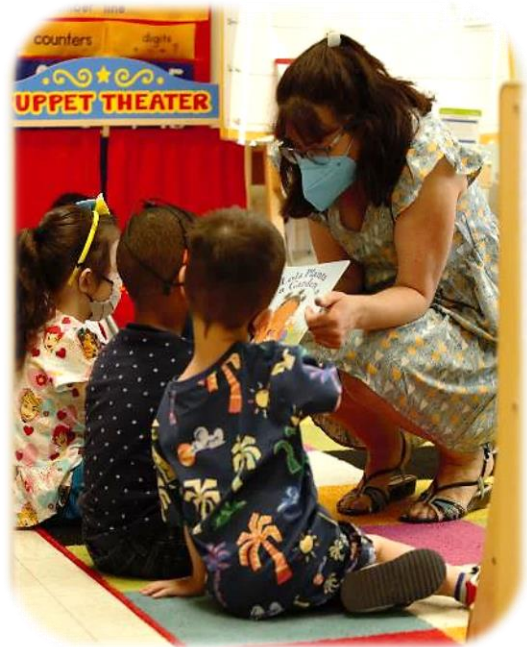


3) Both Academically Rigorous and Developmentally Appropriate. Roughly half of the respondents valued how the PKOMW curriculum was both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate. The PKOMW curriculum is academically rigorous, in that it is standards-based, rooted in research ideas, incorporates strategies to scaffold children’s language skill development, and fosters high expectations for PreK students while also integrating a play-based component and socioemotional supports.

“I like the **rigor of the program** and I know where they are going, and I know the expectation for K and 1st grade. I feel like **the rigor will get the kids to where they need to be.**” - District Staff

Area for Improvement

Although respondents listed many strengths of the PKOMW curriculum, they also shared one weakness: the read-alouds. A third of respondents ($n = 3$) reported that some of the read-alouds were too long, too advanced, or not developmentally appropriate for their children because they were too high-level for the beginning of the school year. As one district staff person reported, “The biggest feedback was that some of the read-alouds that were aligned with the curriculum weren’t the best. They weren’t the most relatable read-alouds for the children. Some books were not the ideal in terms of the teaching points they were trying to focus on.” Specifically, teachers named the books *Alma and How She Got Her Name* and *Imagine* as too advanced and difficult for their children to relate to, despite being one of the first books in the curriculum in the early fall. One PreK teacher mentioned that she had to do some scaffolding to get the children to understand the concepts for the book *Alma and How She Got Her Name* because it was very advanced for a book at the beginning of the school year.





RQ3. How Engaging Are the PKOMW Curriculum Materials for Children?

In this section, we share the perspectives of teachers, district staff members, and center directors on how engaging the PKOMW curriculum is for children. Respondents shared what children enjoyed most about the PKOMW curriculum, with over half of the respondents ($n = 6$) expressing that children enjoyed the hands-on, interactive nature of the small group activities, like the discussion activities with the picture cards and other manipulatives. For example, a PreK center director shared, “I will say that they [the kids] really enjoyed implementation of the activities and how they are able to be hands-on with them.... It’s been enjoyable to see. It has really allowed the kids to explore things they are interested in and things they didn’t even know they were interested in.”

Teachers also reported that children enjoyed the stories and were engaged in most of these stories that took place during large-group activities. For example, a PreK teacher shared that the children liked the interactive reading and would say the rhyming words out loud while she read. A PreK teacher shared that her students loved answering questions with the stories.

During the classroom observation, the observer noted how teachers used the PKOMW guiding questions during the read-alouds to encourage more active engagement by the children. For example, during a read-aloud of *The Greatest Adventure* by Tony Piedra, a PreK teacher prompted children, “What was the guiding question I asked you to remember while we read?” Children responded, “What did we learn about Eliot’s grandfather’s boat?”

During the observation, the teacher also engaged children in open-ended questions (e.g., how and why questions) to help children gain a deeper understanding of the book and develop their analysis and reasoning skills. Teacher questions included:

- “Why do you think grandpa is sad?”
- “Tell me more...why...?”
- “How else can we maneuver a boat?”
- “Why couldn’t grandpa use the boat anymore?”

This type of open-ended questioning provides children with active involvement in discussion and opportunities that promote higher-order thinking skills. Concept questions (e.g., guiding questions) and open-ended questions are strategies built throughout the PKOMW program that prompt interactive read-alouds for children (Zucker, 2021).

