



# Strong Beginnings for Children in Haiti

## 2020-2024 Learning Report



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are numerous challenges facing young children in Haiti, including political upheaval, gang violence, civil unrest, community violence/closures, shortages of necessities, and natural disasters. This fragility can have a detrimental impact on the learning and development of young children. To address these multifaceted risk factors facing children in Haiti, the Strong Beginnings initiative has focused on leveraging the assets of the primary settings—lakay, lekòl, legliz (home, school, and parish)—where young children learn and develop daily. Over four years and spread across six of the 10 departments in Haiti, Strong Beginnings has worked to activate this lakay-lekòl-legliz (L3) system through interventions and approaches that were need-based, developed in partnership with communities, iteratively tested and improved, and gradually scaled. This report summarizes what we have learned through this L3 systems activation work over the last four years.

## SCHOOL BASED INTERVENTIONS (LEKOL)

- Scripted literacy and social-emotional learning (SEL) intervention for Grades 1 & 2
- Pre-primary SEL program focused on morning meetings and read-alouds
- Literacy summer camps for Grades 1 & 2 and accelerated reading camps for Grade 3 children who needed additional support

## DISTANCE LEARNING INTERVENTIONS (LEGLIZ)

- Distance learning opportunities through community resource centers that include structured activities, digital resources, and play materials
- Literacy and SEL-focused radio programs to ensure children have access to learning during school closures

## HOME-BASED INTERVENTIONS (LAKAY)

- Parent empowerment program to improve parents' knowledge, attitudes and practices on nutrition, social and emotional development, intellectual development, school preparedness, stages of childhood development, play-based learning, positive discipline, and importance of the parent-child relationship.

## COMMUNITY/PARISH BASED INTERVENTIONS (LEGLIZ)

- Seminarians trained to integrate Early Childhood Development (ECD) messaging during their engagement with communities
- Baptism trainers trained to integrate ECD messaging during baptism sessions
- Social Enterprise Initiative designed to help Haitian communities become self-sufficient through opportunities like Mail Boxes Etc., Bon Sel Initiative, and vocational and technical education through partnership with the University of Notre Dame - Hinche

During the 4 years of implementation of Strong Beginnings, each component of the project was iteratively improved before scaling through Rapid Evaluation Assessment and Learning Methodologies (REALM), a form of implementation research. We also collected regular monitoring data to understand the teacher-led activities' fidelity to implementation. In addition, two impact evaluations were conducted to understand the impact of the SEL intervention for pre-primary and Grades 1 & 2 on children's SEL skills. We also used the Qualitative Impact protocol—double-blinded interviews with key stakeholders—to understand the changes in knowledge, attitudes,



and practices of stakeholders who were a part of the interventions implemented in the L3 ecosystem, and to understand to what they attribute the change. This report synthesizes the learnings from all of the evaluations and learning exercises conducted over the past 4 years (March 2020 - February 2024) by triangulating findings from impact evaluations, secondary analysis of the formative and summative monitoring data, and qualitative studies.

**LESSONS FROM SCHOOL BASED INTERVENTIONS (LEKOL)**

- A light touch SEL program can positively impact the development of preschool children, but there is a need for a more intensive SEL program for subsequent grades
- Coaching visits are important in improving fidelity of implementation and positive environment in the classrooms
- Pre-primary literacy program and Grades 1-3 literacy catch-up program show promising improvements in children’s learning, but their efficacy needs to be evaluated using more rigorous methods

**LESSONS FROM DISTANCE LEARNING INTERVENTIONS (LEGLIZ)**

- Lessons broadcasted through radio proved to be a viable option for continuing children’s learning during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Contextual changes that have occurred in Haiti since the pandemic call for a re-evaluation of available distance learning modalities
- Creating alternative safe learning environments that are accessible during school closures is being piloted as a sustainable option, but much remains to be learned

**LESSONS FROM HOME BASED INTERVENTIONS (LAKAY)**

- Embedding iterative learning in the parent training component has helped improve the program content and model
- Parent training participants report promising signs of positive behavior change, but its efficacy and impact need to be evaluated
- Male participation in parent training was low, but the ones who participated in the training provided positive feedback about their learning

**LESSONS FROM PARISH/COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS (LEGLIZ)**

- Parish leaders have a strong understanding of the importance of ECD
- Involving seminarians and broadening the touchpoint with the community beyond baptism sermons could be more efficient and sustainable in the long term

Reflecting on the learnings from the past 4 years provides clear insight into what works, what needs to be improved, and what needs to be studied further to strengthen each component of the L3 ecosystem. Overall, the REALM-enabled implementation research has been vital in iteratively testing and improving approaches, and should be embedded in any future initiatives. Furthermore, for each program component of L3 that has been iteratively tested and improved, the next step should be to streamline programming so that the home, school, and parish systems complement each other in supporting the learning and development of young children. It is also essential to deepen partnerships to embed other elements of ECD into programming across the L3 system. At an intervention level, the learnings indicate that the pre-primary SEL program has promise and should be scaled, but the primary grades SEL program needs a deeper, whole-school approach. The distance learning approaches need to be tested to ensure they are contextual, and integrated into the larger L3 system more explicitly where feasible. While the Strong Beginnings initiative focused on iterating each intervention component and testing the efficacy of school-based interventions, future efforts should focus on testing the efficacy of the L3 approach as a whole.



# CONTEXT



Haiti is a country with strong economic potential, whose development has been impeded time and again by unprecedented socio-political turmoil, economic tensions, and natural disasters. Looking back at just the last five years (2019-2024), the country has survived significant challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, the assassination of a president, acute political tensions, gas and food price inflation, increased gang violence, a global pandemic, and a 6.1 magnitude earthquake. Despite the setbacks and tensions, Haiti recorded a primary school enrollment rate (net%) of over 90% in 2022 (UIS, 2022). At the preschool level, 63% of students in the 3 – 5 years age range attended preschool (IDB, 2016). While the enrollment rates are encouraging, a closer look at the resource-constrained education system reveals numerous challenges that affect regular access to schools, teacher capacity, quality of education, and attendance. The public school system, which accounts for only 12% of the schools in Haiti, does not serve every child in Haiti with its limited reach (CRS, 2012) at the preschool and primary level. While private actors, including the Catholic Church, have stepped in to fill this gap, private schools charge tuition which acts as a barrier to families, resulting in 50% of students not attending school regularly (Crouch, 2005). While Haitian teachers spend 76% of class time on academic instruction, their teaching methods are often ineffective (Baron et al., 2016) due to limited training and professional development opportunities. Data from the Haiti National Evaluation shows that just attending a preschool in Haiti does not have an effect on students' future learning outcomes (IDB, 2016). Further, only 35% of the preschool teachers in Haiti receive training in pedagogy to implement a preschool curriculum (IDB, 2016). These data points make clear the strong need for quality preschool education in Haiti. Minimal preschool programming and a deficiency of first-language reading instruction in early grades contribute to 49% percent of Haitian students not being able to read a single word when they enter the third grade (Nielsen, 2014). Data also shows that 22% of the students are malnourished when they enter the school (Ayoya, 2013), which impacts their physical health, and their ability to learn in class.

Beyond the structural learning challenges, children face challenges at home which can negatively impact their learning potential. Indeed, two out of three Haitian children report experiencing violence from a caregiver or authority figure during childhood (Flynn-O'Brien et al, 2016). This is especially concerning given that recent advances in brain and behavioral sciences indicate that children exposed to chronic violence and adversity, which is well-documented in Haiti, have a physiological stress response that can alter their brain development in a way that hampers their ability to learn (Shonkoff et al., 2012).

The multi-faceted challenges facing children in Haiti call for approaches that:

- Prepare children to be lifelong learners by starting early with a strong focus on early childhood development, to minimize the learning gaps as they enter primary school
- Prioritize not only academic learning but also other aspects of development including social and emotional development, health, etc.
- Identify and strengthen not just learning in school, but also build capacity of stakeholders or systems that directly influence children's learning and development



Since its launch in 2020, the Strong Beginnings project has worked towards building a Whole Child Development (WCD) model for education through identifying and strengthening Haiti’s primary social-ecological systems—the home (lakay), the school (lekòl) and the church (legliz)—that deeply influence children’s learning and overall development. A WCD model values all aspects of a child’s wellbeing equally, and engages the key support systems including family, community and school to ensure children become life-long learners (“Defining Whole Child Development”, n.d.). The interventions implemented as a part of the project focus on these three systems (referred to as L3 in this document) for Whole Child Development.

Figure 1: L3 ecosystem in Haiti

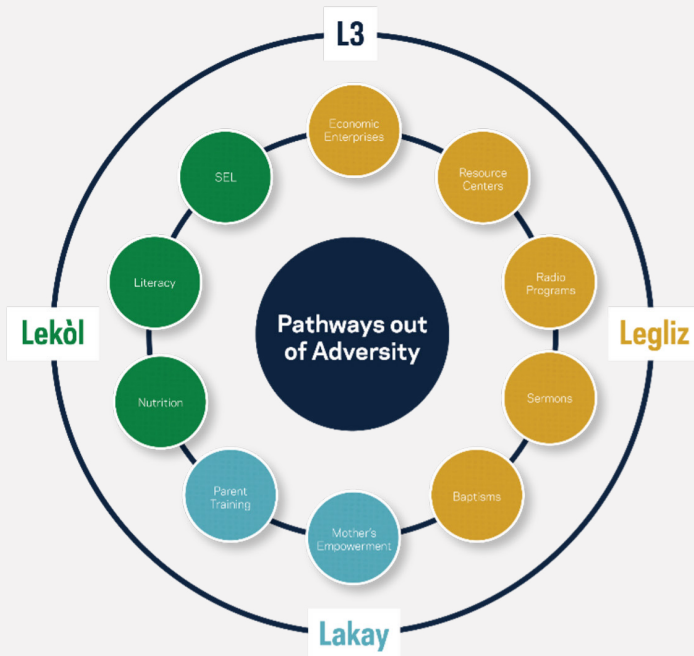
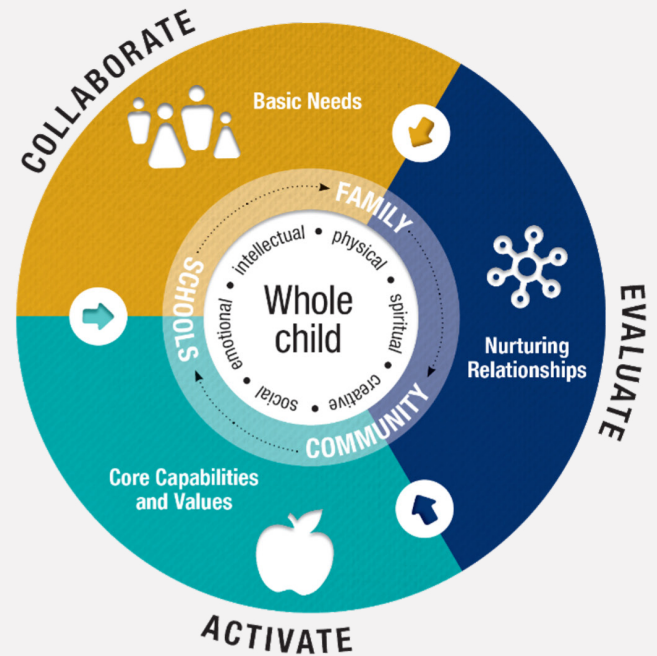


Figure 2: Whole Child Development (WCD) framework



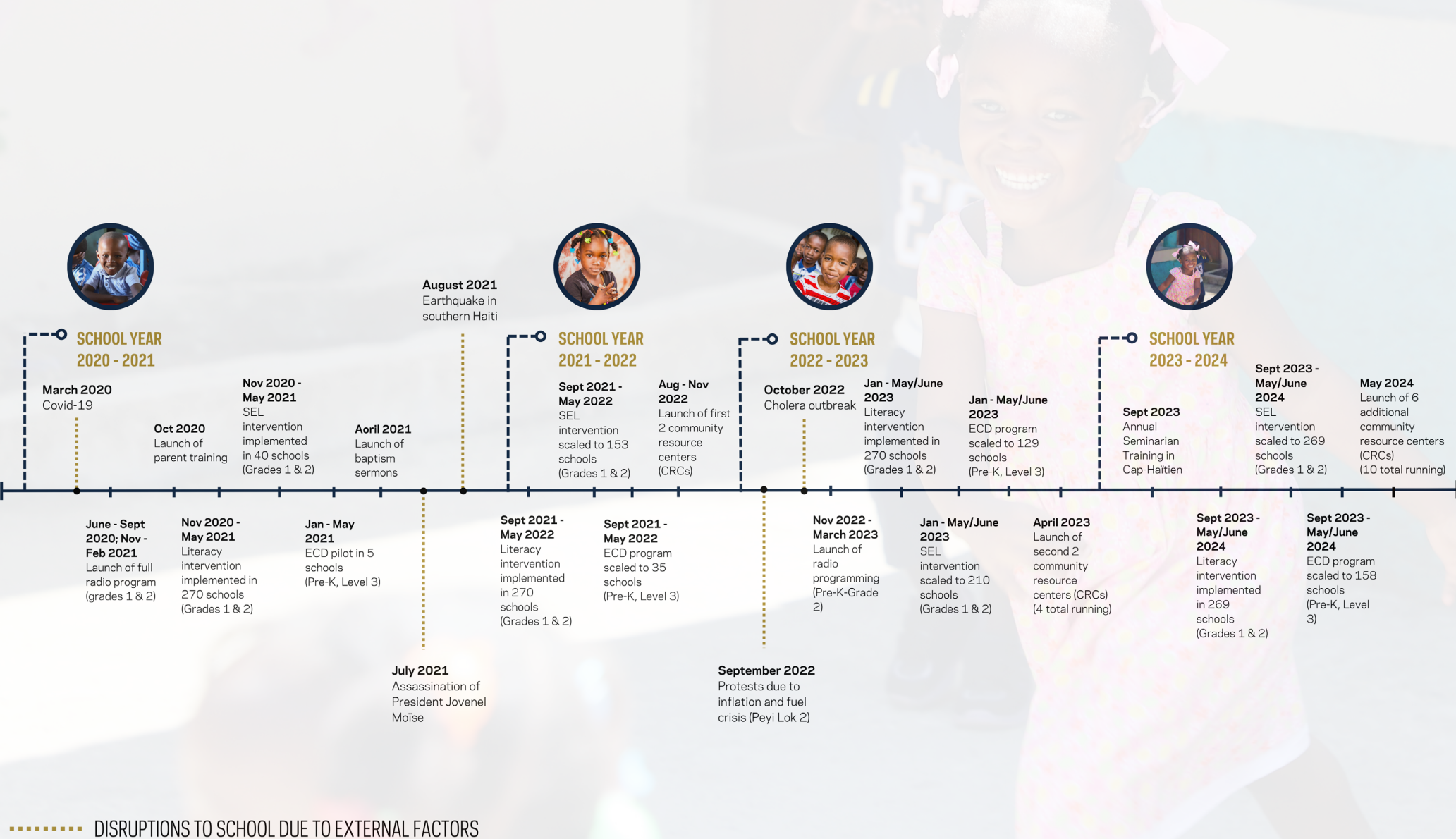
## OVERVIEW OF STRONG BEGINNINGS

Strong Beginnings is a four-year Global Development Alliance (GDA) led by the University of Notre Dame’s Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child (UND’s GC-DWC), in collaboration with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Episcopal Commission for Catholic Education (CEEC), Summits Education Network, and the Schools for Basic Teacher Training and Centers for Pedagogical Support Network (EFACAP). The GDA was originally funded by three donors—USAID, Porticus, and Kellogg Foundation, reaching 5 departments in Haiti—Artibonite, Center, Grand’Anse, Nord, and Sud. The LEGO Foundation subsequently funded the scale-up of Strong Beginnings to the Nippes department after the earthquake in August 2021. In the last four years, Strong Beginnings has served over 60,000 students in 282 schools across six departments, with the objective of strengthening the L3 system for children 3-8 years old through the following activities:



