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Evaluation Highlights Significant Developmental Gains for Children and Parents in Santa Maria's Promoting Our Preschoolers Program

Santa Maria Community Services, Inc. is proud to share the findings from a recent evaluation of its Promoting Our Preschoolers (POP) program conducted by the [University of Cincinnati's Arlitt Child and Family Research Education Center](#). POP serves families with children ages three to five in Cincinnati's Price Hill neighborhood, offering home visits, early learning resources, developmental screenings, and wraparound family support. **The study reveals that POP significantly supports both early childhood development and parent engagement in the Greater Price Hill community.**

[The evaluation](#) showed marked improvement in children's motor, social, and conceptual skills, as well as positive changes in parenting behaviors that promote learning. The strongest growth was observed in children and parents who began the program with the lowest initial scores, underscoring the program's powerful impact on families who need it most.

"Findings show that across many dimensions, the POP program is closing the opportunity gap for both children and their parents," said Dr. Ann Rossmiller, Research Associate at UC's Arlitt Center and lead evaluator of the study.

The research was conducted using more than a decade of data, educator field notes, and stakeholder feedback with a mixed-methods approach, including [DIAL-4 \(Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning\)](#) child assessments, [PICCOLO-Teaching \(Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes\)](#) evaluations of parental behavior, and qualitative analysis of educator observations and team discussions. POP educators were recognized not only for delivering school readiness tools but also for providing hands-on, holistic support by connecting families to housing, health care, and basic needs resources.

"This evaluation validates what we've seen firsthand," said H.A. Musser, Jr., President and CEO of Santa Maria. **"POP is changing lives by helping children prepare for kindergarten and empowering parents with the tools they need to support their children's development from day one."**



While gains were seen across all developmental domains, the report noted that children with initially low language skills experienced slower growth in that area. This finding presents an opportunity to further refine the program by incorporating additional strategies to support children from low-income families or those whose first language is not English.

“This study gives us both affirmation and direction. It confirms that our POP program is changing developmental trajectories for children in Price Hill and shows us the need to strengthen early language support for our multilingual learners. An area our team is already working on,” commented Sisan Cuervo, Santa Maria Board of Directors Chair. Cuervo, a speech-language pathologist and longtime volunteer at Santa Maria, sees firsthand how language skills are built for the children she works with in the program. **“We are deeply committed to building on what works and ensuring that every child, regardless of background or home language, receives the strong start they deserve.”**

Santa Maria Community Services is grateful to [Millstone Fund](#) for funding this indicative study, which will continue to encourage the success of the POP program and shape its impact on Greater Price Hill.

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About Santa Maria Community Services, Inc.

Santa Maria Community Services, Inc. is an independent, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization originally founded by the Sisters of Charity in 1897 and place-based in Cincinnati Ohio's Price Hill community. Santa Maria provides nearly 3,000 individuals with educational tools and resources to build strong families, promote healthy residents, and foster neighborhood revitalization. Our Price Hill Family Centers provide a welcoming environment and the coaching, support, and flexibility to assist families to achieve their identified goals toward stabilization and self-sufficiency. Our mission is to be a catalyst and advocate for Greater Price Hill families to attain their educational, financial, and health goals. Our vision is for Greater Price Hill to be a vibrant, thriving, and self-sustaining community. Learn more at [SantaMaria-Cincy.org](#)

About the Arlitt Child Development Center

The Arlitt Child Development Center is one of the oldest demonstration preschools in the United States. Founded in 1925 as the University of Cincinnati Nursery School, the child development center is sustained in part by an endowment from UC professor and founder of the center, Dr. Ada Hart Arlitt. The center serves preschool children from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds who are funded through Head Start and tuition fees. Tuition funding for families who qualify is also accepted from Cincinnati Preschool Promise and the ODJFS child care voucher program. Children from all funding sources are blended in each classroom within the center, which makes Arlitt one of the most diverse and inclusive preschools in the country. The Arlitt Center serves as an early childhood education practicum site for students from many programs at the University of Cincinnati, a research center for faculty and students, and a teacher training resource center for the community. Early childhood stakeholders and families are welcome to view our practices from the observation booths or schedule a private tour of the facility with one of our staff members. Learn more at [ArlittChildDevelopmentCenter.com](#)