“So, the kids were interacting with each other, they were acting out - one was the dentist, and one was the patient - opening up and using language to talk to each other and using vocabulary, what tools am I going to use... I think they have fun doing that.”
– District Staff

A PreK teacher described how children loved acting out what was happening in the stories. For example, in one classroom the children will act out one of their favorite stories as part of their graduation celebration activities. At the end of the observation, the observer watched children put on their costumes and practice acting out the story with words, music, and movement as they prepared for graduation day. Finally, children enjoyed using the different manipulatives—for example, the geoboards with the rubber band and the different shapes and characters.





RQ4. Why Did School Districts Select the PKOMW Curriculum?

This section describes one district's⁴ rationale for purchasing the PKOMW curriculum over other curricula. It also describes the perceptions of teachers, district staff members, and center directors on the value of PKOMW curriculum.

Rich Cultural and Linguistic Representation of PKOMW Curriculum Materials

One key reason that District A purchased PKOMW is due to the diversity and racial representation of PKOMW's curriculum materials. A district staff member described the internal curriculum review process whereby the district reviewed multiple curricula using a rubric with different criteria such as inclusion of diverse perspectives and racial/cultural diversity. According to the district, one of the criteria that was of great importance to the district was how the curriculum materials represented minority groups. A district staff member mentioned that the other curriculum they had reviewed had some diversity but had more stereotypical representation of ethnic groups; for example, they shared that the other curriculum depicted Asian students in an offensive way. The district also liked that the PKOMW curriculum was research-based and that they had minority writers.

*"We reviewed several curricula.... **It was the diversity piece.** That's why we ended up going with Scholastic. The other product had some diversity, it was limited, the representation was stereotypical.... They get points in the rubric.... **But we like that a lot of the PKOMW texts are written by a person of that minority group.** That's huge. For example, it's not a story of Native Americans written by a non-Native American." – District Staff*

Describing Value of PKOMW to Peers

When asked about how they would describe PKOMW to peers, all teachers, district staff members, and center directors spoke about PKOMW in favorable ways. Teachers described PKOMW as a curriculum that was rich in language and literacy. They reported that the PKOMW curriculum provided extensive guidance and support for teachers and included rich diverse reading materials that made for interactive read-alouds. Similarly, center directors and district staff members depicted the PKOMW curriculum as being very rich in literacy, interactive, and academically rigorous. They reported that the PKOMW curriculum incorporated diversity into the readings. For example, a center director shared the benefits of the

*"I would tell teachers that PKOMW has **rich diverse literature** that makes for wonderful, **interactive read-aloud.** I would also share that all of the center materials are provided for them for math, language, and literacy. I would also share with them that the program is scripted but it still leaves you with a sense of **autonomy.** And it's very **teacher-friendly** because everything is already planned out for you so you don't have to do any lesson planning. It's **aligned with the early learning developmental standards for preschool.**" – PreK Teacher*

⁴ The District B interviewees were not involved in the selection of the PKOMW curriculum, so we could not ask what influenced the purchase of PKOMW.

PKOMW curriculum for teachers: “It is very interactive, very creative, structured in the way that needs to be structured, but allows you to bring your creativity as a teacher to it. It gives the guidance needed and allows you to differentiate if needed.”

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

States, school districts, principals, preschool directors, and teachers across the country are hungry for high-quality, evidence-based educational tools to support our youngest learners in PreK settings. One key component of a high-quality PreK program is having a research-based, developmentally appropriate, actively engaging curriculum that includes content-rich learning materials, a clearly articulated scope and sequence of instructional learning materials, and adequate initial training and ongoing coaching to support the high-fidelity implementation of the curriculum by teachers (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2016; Weiland, McCormick, Mattera, Maier, & Morris, 2018).

An increasing number of federal, state, and local PreK systems now require publicly funded PreK programs to select a curriculum from an approved list of high-quality curricula that meet high evidentiary standards and/or are aligned with state or program learning standards (National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning [NCECDTL], 2019). There are various resources that provide a critical review of the available curricula to assist consumers in the selection of the highest quality PreK curriculum that aligns with the various recommended criteria and best meets the program’s needs (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning [NCQTL], 2015).

The current case study was designed as an initial component of the overall impact evaluation of the Scholastic PKOMW curriculum. The primary goal of the case study was to highlight the successful implementation of PKOMW in an illustrative set of four classrooms within two school districts across two different states. To accomplish this, the case study addressed the following four research questions:

1. How is PKOMW implemented?
2. What are PKOMW’s strengths and areas for improvement?
3. How engaging are the PKOMW curriculum materials for children?
4. Why did school districts select the PKOMW curriculum?

How Is PKOMW Implemented?

Overall, respondents in both districts reported early successes during PKOMW implementation and training, with two of the big early successes being the ease of implementation (particularly for new teachers) and the active child engagement with the PKOMW curriculum materials. The PKOMW curriculum is specifically designed to include not only a rich and engaging array of books, materials, and learning activities for use in large groups, small groups, and independent learning centers, but also the necessary guidance materials to help support teachers’ planning and implementation of responsive and intentional instructional practices (Zucker, 2021). The combination of ease of PKOMW implementation and the active engagement of children are positive indications of successful implementation of the PKOMW in these two case study sites.