# STRONG BEGINNINGS FOR CHILDREN IN HAITI

Figure 3: Strong Beginnings Timeline



## SCHOOL BASED INTERVENTIONS (LEKÒL)



**LITERACY PROGRAM FOR GRADES 1 & 2** - This is a scripted, mother tongue literacy curriculum, created by Haitian and international educators, with support from USAID in collaboration with the Haitian Ministry of Education titled *M ap li nèt ale* (Haitian Creole) and *Je parle bien français* (French). To further augment the literacy curriculum, Strong Beginnings partners developed and curated classroom libraries with culturally relevant, mother tongue language books and *AliK* (*Ayiti Li Li Kreyòl*), a formative assessment that determines children's reading levels. *AliK* provides teachers, coaches, and partners data-driven insights into children's learning. A robust teacher and school leader professional development program accompanies the literacy program, including two residential educator training sessions throughout the school year. Teachers are further supported by monthly coaching and observation visits by teacher coaches (who are also trained by the Strong Beginnings partners) and monthly teacher newsletters that share strategies and tips for classroom management and pedagogical best practices.

**LITERACY SUMMER CAMPS** - Led by school directors, teachers, community volunteers, and student tutors, this intensive and engaging three-week literacy summer camp allows the lowest performing students to improve their reading skills in a participatory and welcoming environment. Camp days include a variety of interactive activities such as academic games, Reader's Theatre, morning meeting activities, and reading competitions, all to foster a love of reading and learning, and to better prepare students for the next school level.

**SEL PROGRAM FOR GRADES 1 & 2** - A Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program developed to complement the literacy program utilizing key elements of the Vision of the Haitian Child, a SEL Framework specifically designed for the Haitian context by a task force of local and international experts in 2017-2018. A pivotal component of the program is the SEL Morning Meetings (*Sèk Matine*) Curriculum Guide that aligns with key themes within the Vision of the Haitian Child such as promoting relational strength, self-direction, and a sense of self. In addition, the Strong Beginnings partners created and curated SEL-aligned, culturally relevant books through the *Ana ak Tiga* SEL book series that accompanies the SEL Morning Meetings. Teachers and school directors are trained in approaches to fostering a positive school climate and culture and implementing SEL activities. They are supported by monthly observation and coaching visits from the trained teacher coaches.

**PRESCHOOL ECD PROGRAM** - The pre-primary program was initially developed as a light touch SEL program, by adapting the SEL morning meetings and culturally relevant books used in the SEL programs for Grades 1 & 2 (described above). The program was made more comprehensive in the school year 2022-23 with a focus on play-based learning, life skills/discovering the world themes, and key pre-literacy and pre-numeracy concepts aligned with the Haitian Ministry of Education's preschool curriculum standards. The program also includes PReSA (Preschool Skills Assessment), a formative assessment designed to provide teachers, coaches, and partners data-driven insights into children's development across 4 key domains: motor, social and emotional, pre-literacy, and pre-numeracy. A robust teacher and school leader training accompanies the program, including two residential educator training sessions throughout the school year. Teachers are further supported by monthly coaching and observation visits by teacher coaches.



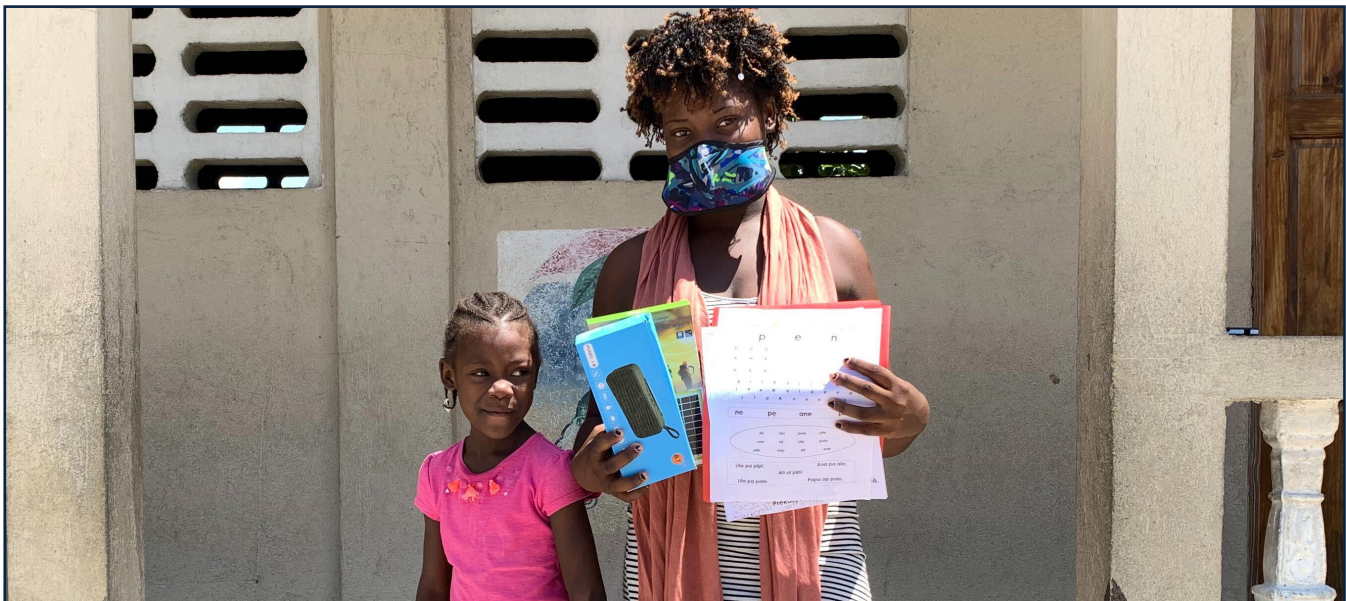
## HOME BASED INTERVENTIONS (LAKAY)

**PARENT TRAINING PROGRAM** - This program started as a mother's empowerment initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic which focused on alleviating their stress by providing a supportive outlet through phone calls. The program then went through several iterations based on participant feedback, expanded to include fathers as well, and evolved into a ten-week parent empowerment training led by community facilitators (who were trained via a Training of Trainers model). The program covers the inherent connection between science and faith, nutrition, social and emotional development, intellectual development, school preparedness, the stages of childhood development, play-based learning, positive discipline, the importance of the parent-child relationship, family dynamics and wellbeing, reproductive health, cultural identity, gender equality, and protection of the environment. Parents are engaged in deep discussion, brainstorming, and both group and paired work, integrating a series of culturally relevant, positive parenting videos. The facilitators conduct a short one-on-one survey with the parents at the beginning and end of the training to understand any changes in their parenting and feeding practices over the ten-week period. This helps the Strong Beginnings team understand any trends among changes in practices by theme.

## DISTANCE LEARNING ACTIVITIES (LEGLIZ)

**RADIO PROGRAM** - To ensure children and caregivers had access to robust literacy and SEL content during prolonged school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020) and delayed school openings in the 2022-2023 school year due to the security situation throughout the country, Strong Beginnings partners developed the following radio programs which were through Catholic radio stations:

- a 12-week literacy program in French and Haitian Creole supplemented with a reading hour program
- a 6-week pre-primary SEL and parent engagement program
- a 12-week pre-primary program that complements the current, school-based ECD curriculum which was co-created and developed with pre-primary teachers to align with themes relevant to the classroom



**COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTERS (CRC)** - These are physical spaces set-up in 10 parish communities (to date) to ensure students and caregivers have access to high-quality learning materials and that learning continues during periods of prolonged school closure. After extensive exploration, the physical spaces were made using refurbished shipping containers. CRCs, powered by solar electricity, are equipped with print and digital learning materials, toys, and games purchased in Haiti. They are managed by two paid 2 monitors and a facilitator at each

site, selected through the parish. Monitors are responsible for managing the CRC and being present during the set schedule of open hours. Facilitators are directors of the local school who provide support to monitors and visit the CRCs twice a month. Children aged pre-primary through 6th grade are free to play with resources within the resource center. When school is in session, the CRCs operate half a day for three days a week and full days on the weekends. When school is not session, the CRCs are open from 9am to 5pm five days a week. In addition, the CRC monitors are trained to implement a weekly curriculum for parents which includes topics like social and emotional learning, positive discipline, and reading out loud. The monitors and facilitators receive an annual training supported with monthly supervision and coaching, and an annual booster training conducted by the GC-DWC.



## COMMUNITY/PARISH BASED INTERVENTIONS (LEGLIZ)

**INTEGRATING ECD MESSAGING IN BAPTISMS** - With the support of the Archbishop’s Office in Cap-Haïtien, the Strong Beginnings team developed a supplemental Baptism Guide focused on parenting success in the first thousand days of a child’s life and the importance of promoting early childhood development, particularly as it relates to nutrition, parenting for success, and school readiness. This supplemental Baptism Guide was integrated into a larger Baptism Guide used by all baptism trainers throughout the Archdiocese of Cap-Haïtien. However, this model of working directly with the parish leaders proved to be inefficient since the priests were often busy and could not attend the trainings, and the timeline of baptism sessions were different from parish to parish. Additionally, the person delivering the training in the session varied, making it difficult to plan training of the trainers in a timely manner. This approach was replaced with the seminarian training described below.

**SEMINARIAN TRAINING & SERMONS** - The initial approach of training baptism trainers was shifted to integrating ECD messaging into the Catholic system through training seminarians and parish priests in the Nord department directly when they meet for their annual seminarian training. In 2023, Parish priests and seminarians were trained in WCD to deliver pre-birth development and SEL sessions in their respective communities where they wield significant influence. To assist parish priests in making the distinct connection between science and faith, a liturgical calendar, aligned with Biblical stories and passages that inherently promote WCD messaging, was developed. In addition, the Strong Beginnings team provided parish priests and seminarians with school administration training (pedagogy follow-up and support; identifying qualified teachers) and a parent engagement “crash course” since they are also actively involved in the school (lekòl) and home (lakay).



**SOCIAL ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE (SEI)** - Social enterprise work in Haiti is designed to improve the sustainability of the Strong Beginnings program and help Haitian communities become more self-sufficient. Comprised of partnerships with three different initiatives, the GC-DWC's work in social enterprise leverages entrepreneurship to address complex social issues and ultimately foster sustainable solutions, create capacity, and empower people at local levels. These initiatives are outlined below:



- **Mail Boxes Etc. Haiti** - The shipping industry in Haiti provides a potential pathway to community-driven change and sustainable development. Currently in Haiti, there exists no low-cost option to ship packages both in and out of the country. The Mail Boxes Etc. (MBE) enterprise establishes a global franchise as a locally-run business in Haiti, meeting this gap in service. The doors to the first storefront in Cap-Haitien were opened in May 2023, and the storefront became fully operational in May 2024. Working under the guidance of the GC-DWC, representative community committees will decide how generated profits are to be utilized in their schools. This model both allows communities to chart their own course to change, and provides a local source of financial sustainability and employment.
- **The Bon Sel Initiative** - The Bon Sel Initiative (BSI), formerly Haiti Salt Project (HSP), works to eliminate Lymphatic Filariases (LF) and prevent Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) in Haiti through the production and distribution of fortified salt. Inaugurated in 2014, BSI's production facility in Port au Prince is the only Haitian supplier of packaged, fortified salt under its Bon Sel Dayiti brand name. Currently, Bon Sel Dayiti is the only food-grade, iodized, and fortified salt produced in Haiti. Notably, BSI's footprint extends beyond combating LF and IDD. Recognizing the nutritional and educational impact of meals at Haitian schools prepared with fortified salt, BSI has been active in school-meal programs in Haiti since its inception, having developed partnerships with the World Food Programme and Fonkoze.
- **University of Notre Dame Haiti-Hinche** - The GC-DWC's partnership with the University of Notre Dame Haiti-Hinche (UNDH-H), coined 'Our Lady's Partnership,' seeks to fill knowledge gaps by providing Haitian students with robust opportunities in bioscience, entrepreneurship, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and soon even parent training and support.

While these comprehensive sets of activities were co-created with the participants through multiple iterations to strengthen the L3 system, not all of them were implemented in all 6 departments. The Nord department—where Strong Beginnings has a deep presence—turned into “innovation communities”, and different interventions around home, school, distance learning and the community/parish were piloted here. Based on the learnings from the pilot and from some of the previous projects, the primary school-based interventions were scaled across 270 schools, and the ECD school-based interventions were scaled to a subset of 131 schools across all 6 departments. The school-based Grades 1 & 2 literacy and SEL program is also being implemented in another education project implemented by the same partners in 60 schools, with the objective to scale the programs across 170 schools in Haiti, as well as develop a literacy and SEL program for Grades 3 & 4 students.

# UNDERSTANDING THE STRONG BEGINNINGS PARTICIPANTS AND COMMUNITIES

Strong Beginnings targeted participants and communities that are socio-economically marginalized and are often affected by the fragility of Haiti’s natural and socio-political landscape. The table and description below it provide a deeper understanding about the Strong Beginnings participants:

Figure 4: Strong Beginnings Reach

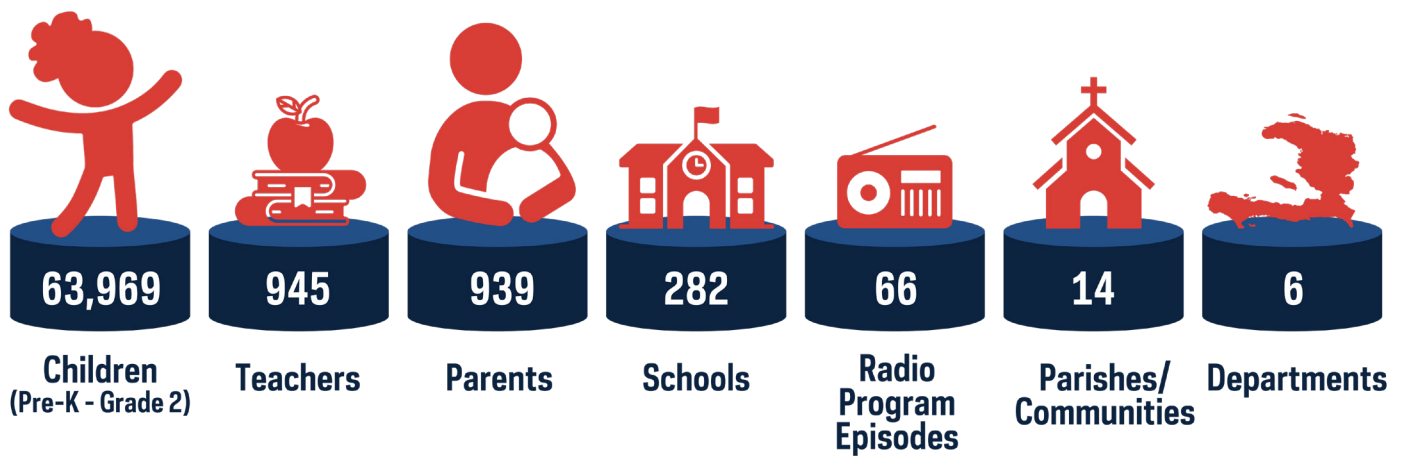


Figure 5

Average age of students in pre-primary (in years)	n=705	5.2 years
Average age of students in Grades 1 & 2 (in years)	n=2,933	7.7 years
% students reported speaking Creole at home	n=3,262	78%
% students reported speaking French at home	n=3,262	15%
% students who have electricity at home	n=3,262	39%
% students who have a radio in at home	n=3,262	69%
% students who have a TV at home	n=3,262	39%
% students who have some form of transport at home (bicycle or a motorcycle)	n=3,262	43%
Average number of literacy materials at home	n=3,262	3
% caregivers (mothers) who have completed at least primary education	n=641	37%



% caregivers (fathers) who have completed at least primary education	n=641	41%
% caregivers who expect their child to complete primary education	n=641	99%
% caregivers who expect their child to complete secondary education	n=641	99%
% schools that experienced political unrest during the school year	N=254	78%
% schools that experienced fuel shortages during the school year	N=254	95%
% schools reporting a safe play area for students	N=254	86%

*Note: The data shared in this report was collected from a representative sample of students as a part of multiple impact evaluations conducted during the project (2020-2024). More specifically, the data for caregivers comes from surveying a sample of caregivers of children who are enrolled in schools.*

As displayed in the table above, here are a few of the notable characteristics that provide a deeper understanding of the Strong Beginnings participants’ limitations, and the subsequent challenges that followed:

- Only 15% of the students reported speaking French at home. However, the medium of instruction in their schools is often French, making it difficult for students to learn, further underscoring the need to focus on mother tongue (Creole) education.
- At the school or community level, over 70% of schools report experiencing political unrest during the school year, and over 90% of schools report experiencing fuel shortages—in-line with the protests, unrest, and fuel shortages experienced by the country as a whole. The fuel-shortages usually limits the availability of electricity, use of generators, and transportation among other things that are all fuel-dependent.
- 86% of schools reported being able to provide their students with a safe play area while they are in school.

Additionally, here are a few notable characteristics which provide insight into participant attitudes and assets:

- Although over 50% of the caregivers surveyed had not completed primary education, almost all of them expected their children to complete primary and secondary education. This provides insight into parents’ expectations and attitudes towards their children’s learning.
- While 69% of students reported having a radio at home, other qualitative and quantitative surveys conducted as a part of the radio programming (discussed later in this report) showed that over 50% of the households either don’t have a functional radio, or when they do, they do not have electricity or signal to be able to use the radio. The lack of functional radios, along with limited access to electricity (39%), proved to be a major challenge in delivering lessons through radio.
- Participants reported an average of 3 literacy materials at home. This can include reading materials (ie textbooks, storybooks, newspapers, religious books, magazines, comics and coloring books), writing materials (ie pencils, paper, or chalk), or other materials to support literacy like tapes, computers, or audio books.

# SYNTHESIZING LEARNINGS FROM STRONG BEGINNINGS



A key focus of Strong Beginnings, along with implementing interventions to activate the L3 system, has been to learn what works and what needs to be improved. Through a Rapid Evaluation, Assessment, and Learning Methods (REALM) approach, each component of Strong Beginnings was iteratively improved. REALM is a systematic monitoring and evaluation strategy that can be used to iteratively improve program design and implementation. It uses simple, timely, easy to collect, and easy to analyze data to drive decision-making about programs (USAID, 2015). For each component of Strong Beginnings, formative assessments, observations, and feedback surveys were used to collect data as a part of REALM and to compile learnings.

In addition, 2 major impact evaluations (the third one is in progress and will end in June 2024) and 2 qualitative learning exercises were conducted once the interventions were scaled to understand the impact and participants' perceived effectiveness of the interventions. One of the qualitative studies - Qualitative Impact Protocol (QulP; Copestake et al., 2019) was implemented in two of the innovation communities to understand the impact of L3 interventions beyond just the REALM strategies used for individual components. QulP assesses the impact of interventions by employing a double-blinded, open-ended questions approach to data collection, where no direct reference to the intervention is made in the questioning, and neither the interviewers nor the interviewees know what is being evaluated. For example, questions designed to understand the impact of parent training interventions looked like: "Has anything changed in the way you play with your children in the past year?," rather than asking directly about the intervention. If the participants mention a change and directly associate it with the intervention, then they are coded at the analysis stage. An "unblinding" process is conducted with the participants at the end through a focus group. The other qualitative study was implemented in the Nippes department and was inspired by the QulP. However, the study did not follow the process of double blinding because of its resource and time-intensive nature.



The main purpose of this report is to synthesize the key learnings and recommendations from these formative and summative evaluations, and program learning (REALM), and monitoring data conducted over the past 4 years (March 2020 - February 2024), as a part of the Strong Beginnings project. The report triangulates findings from impact evaluations, secondary analysis from the formative and summative evaluation data collected, and the qualitative studies conducted. The secondary analysis in this report mainly includes re-analysis of quantitative data collected to understand the fidelity of implementation better, and a thematic analysis of existing qualitative reports, rather than re-analysis of the actual transcripts. The quantitative models fit for secondary analysis are either at the student level or classroom level—with department as a control for all classroom-level data, and sex and department as a control for student-level data. In addition, the report also highlights learnings and results that are tied to the outcomes laid out in the program logic model (annex - table 7). The following table summarizes the datasets/ information used for the learning synthesis.

STUDY	DESCRIPTION	METHOD	COMPLETED
<b>Pre-primary SEL impact evaluation</b> (D'Sa, N. et al., 2022)	Cluster randomized controlled trial to understand whether the pre-primary SEL program has an impact on pre-primary children's SEL outcomes. (n=881)	Quantitative	June 2022
<b>Grades 1 &amp; 2 SEL impact evaluation</b> (D'Sa, N. et al., 2022)	Cluster randomized controlled trial to understand whether the Grades 1 & 2 SEL program has an impact on Grade 1 & 2 children's SEL outcomes. (n=3,262)	Quantitative	June 2022
<b>Grade 2 Monitoring endline - literacy and SEL</b> (Parvathy, S. et al., 2023)	Data collected with a small sample of children to understand the status of literacy and SEL outcomes at the end of the school year. This data was collected for two subsequent years. ( SY 2021-22: n= 768 SY 2022 23: n = 615)	Quantitative	June 2022 and June 2023
<b>Qualitative Impact Protocol Study</b> (University of Notre Dame, 2023)	Double blinded (at the assessor level and participant level) qualitative interviews in 2 innovation communities with teachers, parents and school leaders to understand changes (if any) in participant behaviour and what they attribute the changes to. (n = 33 parents, 13 teachers, priests = 2)	Qualitative	December 2022
<b>Participant learning, feedback and sentiment study</b> (Presuma, L. et al., 2023)	Focus groups and interviews with parents, teachers and school leaders in the Nippes department to understand change in their behaviors (if any) and what they attributed the change to (n=15 teachers, 30 parents, 5 school directors, 1 parish leadership)	Qualitative	October 2023
<b>Program fidelity data</b>	Regular classroom observations collected by the teacher coaches while visiting pre-primary through Grade 2 classrooms.	Quantitative	Ongoing

<b>Stakeholder perspectives on distance learning modalities in Haiti</b> (Presuma, L. et al., 2023)	Interviews with stakeholders supporting and/or implementing distance learning modalities in Haiti to understand their perspectives of assets and challenges in distance learning (n=16)	Qualitative	June 2023
<b>Leveraging community-based innovations during COVID-19 pandemic</b> (Boothby, N. et al., 2021)	Semi structured interviews with a variety of education actors in Haiti to understand the existing gaps in the education system's readiness to withstand crises and continue to provide learners access to education. (n=83)	Qualitative	March 2021
<b>Variation in Early Grade Reading Program Effects</b> (D'Agostino, T.J. et al., 2024)	Mixed-method study on explaining variation in treatment effects seen in the Read Haiti program (n=5,500)	Quantitative	February 2024
<b>Parent training - learning check</b>	Report consolidating learning from each iteration of the parent training program including pre-/post survey data collected	-	Ongoing
<b>COVID-19 radio programming study</b>	Data collected on radio program engagement and student learning outcomes during the COVID pandemic (n=1243)	Quantitative	October 2020

As we move on to discuss the results, there are two key limitations to keep in mind with the analyses:

- Not all of the secondary analysis conducted have a randomly selected control group, so we cannot claim causality. Where the studies are randomized controlled trials, the report talks about both statistical and practical significance of the results.
- There are certain intervention components, especially distance learning, where the report focuses on more operational learnings than findings from a structured study. Any focus on operational learning is explicitly specified in the report. This focus on operational learning is intentional because of the challenges encountered in implementation, and limited feasibility to conduct a study due to the security situation, logistics, etc. Understanding the solutions that have worked to overcome some of the operational challenges and existing gaps will be beneficial for any future programming.



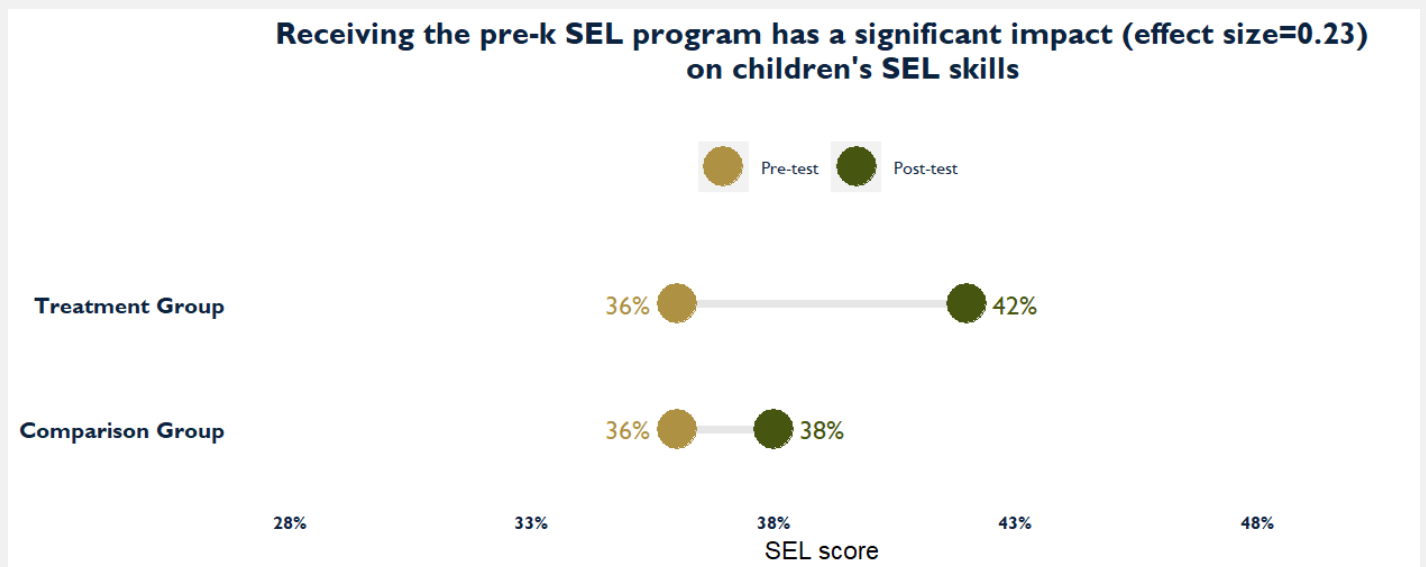
## WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOCUSED ON SEL AND LITERACY?