Respondents also reported positive perceptions of Scholastic's in-person coaching because it helped teachers figure out how to successfully implement the PKOMW curriculum in their classrooms. The research literature supports ongoing coaching as an essential component for supporting high-quality instructional practices and improved child outcomes. The common elements of successful coaching practices include periodic observation of teachers' instructional practices, provision of feedback, facilitation of goal-setting, and ongoing adaptation of instructional practices (Elek & Page, 2019). Taken together, the reported ease of implementation, active engagement of children with the curricular materials, and the ongoing Scholastic in-person coaching supports contribute to the successful implementation of the PKOMW curriculum in the case study sites in ways that are consistent with prior research on effective PreK curriculum implementation (Weiland et al., 2018).

With respect to challenges, the three most significant challenges reported by teachers included the challenge of fitting all of the PKOMW curricular activities into the typical school day, learning the different curricular components, and differentiating the curriculum for children with different needs and abilities. Despite experiencing these challenges, respondents reported that these challenges were partially addressed by the in-person coaching supports provided by Scholastic coaches. These findings support the value-added benefits of ongoing coaching supports as a critical component for ensuring the successful implementation of a high-quality curriculum (Elek & Page, 2019).

What Are PKOMW Strengths and Areas for Improvement?

There were a number of both strengths and weaknesses reported by the case study respondents. Respondents reported three main aspects of the PKOMW curriculum that they valued: 1) its extensive guidance to teachers (including new teachers) and ease of use; 2) its high-quality and diverse array of reading materials; and 3) that it is both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate. The clear guidance provided with the PKOMW curriculum is particularly helpful for new teachers to better ensure successful implementation. These strengths reinforce the close alignment of the PKOMW with the current recommendations for high-quality curricula (HHS, 2016; NAEYC, 2009; NCQTL, 2015).

The one notable weakness reported by three of the case study respondents was that some of the read-alouds were too long, too advanced, or not developmentally appropriate for their children. This was a bit at odds with the reported strengths of a literacy-rich and rigorous curriculum noted above. As such, this may suggest the need for the initial training, as well as the ongoing coaching or communities of practice, to help support teachers in identifying ways to individualize the various PKOMW curricular activities to best meet the needs and abilities of children in different classrooms.

How Engaging Are the PKOMW Curricular Materials for Children?

It was particularly noteworthy that over half of the case study respondents reported that children in their classrooms enjoyed the hands-on, interactive nature of the small group activities, as well as the discussion activities with the picture cards and other manipulatives. One of the hallmarks of a developmentally appropriate curriculum is whether the curricular materials and activities support children's active engagement in learning through play, exploration, and inquiry (NAEYC, 2009). Thus, these case study findings support the alignment of the PKOMW curriculum with one of the key characteristics of a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Why Did School Districts Select the PKOMW Curriculum?

Given the growth in the number of PreK curricula, school districts and PreK programs are faced with a wealth of options from which to select an appropriate curriculum, which can be a bit overwhelming for those administrators responsible for selecting the right curriculum. To assist with the decision-making process, there are a number of resources that provide a critical review of the available PreK curricula and assist consumers in the selection of the highest quality PreK curriculum that aligns with the various recommended criteria and best meets the program's needs (NCECDTL, 2019; NCQTL, 2015).

In the current case study, one district shared why they purchased PKOMW over other curricula, citing the substantive range and quality of the culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum materials. Given the growing diversity of the early childhood population, it is critical to have a curriculum that is responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of the population served.

Recommendations

In addition to the reported successes and challenges of implementing the PKOMW curriculum, teachers, district leaders, and center staff members also shared a few recommendations to Scholastic on potential improvements to the PKOMW curriculum.

- Teachers recommended a wider range of read-aloud options. They suggested that Scholastic should include an expanded number of alternative book options to support the specific needs and ability levels of different children.
- One teacher recommended that the PKOMW curriculum could provide better visuals and better ways to display different types of vocabulary and strategy cards. This teacher found ways to display the various PKOMW materials so that she could easily access them during instructional activities.
- Respondents also made recommendations about the PKOMW supports and training. District staff members recommended that Scholastic provide training before the districts begin implementation of the curriculum. One district staff member shared that, "A better understanding of the approach, or the vision of Scholastic would have been helpful to [teachers'] planning."
- Another respondent noted that it would be helpful if Scholastic provided guidance for which aspects of the curriculum activities teachers should prioritize if they could not fit everything into one day.





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