### A LIGHT TOUCH SEL PROGRAM CAN POSITIVELY IMPACT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN, BUT THERE IS A NEED FOR A MORE INTENSIVE SEL PROGRAM FOR SUBSEQUENT GRADES<sup>1</sup>

The pre-primary SEL program, as described in the overview section, was a light-touch SEL program adapted from the SEL program for Grades 1 & 2. Both the programs had the morning meeting and thematic SEL books that were used in the classroom as key activities. Two cluster randomized controlled trials were conducted in the SY 2021-22 — one to evaluate the impact of the pre-primary SEL intervention on the SEL outcomes of children in pre-primary, and another to evaluate the impact of Grades 1 & 2 SEL intervention on the SEL outcomes of children in Grades 1 & 2. The pre-primary evaluation used IDELA to measure pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, SEL and motor development outcomes, and the Grades 1 & 2 evaluation used the EGRA and ISELA tool to measure literacy and SEL outcomes of students.

The pre-primary SEL intervention, implemented for a shortened period of 4.5 months (as opposed to the originally planned 9 months due to school closures related to political unrest) showed a statistically significant impact on children’s SEL skills. The study also showed that the change in SEL skills did not vary by gender, which means the intervention was equally effective for both boys and girls in pre-primary (D’Sa et al., 2022). At baseline, an average child in the intervention and comparison group responded correctly to ~36% of SEL questions in the IDELA tool. At endline, an average child in the treatment group responded correctly to ~42% of the SEL questions in the IDELA tool and an average child in the comparison group responded correctly to ~38% of SEL questions. This translates to an effect size of 0.23, which provides an insight into the magnitude of the impact and practical significance of the result. In education programs, 0.23 is considered a large effect size, which means that the result is also practically significant (Evans & Yuan, 2020).

Figure 6: SEL outcomes for pre-primary students - treatment and comparison group

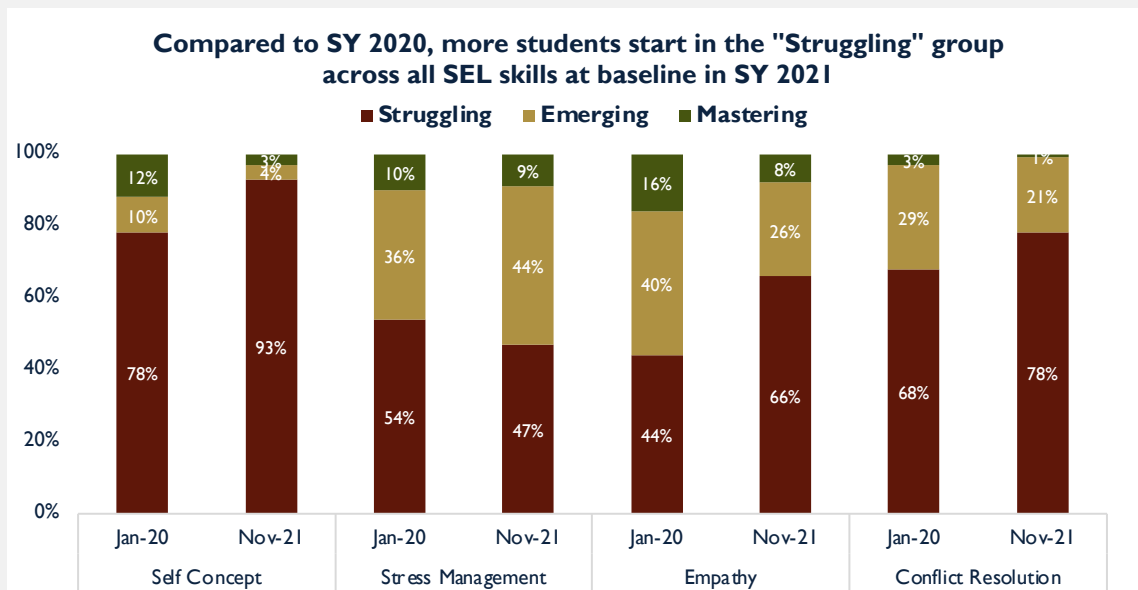


<sup>1</sup> This learning addresses outcome OC2 listed in table 9

A similar evaluation of the SEL program for Grades 1 & 2 did not show a statistically significant impact on children’s SEL skills in Grades 1 & 2. This could have happened because of one of the three reasons (D’Sa, et al., 2022):

- The intervention as designed was ineffective — this is unlikely since the SEL program for Grades 1 & 2 is similar to the pre-primary SEL program, which has a significant impact of children’s SEL skills in pre-primary.
- Intervention was not implemented with high quality — The already shortened (5-month) implementation period was further made challenging by delayed delivery of materials in one of the departments due to bureaucratic delays in getting the materials from the USA to Haiti, inability of the coaches to visit all the schools due to acute fuel shortage and socio-political unrest, and delayed enrollment of students in the schools due to the looming fear of security threats. All of these could have affected the quality of implementation of the program in the classrooms.
- Lower baseline levels of SEL skills than originally expected which the ISELA tool did not capture — The analysis of the impact evaluation data showed that a vast majority of students in both treatment and comparison groups scored 0 on SEL outcome variables measured using ISELA even at post-test. Further, comparing the baseline SEL outcomes from the evaluation with baseline data collected in January 2020 from the same departments as a part of another evaluation (please note that these are not from the same set of students, but a representative sample of Grade 1 & 2 students at each point in time) shows that children started with lower levels of skills across all four SEL outcomes measured using ISELA in 2021 (fig 7). It could mean that children started with more significant needs due to the pandemic, the repeated school closures, and constant security threats between January 2020 and November 2022. If this is true, then it is possible that ISELA was not able to accurately capture the lower end of SEL skills, resulting in a large number of students scoring 0 on SEL outcome variables measured. To compare the baseline SEL skills of children in January 2020 and November 2021, children were categorized into three groups at baseline and endline based on their SEL scores (the groups were defined by Save the Children) as:
  - Struggling - SEL score less than 25%
  - Emerging - SEL score between 25% and 75%
  - Mastering - SEL score greater than 75%

Figure 7: Children's baseline SEL skills over time





In response to these potential limitations, the following changes were made to the program and coaching strategy in consultation with the partners in order to ensure program fidelity:

- Simplification of morning meetings guide so it is easier for the teachers to refer to and implement
- Strengthening the capacity of coaches by conducting joint visits where one of the technical team members accompanies the coaches on their visits
- Creation of synthesis documents that act as a cheat sheet for teachers and coaches while implementing and observing activities

In addition, the assessment tool was adapted by adding SEL tasks from IDELA (pre-k level assessment) to ISELA so that the tool captures more foundational SEL skills.

The improved SEL program was meant to be evaluated during the SY 2022-23, but the evaluation had to be suspended because of prolonged school closures and acute fuel crisis. To understand trends in students and in the classroom with the improved SEL program, we started tracking a sample of schools in the SY 2023-24. As a part of this exercise, the GC-DWC team visited 8 schools in the North department over a period of 3 months and made 57 classroom observations. The team collected data based on teacher specific observations and whole classroom observations during these visits. The teacher specific observations consisted of fidelity metrics that aimed at capturing whether the teacher was able to implement routines and practices required in an SEL activated classroom, like talking respectfully to students, dealing with disagreements between children in the classroom, etc. The classroom level observations aimed at capturing how positive and disciplined the overall classroom was, like whether children raised their hands to ask questions, whether children actively listen to the teacher during the lesson, etc. Composite classroom and teacher level scores were created for each visit and analyzed. While the number of observations were not enough to fit a regression model to understand associations, analyzing the data to understand correlations showed that the teacher score and the classroom score are highly correlated (correlation co-efficient=0.74), indicating that creating a positive SEL activated classroom is reliant on the teacher's capacity to implement SEL routines and practices with high fidelity. Additionally, monitoring data collected from 164 schools implementing the SEL intervention shows that 88% of the teachers observed were able to implement classroom SEL routines with fidelity. While this simple analysis does not speak anything about causality, it still provides powerful insight into the importance of ensuring fidelity of implementation.



## COACHING VISITS ARE IMPORTANT IN IMPROVING FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION AND POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT IN THE CLASSROOMS

Monitoring and support has been embedded into each component of Strong Beginnings since its launch. For the school-based interventions, this is done mainly through a cadre of CEEC coaches who are trained to train teachers and support in their capacity building through classroom visits and observations. In addition to observing the classroom, the coaches also collect data on:

- **Classroom management practices** – how well the teacher manages a classroom in terms of allowing students of both genders to speak, organizing group work, moving around the classroom to give all children attention, etc.
- **Fidelity of implementation of activities** – how well the teacher is able to apply pedagogical principles that they are trained on, like connecting the content to students’ life, providing specific feedback to students, etc.
- **Lesson management** – how well the teacher follows the lesson plan in terms of explaining the objectives of the lesson, finishing the lesson in time etc.
- **Classroom environment** – this metric is related to the SEL program, and it looks at how well the teacher is able to create a positive classroom environment by respecting the students, encouraging students to express their emotions, solving student-student conflict, etc.

**Operational learnings about how to improve the coaching process and integrated into CEEC operating procedures in Haiti:**

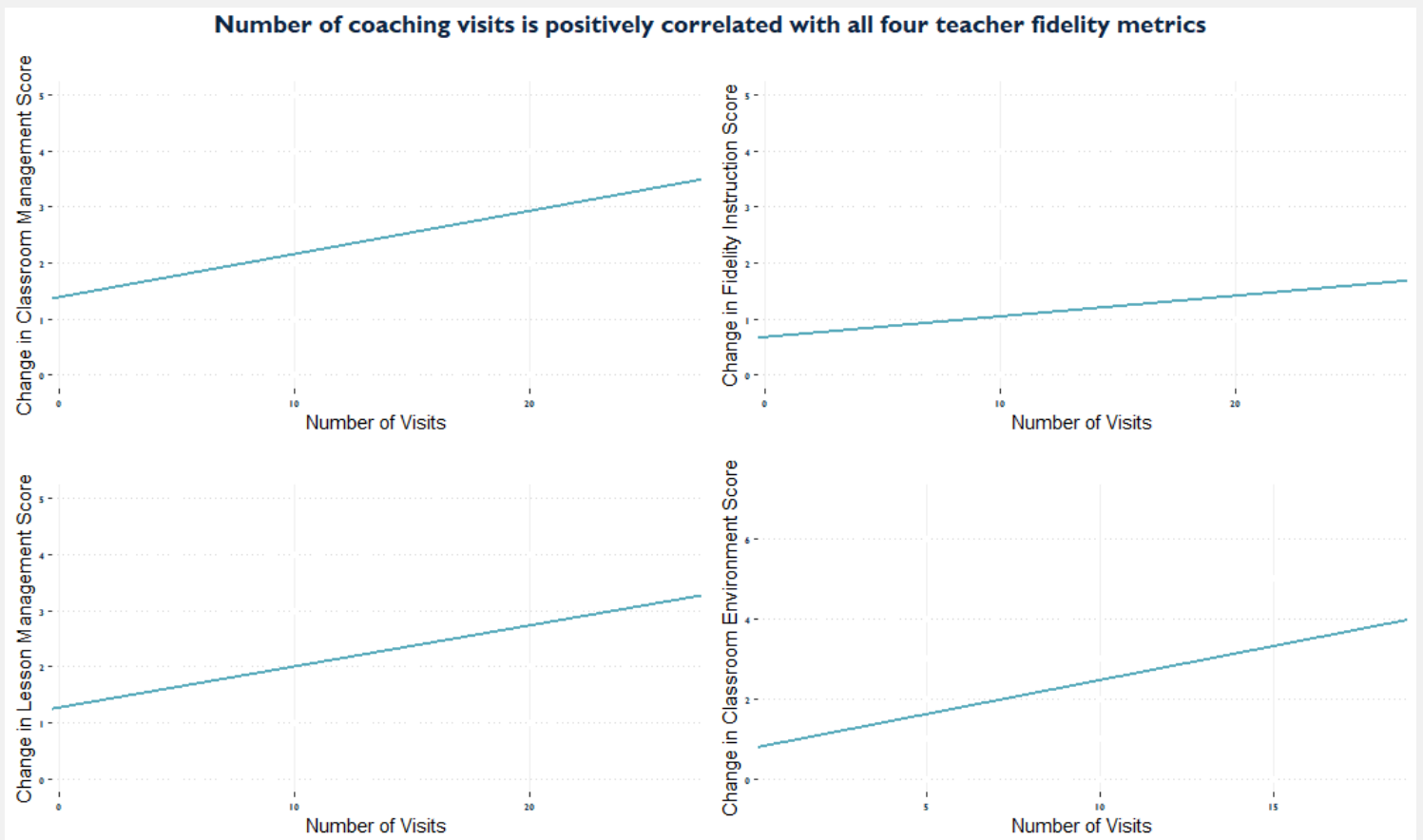
1. Enhancing process each year, by progressively building the coaches’ (CEECS’) capacity in collecting data and supporting teachers is important to ensure quality of the process
2. Ensuring the coaches understand that they will not be evaluated based on the data collected, and teachers understand they are not being assessed is important to ensure data quality
3. Building coaches’ capacity to provide actionable feedback to teachers post observation is crucial in improving program fidelity. The Strong Beginnings team created a “look-fors” document to facilitate this.
4. Having access to data collected real-time through a dashboard is helpful in tracking progress and identifying challenges
5. Building partner (CEECS and CRS) capacity through workshops on how to use the dashboard—and finding the space in existing meetings to look at the dashboard as a consortium—led by the CRS and CEECS teams, is important in making timely decisions about school visits, identifying additional support needed in specific schools, and identifying where coaches need additional support in providing feedback to teachers

Teachers receive a score out of 5 for each of the metrics during each visit, allowing the data to capture variations in score over time for each teacher. Analyzing 617 observations collected during Grades 1 & 2 classroom visits across 247 schools show that there is a positive, statistically significant correlation between the number of coaching visits a classroom or teacher receives and their change in fidelity of instruction score, change in classroom management score, change in lesson management score and change in classroom environment score. It is worth noting that while the SEL program itself did not have a statistically significant impact (as documented in the 2021-2022 cRCT in Grades 1 & 2), SEL activities and observations have a strong association with a higher change in classroom environment score. Overall, this means that support teachers receive through classroom visits and coaching, is positively associated with how well they are able to implement the activities, and pedagogical practices (fig 8). While the change in scores cannot be causally attributed to the number of visits using this analysis, the positive correlations are indicative of the strong role that the number of visits play in improving teacher capacity. The detailed results of this analysis can be found in the annex (table 3).



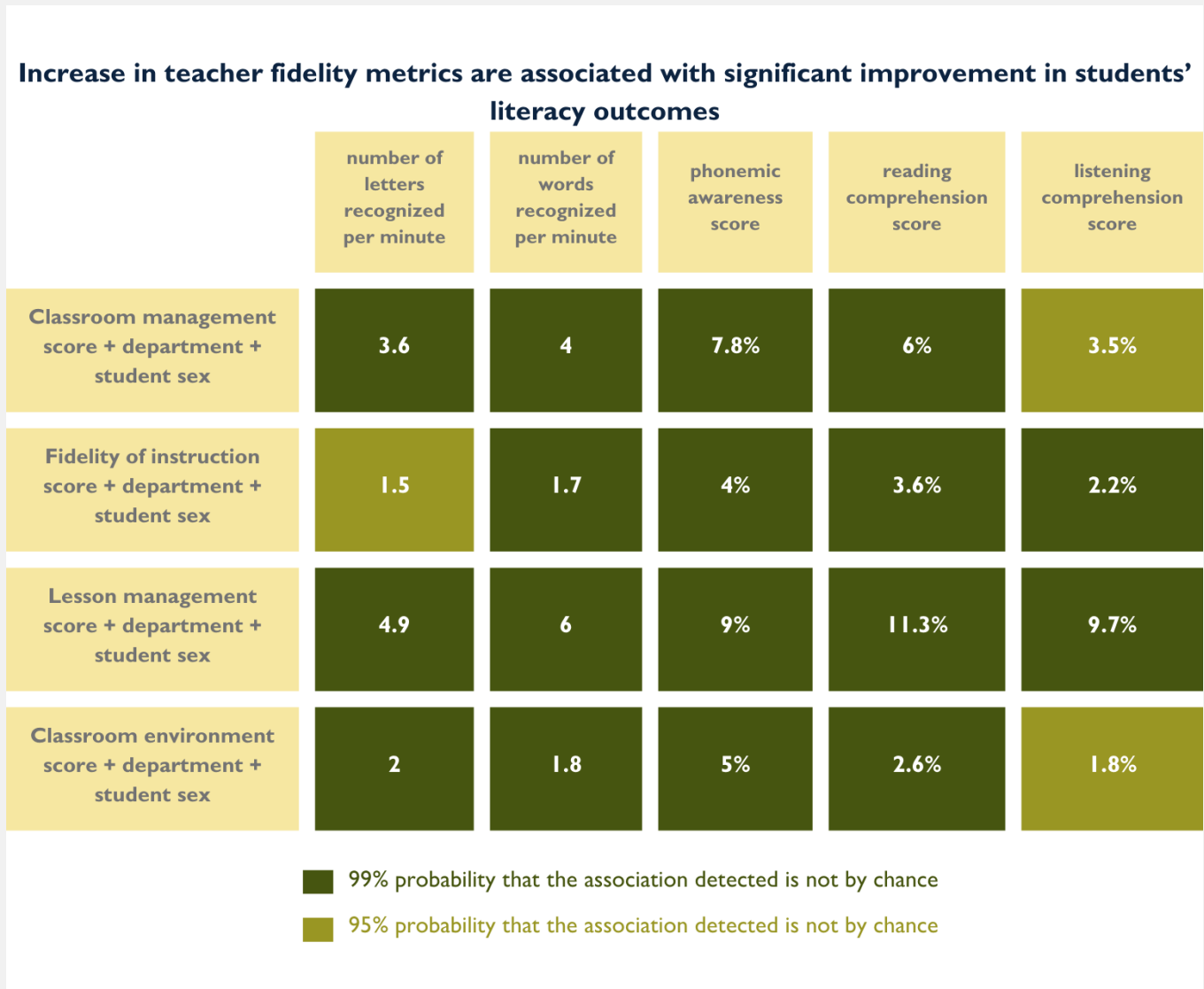


Figure 8: Association between coaching visits and teacher fidelity metrics



If the coaching helps teachers implement the program with high fidelity, and the teacher capacity to manage a classroom, and create a positive environment improves, we expect student outcomes to be positively correlated with the quality of implementation and pedagogical practices. Analyzing the association of these metrics collected during the school year 2022-23 with the student outcomes from the same schools at the end of the school year 2022-23 confirms the hypothesis that fidelity of instruction, lesson management, classroom environment, and classroom management are all strongly and statistically significantly associated with students' literacy outcomes (fig 9).

Figure 9: Association between fidelity metrics and student literacy outcomes



<sup>1</sup>Out of the four metrics, it can be seen that a unit increase in lesson management score is associated with children recognizing 5 more letters per minute and 6 more words per minute. A unit increase in classroom management score is also associated with students scoring 11 percentage points more on reading comprehension. Similar associations can be seen with classroom management and fidelity of instruction as well, although we see a smaller increase in literacy outcomes associated with fidelity of instruction as compared to the other two. The detailed results of this analysis can be found in the annex (table 4 – 6). The strong correlations seen between coaching visits and implementation quality metrics and student outcomes reiterate the importance of embedding monitoring and support within the intervention, logistically planning school visits so that most if not all schools are visited, and building coaches' capacity to better support teachers in improving their instructional, classroom and lesson management skills.

1 This learning addresses outcome OC1 and OC2 in Table 9





Capacity building and institutionalization of practices within CEEC through building a strong partnership has been a salient feature of Strong Beginnings (^ 2). While there were routine meetings scheduled to discuss updates and plan for next steps, the Strong Beginnings team quickly realized that in order to build a deeper partnership, it is important to understand the hierarchy of each organization, and define roles and responsibilities clearly. One of the quarterly meetings focused on creating this shared understanding, which improved accountability among all partners. Along with this, using simple communication tools like WhatsApp and setting up groups facilitated easy and quick communication between teams, and allowed the consortium to work together cohesively. Once the sense of partnership was created, it helped partners identify capacity building requirements as a consortium. One of the key challenges that emerged were delays in financial management processes from CEEC's end, which in turn delayed many other logistical decisions making around programming. Partners came together to share their respective procedures around financial management, and best practices. Coming together also helped partners learn from each other. These sessions, along with increasing meeting frequencies to solve challenges together, helped CEEC improve their financial processes, and ensure that they understood their budget and the financial needs required for them to continue the work in schools beyond Strong Beginnings.

Co-creation has been one of the salient features of the consortium, and in response to ensuring the quality of implementation of interventions, the partners co-created synthesis documents. These documents serve as a ready reference for teachers on activities, and pedagogical practices. The documents also helped the coaches orient any new teachers who joined the school after the training to ensure that they could implement those activities with their support. The syntheses document was created through holding multiple working sessions that provided all the partners with an opportunity to understand the content implemented thoroughly. The CEEC has also successfully integrated WCD in the ECD trainings with support from the GC-DWC team. The WCD module discusses the importance of WCD, and tools that can be used in a WCD approach: SEL, play based learning, positive discipline, positive climate, classroom library, and a curriculum that focus on diverse topic such as hygiene, family, friends, protection and important of the environment, culture, etc. The module also explores classroom strategies like positive feedback, classroom management, and positive discipline which support WCD.

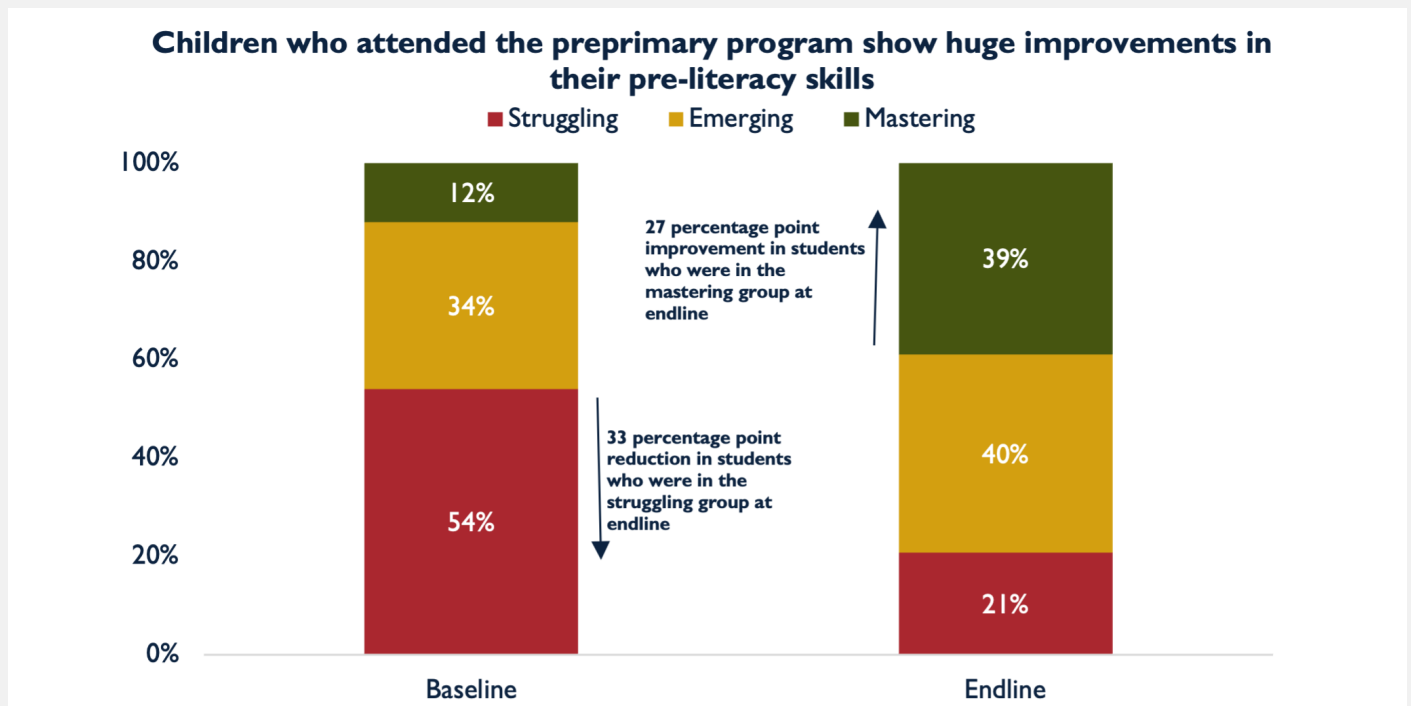
The efforts around training, capacity building, and co-creation has led to the CEEC developing an internal SEL policy document with support from UND, which is a big leap in the direction of institutionalizing WCD practices. The policy adopts the definition of SEL from the CASEL framework, and envisions SEL as a pathway to help improve student behavior for better academic performance. The policy contextualizes SEL in three settings: physical and social environment, instruction and learning, and partnership and services. It also includes a brief section on play based learning, and simple SEL scope and sequence based on competences defined in the CASEL framework. While the document lays a pathway for institutionalizing SEL, it still needs to be fine-tuned. Through the next round of program implementation, the GC-DWC team hopes to work with CEEC to bolster the definition of WCD, elaborating on the role of SEL in students becoming life-long learners, and define the impact of an SEL integrated classroom and school culture on student behavior and performance.

**PRE-PRIMARY LITERACY PROGRAM AND GRADES 1-3 LITERACY CATCH-UP PROGRAM SHOW PROMISING IMPROVEMENTS IN CHILDREN’S LEARNING, BUT THEIR EFFICACY NEEDS TO BE EVALUATED USING MORE RIGOROUS METHODS**

The scripted literacy program implemented in Grades 1 & 2 is an evidence-based program which was evaluated as a part of a previous grant in 2018-19 through a stratified cluster randomized controlled trial. The study analyzed data from 3,071 students in 355 schools (treatment and comparison) across 3 departments of Haiti. The study found that the literacy curriculum had strong and statistically significant impact on children’s literacy outcomes, especially in the second grade with large effect sizes for an education intervention, proving the results are not only statistically significant, but they are also practically meaningful (D’Agostino et al., 2024). However, since the launch of Strong Beginnings, the recurring school disruptions in Haiti and the project’s focus on systems strengthening through WCD called for a greater need to truly provide strong beginnings for children’s learning and development by strengthening their pre-literacy skills along with SEL at the pre-primary level, and providing opportunities for catch up for Grades 1 – 3.

**PRE-LITERACY CURRICULUM FOR PRE-PRIMARY** – The initial pre-primary program that was evaluated (discussed previously in the report) focused mainly on improving children’s SEL outcomes with some pre-literacy activities included. While the evaluation showed the program had a significant impact on children’s SEL skills, it did not have an impact on children’s pre-literacy skills. Based on this learning, and the need to provide a strong foundation for students, the ECD curriculum was revised to be more comprehensive with a focus on pre-literacy activities in the SY 2022-23. This curriculum was co-created with the Strong Beginnings partners and a short pilot was conducted in one school in the innovation community. Based on the learnings and feedback from the teachers, the activities were further simplified, and classroom management and lesson planning were added as key topics to be included in the training. The new curriculum also focused on pre-literacy along with SEL. The results from the formative assessment PreSA which measures pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, social and emotional learning, and motor skills of children at the beginning and end of the intervention show major improvement in children’s pre-literacy levels (fig 10). PreSA includes activities that children should be able to do at pre-primary level like identifying lower and uppercase letters, identifying first letter sounds of words, and spelling and writing one’s name.

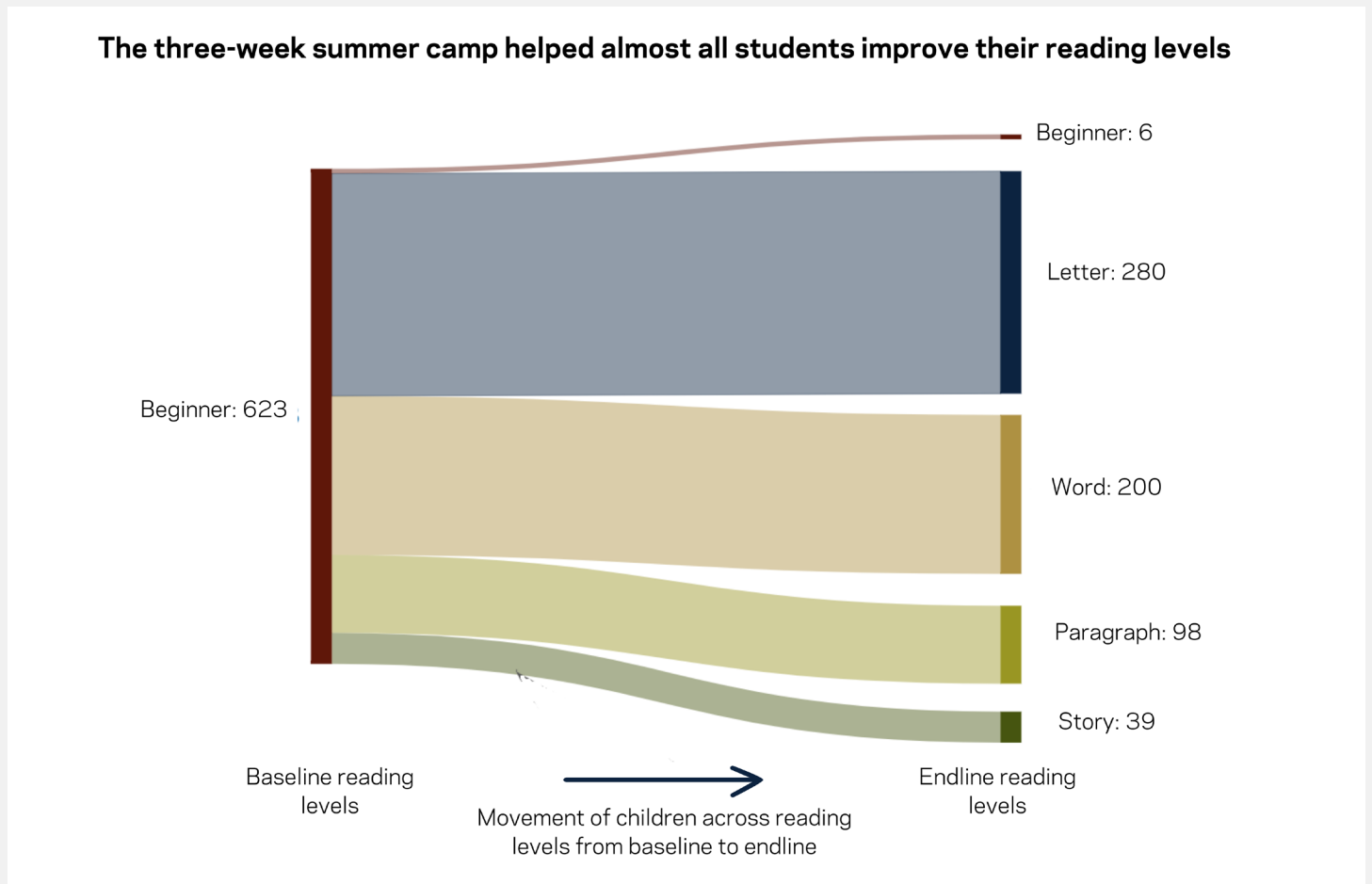
Figure 10: pre-literacy skills outcomes for pre-primary children assessed using PreSA



The graph above shows the results for pre-literacy from PreSA for a shortened, 6-month implementation period because of school closures due to protests and fuel crisis. The students are grouped into Struggling, Emerging, or Mastering depending on their overall score for pre-literacy. While the logic of grouping remains the same—“struggling,” “emerging” and “mastering” based on students’ SEL scores (discussed earlier in the report)—it is to be noted that they are not comparable to the ISELA data presented in fig 7, since it is much more comprehensive and has more tasks, while PreSA was designed to be an easy-to-implement tool to be helpful for the teachers and the program teams to understand children’s progress. It can be seen from the results that there was a 27-percentage point increase of the students in the “mastering group”, from 12% at baseline to 39% at the endline. There is also a 33-percentage point reduction of students in the struggling group at the endline, from 54% at baseline to 21% at the endline. A cluster randomized controlled trial is in progress to evaluate the impact of the updated, more comprehensive ECD curriculum, but the study has been disrupted due to sociopolitical tensions and gang activity.

**SUMMER CAMP FOR GRADES 1 & 2** - The summer camps were designed specifically for students whose learning levels are low at the end of the year. The learning levels are measured using the teacher-led formative assessment *AliK*, which measures the highest reading level of the child as beginner, letter, word, paragraph, or story. *AliK* also measures vocabulary and reading comprehension and is administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year to understand how children are progressing in their learning. Children who are still at the beginner or letter level at the end of the school year are enrolled in the summer camp so that they can learn to read before they enter Grade 3. The summer camps were held for two out of the four years in two departments (due to budget and logistics) and reached over 500 students each year. The following graph/table (fig 11) shows the results from the summer camp conducted at the end of the SY 2021-22.

Figure 11: Summer camp - student learning outcomes

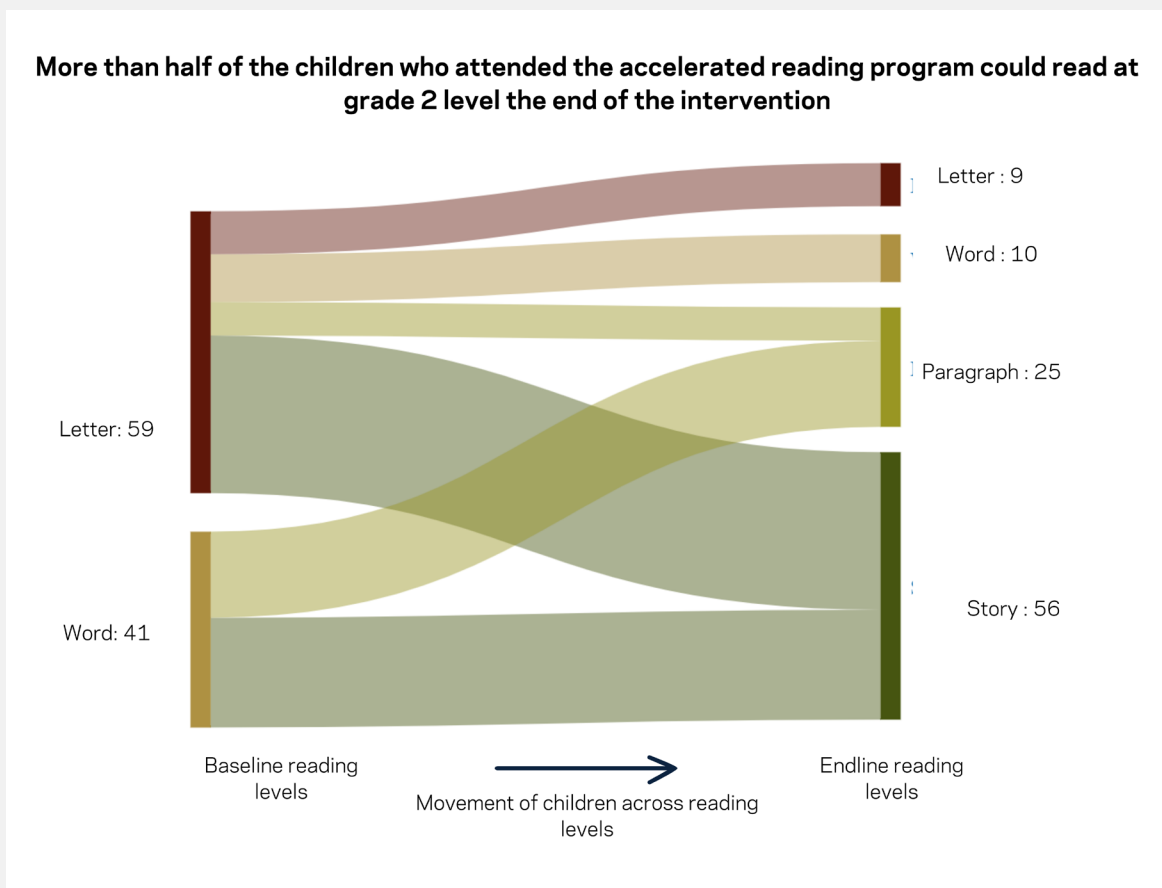




All students who were a part of the summer camp started at a beginner level, which meant they could not even recognize letters. At the end of three weeks, over 50% of the students could recognize at least words. 22% of the students could read at grade level by the end of the three-week summer camp, which is a notable achievement since all the students started at beginner level.

**ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR GRADE 3** – The catch-up program for Grade 3 was designed to ensure that children who were in grade 3 and still were at beginner level (as measured by AliK) were able to catch up during the school year. The Grade 3 catch up program was piloted in 10 schools—reaching 100 students in SY 2022-23 across 2 departments—as an after-school teacher-led intervention. Teachers implemented classes for the selected students three times a week after school for 2 hours. The following graph/table (fig 12) shows the results from the grade 3 catch-up program piloted in 10 schools.

Figure 12: Accelerated reading program (Grade 3): Student learning outcome



At the end of the intervention, 80% of the students could read at least a paragraph. Almost all the students improved their reading levels at the end of the intervention.

Strong Beginnings has not only built a continuum of literacy interventions starting pre-primary through grade 2, but it has also built accelerated learning opportunities at multiple points after and during the school year to ensure every child gets the opportunity to learn and improve their foundational literacy skills. This is especially important in the context of Haiti where learning is interrupted often due to school closures, and learning losses are highly likely to happen when students come back to school. While all these interventions show promising trends, their efficacy has not been evaluated yet. Understanding whether the interventions work statistically and practically would be an important next step to scaling these interventions so that they can be implemented as a continuum approach rather than implementing literacy interventions only in Grades 1 & 2.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT HOW WE CAN ENSURE CONTINUED LEARNING DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES AND DISRUPTIONS?

### LESSONS BROADCASTED THROUGH RADIO PROVED TO BE A VIABLE OPTION FOR CONTINUING CHILDREN'S LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC<sup>1</sup>

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Strong Beginnings team developed 16 literacy lessons with SEL integrated in them for Grades 1 & 2, and 12 pre-primary SEL lessons to be broadcast through the radio. The literacy lessons were based on the scripted French and Creole curriculum implemented in the classrooms as a part of Strong Beginnings, and aligned with the Haitian Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training's (MENFP) themes and objectives listed in their Programme à Compétences Minimales document for Grades 1 & 2. This document is a shortened curriculum that lays out minimum skills that students need to have acquired at the end of each grade level. Partners distributed 15,200 radios and solar panels to students across 5 departments. Between June and September 2020, every lesson was aired twice, providing the students with the opportunity to catch up even if they missed listening to the episode the first time. To track participation rate and learning, a random sample of 1,243 students from Grades 1 & 2 were selected, and coaches who normally visit classrooms to support teachers made phone calls to the students every week for 12 weeks. At the beginning (June 2020) and end (September 2020) of the 12 weeks, a baseline and endline assessment was conducted over the phone to understand children's learning. A phone-based assessment tool was developed to measure phonemic awareness and vocabulary knowledge in Creole, and listening comprehension in French. These skills were chosen considering the ease and accuracy of measurement over phone calls. The data from weekly monitoring phone calls shows that 73% of the students never missed listening to an episode, and on average, 72% of the students listened to the radio program each week (fig 13).

Blueprint for radio program implementation and monitoring:

1. Contracting various radio stations led the team to gain a good understanding of their coverage, contracting procedures and timelines.
2. Creating content for pre-primary through Grade 2 led to the formation of a content repository that is ready to be used at short notice. Partners from other projects have also contributed to this repository, and is currently growing.
3. Creating a phone-based assessment tool to assess literacy outcomes meant that it could be used not just for radio programming, but other distance learning modalities as well, where the objectives align, and is age appropriate.
4. Streamlining channels of communication among all partners, and building supervisor capacity to collect monitoring data over the phone, meant that they could be mobilized again quickly in the event of a pivot to distance learning.

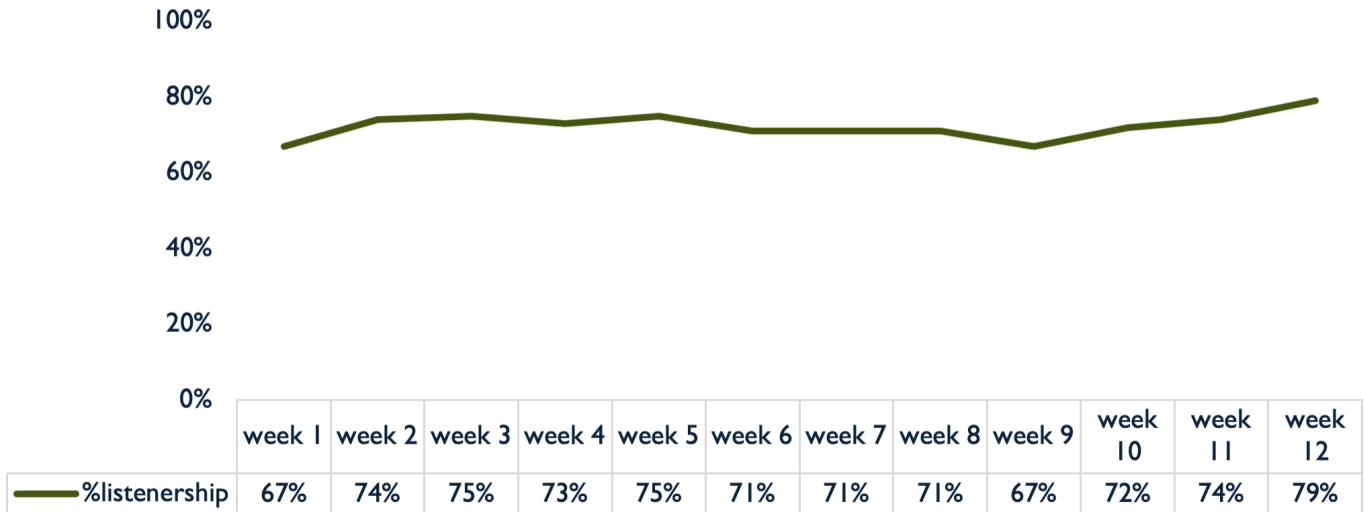
While implementing the radio program helped us lay out many efficient processes and learn from it, there are still some opportunities for improvement.

1. Gathering accurate parent/student contact information was difficult across departments because of outdated student registration data maintained at schools.
2. The process of collecting monitoring data through pen and paper, and then digitizing it, was time and resource intensive.
3. Determining the actual reach of the radio program was challenging.

1. This learning addresses outcome OC4 in table 9

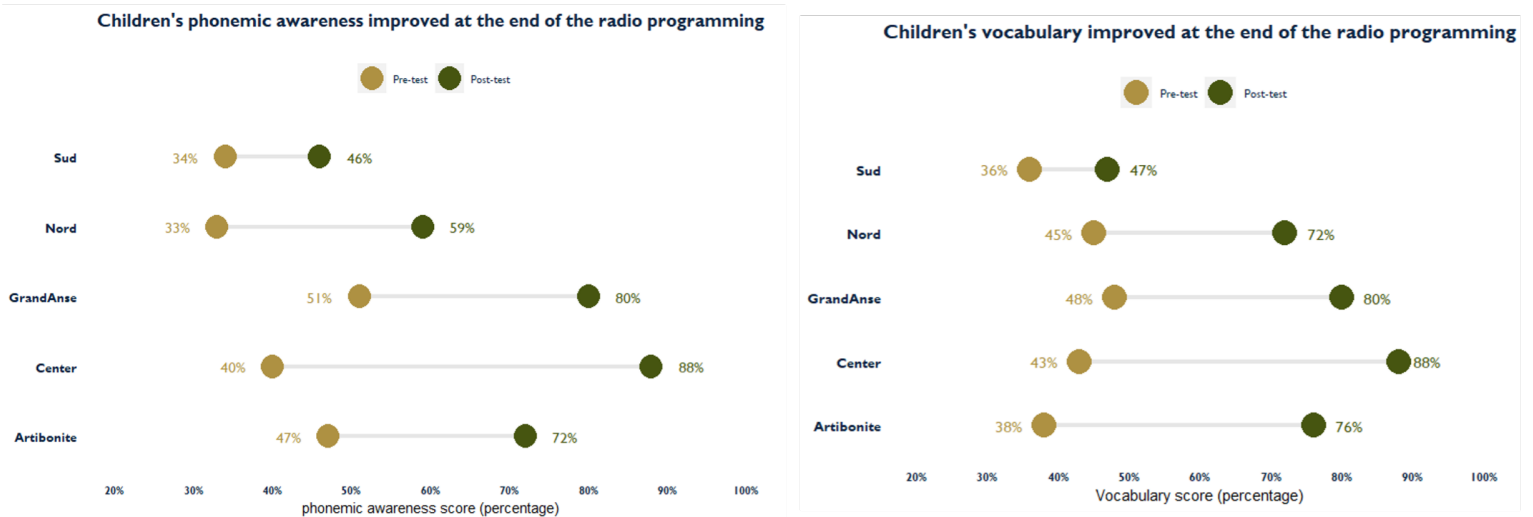
Figure 13: Percentage of students (from the sample of students tracked) who listened to the radio program each week

**Over 70% of the students surveyed each week reported that they listened to the radio program**



Data from the phone-based assessment shows that there is a significant increase in student scores across all three skills. While it cannot be claimed with certainty that listening to the radio program is what caused the increase in scores in the absence of a comparison group, the improvements are likely a result of listening to the radio program since students did not receive any other academic support during the school closures

Figure 14: Children's learning outcomes measured before and after the radio programming during the COVID pandemic





The graphs show that the scores varied by department, and students tested higher across all skills at endline. In addition to the learnings from the data collected, the 16 weeks of implementation also helped Strong Beginnings gain more insights into operationalizing a large-scale radio programming and its monitoring. The 16-week implementation and the preparation leading up to it helped the team create a blueprint for implementation and monitoring of radio programming, including streamlining channels of communication between partners. It also highlighted the challenges around collecting accurate student/parent contact information, the resource-intensive nature of making over a thousand phone calls manually for monitoring each week, and the barriers to participation among students who could not listen to the radio program due to lack of power, signal, etc. Subsequent rounds of implementing radio programs due to school closures and structured interviews with education actors in Haiti helped in broadening the team’s understanding of the challenges, other modalities available, and other content available (discussed in the next section of this report). Understanding the efficacy of the content created using a comparison group is a study we were unable to conduct in this project.

**CONTEXTUAL CHANGES THAT HAVE OCCURRED IN HAITI SINCE THE PANDEMIC CALL FOR A RE-EVALUATION OF AVAILABLE DISTANCE LEARNING MODALITIES**

Encouraged by the high level of participation in the radio program and improvement in students’ literacy outcomes, Strong Beginnings pivoted to broadcasting radio lessons during the prolonged school closures in SY 2022-23 due to acute fuel crises and protests. In addition to the lessons developed during the pandemic, the team also had additional lessons for pre-primary radio programs that were co-created with pre-primary teachers. The “blueprint” for implementation and monitoring created during the pandemic helped the team pivot quickly to radio programming not only in the 6 departments (including Nippes), but also to 2 other departments where the scripted literacy curriculum and SEL interventions were being implemented as a part of another project. Considering the challenges encountered in making manual follow-up calls during the previous round of implementation, the team streamlined monitoring using automated surveys through integrated voice response (IVR) systems. Through the IVR, automated calls were made to parents every week (for 12 weeks) the day after the new episodes were aired to investigate if children listened to the episode that week, and understand the reasons for not listening to the episode. The data collected through IVR was made available to the Strong Beginnings team for analysis. Unlike the previously seen high participation rates, the monitoring data from this round of implementation showed that over 50% of parents who responded to the survey said that their children did not listen to the radio program (fig 15). Over 50% of the parents who said they did not listen to the radio program cited lack of radio/power or signal as the reason for not listening to the episode (fig 16). This data is only from the parents who responded to the survey, and the response rates were also quite low, hovering around 30% or less each week. It is to be noted that the Strong Beginnings team did not distribute radios in the SY 2022-23 due to logistical and budgetary limitations.

Figure 15: Radio program 2022-23: Weekly listenership

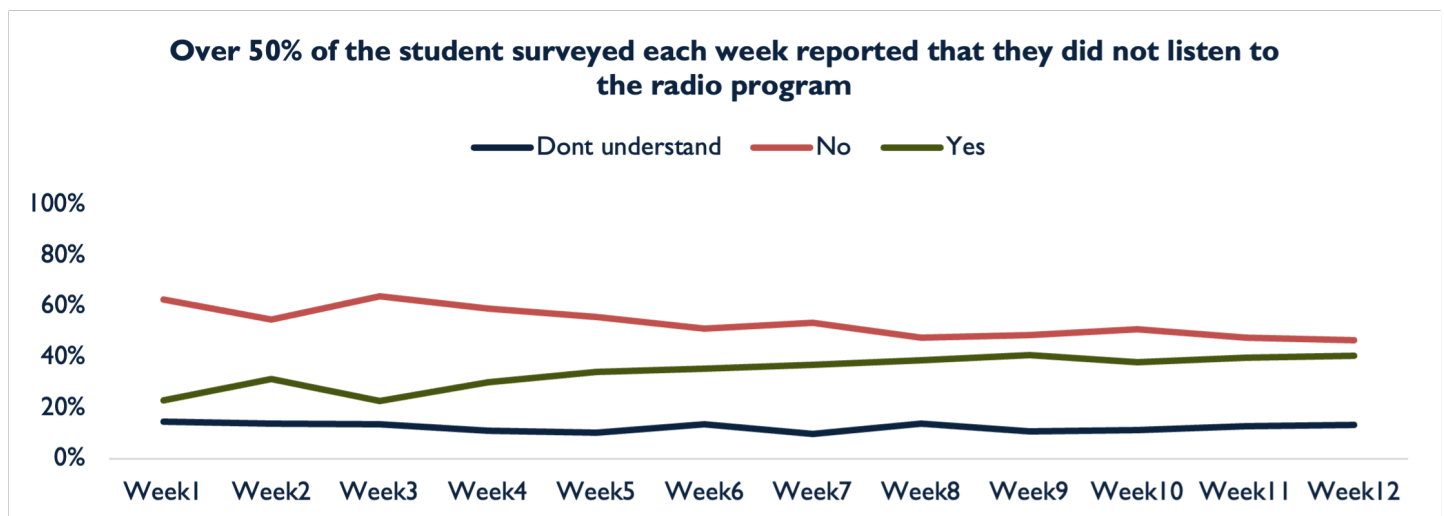
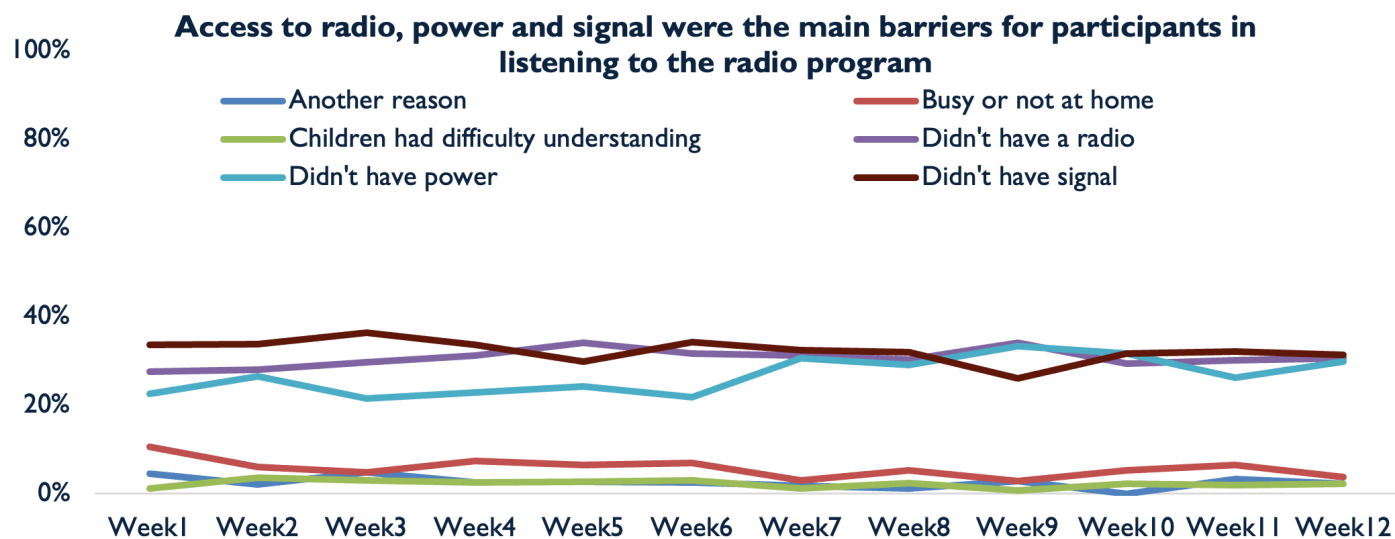


Figure 16: Radio program 2022-23: Barriers to participation



This low participation rate in a model that worked well previously prompted two questions:

- Why did the majority of the parents not engage with the automated survey and the program?
- What modalities are used by other education actors in Haiti, and are they suited to the Haitian context?

To answer these questions, two exercises were conducted: First, short feedback surveys with 10 randomly selected parents who said they listened to the radio program, parents who did not listen to the radio program, and parents who did not respond to the IVR surveys; Second, a larger desk review followed by in-depth interviews with key education actors in Haiti to understand more about distance learning modalities being used in the country.

The surveys with parents reiterated the challenge of accessing the content due to lack of power, radio, or signal. Almost all of the parents did whatever they could to ensure their children’s continuity of learning, and some of the strategies included sending them for remedial support to an older child’s house in the neighborhood, buying worksheets and resources where possible, or just asking students to study. Very few parents mentioned helping their children with studies, and children were more likely to listen to the episode when parents were engaged and motivated. Many parents who did not listen to the radio program also mentioned that they would have listened to it if the message had come through the school.

The in-depth interviews conducted with 16 education actors in Haiti provided more insights into common modalities used (Presuma et al., 2023). The participants represented eight organizations/institutions that are currently or have previously implemented distance learning initiatives in Haiti, including not for profits, private schools, the Ministry of Education, and multilateral donor and implementing organizations. We also interviewed key informants that represented three multilateral donor and implementation organizations: Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), UNESCO, and the World Bank. Surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of participants spoke about modalities that involve the internet. Many of the modalities discussed involved making the school curriculum available online on Google Classroom or other tech platforms. Only 6 out of the 16 participants mentioned using radio as a distance learning tool. Some of the modalities mentioned were also geared towards use in the classroom, with the intention of pivoting the same modality to a distance learning methodology. Except for WhatsApp, most of the modalities mentioned came with infrastructural requirements and a learning curve for the participants to understand how to use them. The following figure (fig 17) shows the modalities mentioned by the participants and the level of technology, training and internet required to implement each modality.

Figure 17: Distance learning modalities implemented in Haiti

**Majority of the distance learning modalities implemented in Haiti rely on access to technology and internet**

● Low     
 ● Medium     
 ● High     
 ● None

Modality	# participants implementing the modality	Reliance on a tech device like laptop or mobile phone	Reliance on the internet	Capacity building required for delivery/use
Content shared through WhatsApp	7	●	●	●
Learning management system for virtual classrooms	7	●	●	●
Live virtual classes	7	●	●	●
Content broadcasted through radio	6	●	●	●
Content played using Bluetooth speakers	1	●	●	●
Content hosted on a mobile application	1	●	●	●
Content hosted on an offline web server	1	●	●	●
Content pre-loaded in tablets	1	●	●	●
Content played through integrated voice response system	1	●	●	●
Neighborhood classes run by a volunteer	1	●	●	●

The findings from the surveys and interviews present several key takeaways: unlike 2020, any distance learning modality—including radios—needs to be accompanied by a substantial infrastructural support to the participants. For example, during the pandemic, distributing the radios was enough for participants to be able to listen to the episodes. However, in SY 2022-23, even when parents had radios, power and signal posed a huge barrier to listenership. Since 2020, the reliance on technology seems to be inevitable, and it shows that the modalities are preferred by education actors even when it comes with additional infrastructural needs like solar panels to charge phones, distribution of smartphones or tablets, etc. This reliance on technology needs to be critically examined given the stark digital divide in Haiti, where only 15% of households use the internet regularly and only 45% of the national population had access to electricity (Boothby et al, 2021) even before the pandemic and the acute fuel crisis that has happened since then. Considering that children in Haiti have missed at least 20% of their school days consistently over the past three years<sup>1</sup> because of prolonged school closures, and attendance remains a challenge due to the security situation even when schools are open, providing students with equitable and effective distance learning options to continue their learning is crucial. While tech-based solutions and even radios are flexible and offer the potential for scale, the unique situation in Haiti demands responding to local contexts in deciding delivery modalities rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to distance learning, which might further exacerbate existing inequities.

<sup>1</sup> this number is an approximation based on the Strong Beginnings implementation calendar for the past three years, accounting for delays due to school closure. The team could not find a reliable source of information to obtain the exact number of school days each year



## **CREATING ALTERNATIVE SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES IS BEING PILOTED AS A SUSTAINABLE OPTION, BUT MUCH REMAINS TO BE LEARNED**

Reflecting on the prominence and potential of digital modalities of distance learning—and the stark inequities—one potential solution to address this could be to establish an alternative safe learning space equipped with resources and learning materials that children can easily access. Strong Beginnings has worked with the communities to set-up 10 such learning spaces in the form of community resource centers, and is in the process of setting-up 6 more across communities in and around Cap-Haitien. In discussion with the parish and school leaders of these communities, it became clear that renovating existing spaces would be prohibitively expensive, and the more cost-effective solution would be to use pre-fabricated containers and equip them with electricity, raspberry-pi, and other resources. The resource centers are donated to the communities, with a signed agreement outlining roles and responsibilities of the community and Strong Beginnings partners. A management committee consisting of the parish priest and representatives from the school and parents is established in each community, and the committee determines all aspects of logistics, management, and stewardship of the resource centers. Two paid monitors and a facilitator manage the day-to-day operations of the resource centers; the monitors are trained to implement a weekly curriculum for parents and manage the resource center during their hours of operation. Children are free to play with the resources at the resource center, and are supported by the monitors. Currently, the resource centers serve 436 children across 4 communities.

Reflecting on the past 2 years since the Strong Beginnings team started the effort to set-up the resource centers, there have been numerous challenges, but also valuable operational learnings in navigating the challenges effectively. The process of procuring and refurbishing the containers in the United States proved to be more expensive than expected because of the supply chain shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this means that the team needed to build in flexibility to account for price fluctuations, especially of construction materials. Another major learning has been around importing the containers to Haiti. It requires a legal import franchise or license, invoice of items in the containers, and other relevant paperwork; but, even with all the appropriate paperwork, containers could still be held at the port for a long time before they are released, and this is often accompanied with a “storage fee” that is charged per day.

However, once the containers are set up, they become a friendly and welcoming environment not just in terms of the resources, but also in terms of comfort so that children can focus on learning. The resource centers are built with full electrical capabilities, equipped with solar panels, and have insulation to prevent overheating of the containers due to sunlight. The containers are set up either in or around the school or the church grounds, based on consultation with the management committee regarding safe and easy access to the resource centers for the community, safety of the resources and equipment, proximity to schools, etc.

It is worth noting that as a distance learning option, resource centers might work best in situations where safe, short-distance mobility is still possible during school closures, or children live close to the school or church. This does not mean that resource centers are the only solution to ensuring continuity of learning. However, the resource centers do provide all of the infrastructure and resources in one place rather than having to make individual infrastructure and technology investments at a household level. So far, the key learnings from the resource centers have been operational, because of the logistics involved in transporting containers, construction required to set it up, and the logistics involved in setting up the resources in the centers. Now that all ten containers are in Haiti and the recently imported six will soon be operational, the team aims to focus on the following as next steps which will maximize the use of resource centers, looking at it as an asset that goes beyond being a distance learning modality:

- Streamline the activities at the resource center to include and improve out-of-school children’s learning
- Make explicit connections of the resource center with the home, school, and church components of system activation so that learnings from one place are practiced and reiterated in the other

Once the resource center programming is streamlined, the next step will be to learn more about:

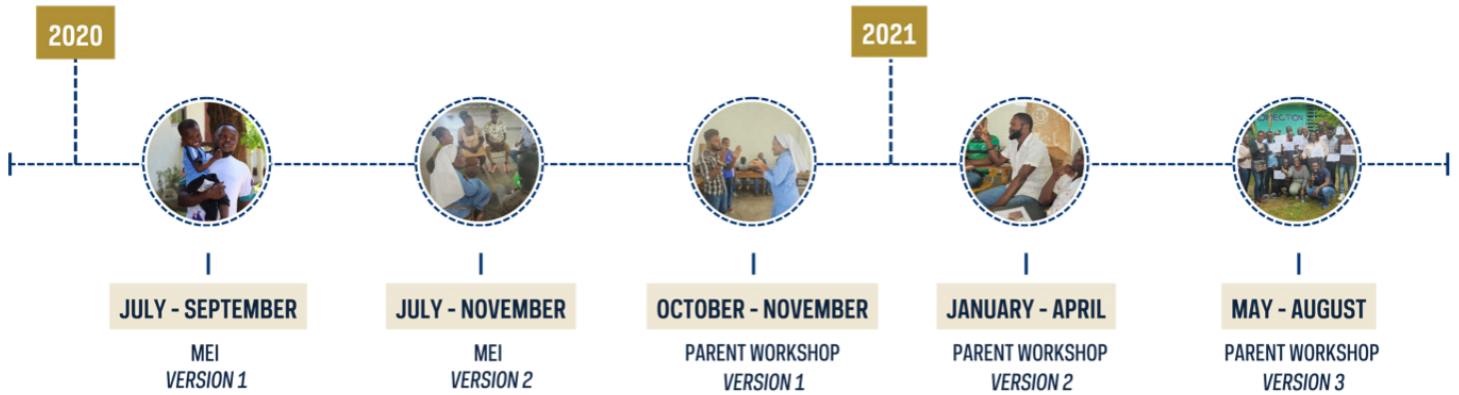
- The effectiveness of resource centers as a distance learning modality
- Fidelity of implementation of activities in the resource center
- Sustainability of resource centers as a community driven asset for children’s learning

## WHAT EVIDENCE DID STRONG BEGINNINGS GENERATE ABOUT ACTIVATING THE 'HOME' COMPONENT OF L3?

**EMBEDDING ITERATIVE LEARNING IN THE PARENT TRAINING COMPONENT HAS HELPED IMPROVE THE PROGRAM CONTENT AND MODEL**



Figure 18: Parent training program evolution through iterative testing using REALM approaches



The parent training program started as “Mothers Empowerment Initiative” (MEI) during the pandemic to help mothers cope with stress, especially around stability at home. This was engendered from focus groups with mothers in the five innovation communities in Nord. A trained community member provided phone-based support to 34 mothers through weekly wellbeing check-ins for three months. However, mothers reported an overall decrease in wellbeing and increase in stress at the end of the 3 months (fig 19a) when compared to mothers not receiving phone calls. While this was not statistically significant (because it was not a powered study and the sample was small), it indicated a trend to be addressed. To understand how the program could be improved to actually help the mothers, another focus group discussion was conducted and the participants suggested adding an in-person component to the training. In the second version, an in-person component with mindfulness and relaxation techniques were incorporated along with phone calls. A survey at the end of three months of implementation of this iterated version showed reduction in mothers’ reported stress levels and increase in their reported wellbeing compared to mothers not in the program (fig 19b). However, mothers noted their desire to move into a completely in-person training where they could actively create a community and learn from each other.

Figure 19a: Mothers empowerment initiative: phase 1 results

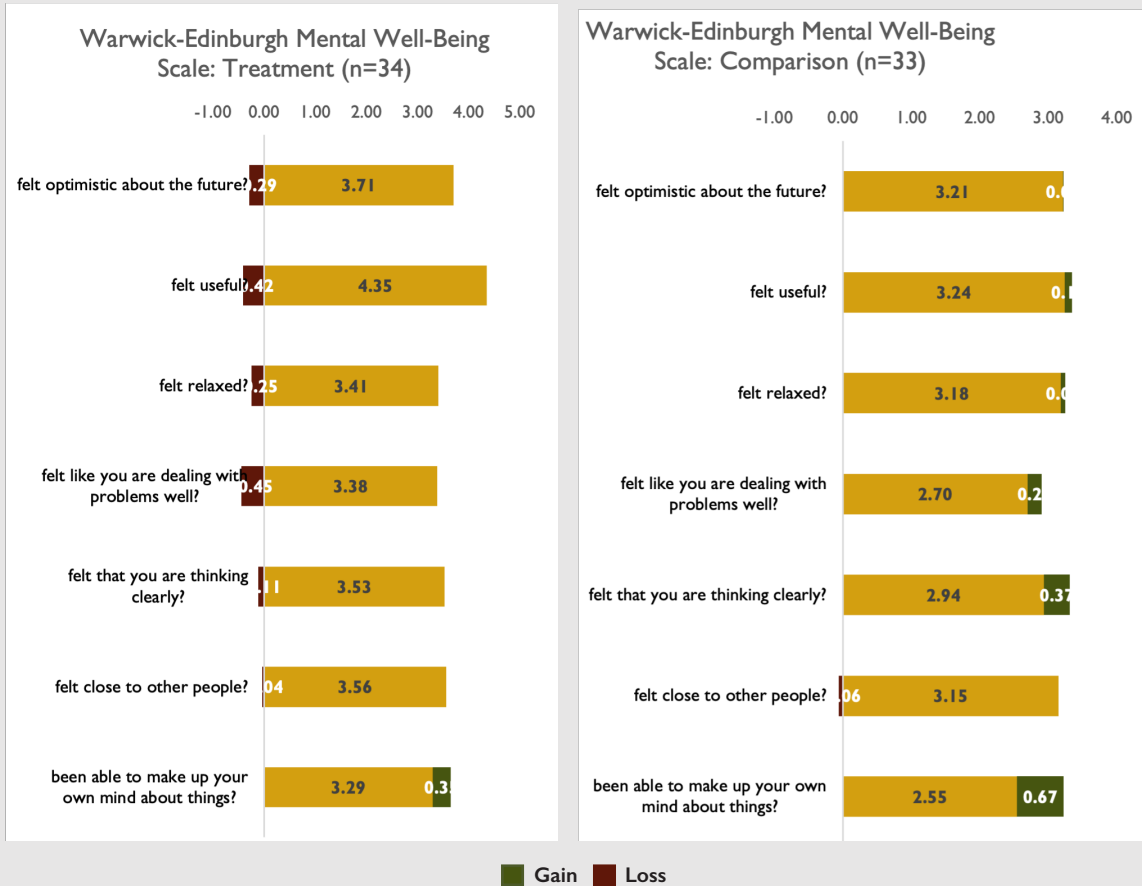
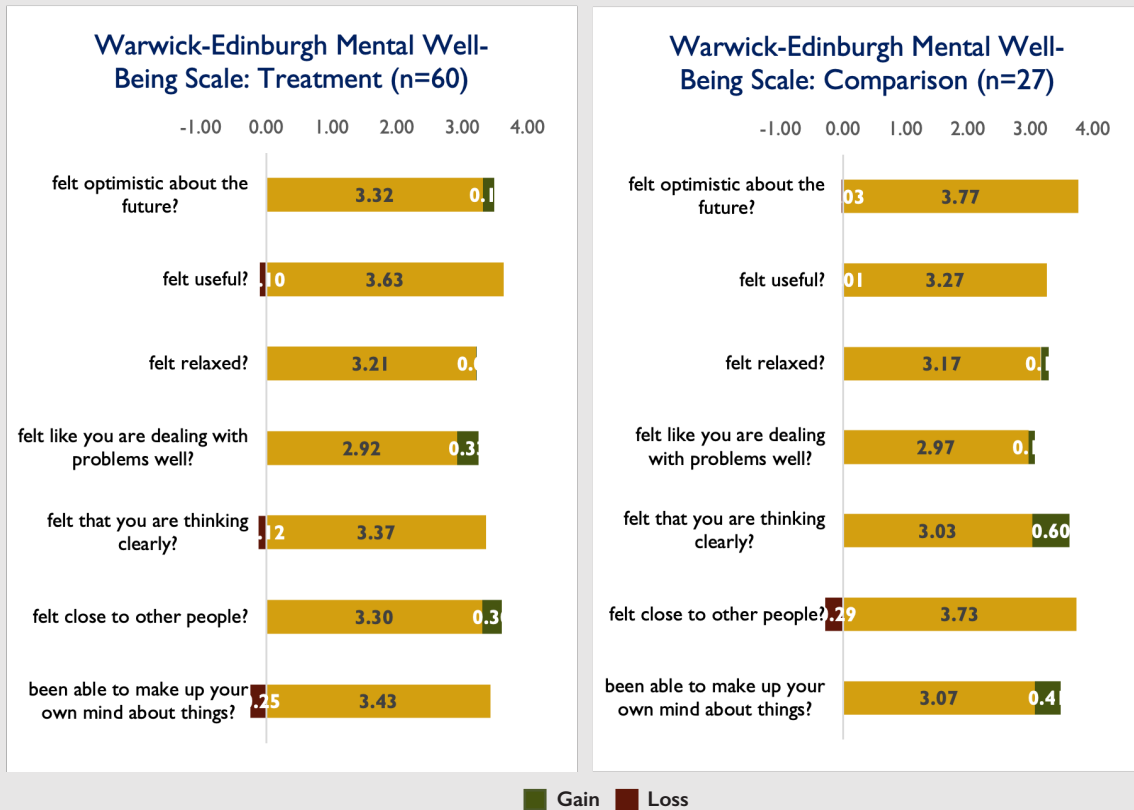


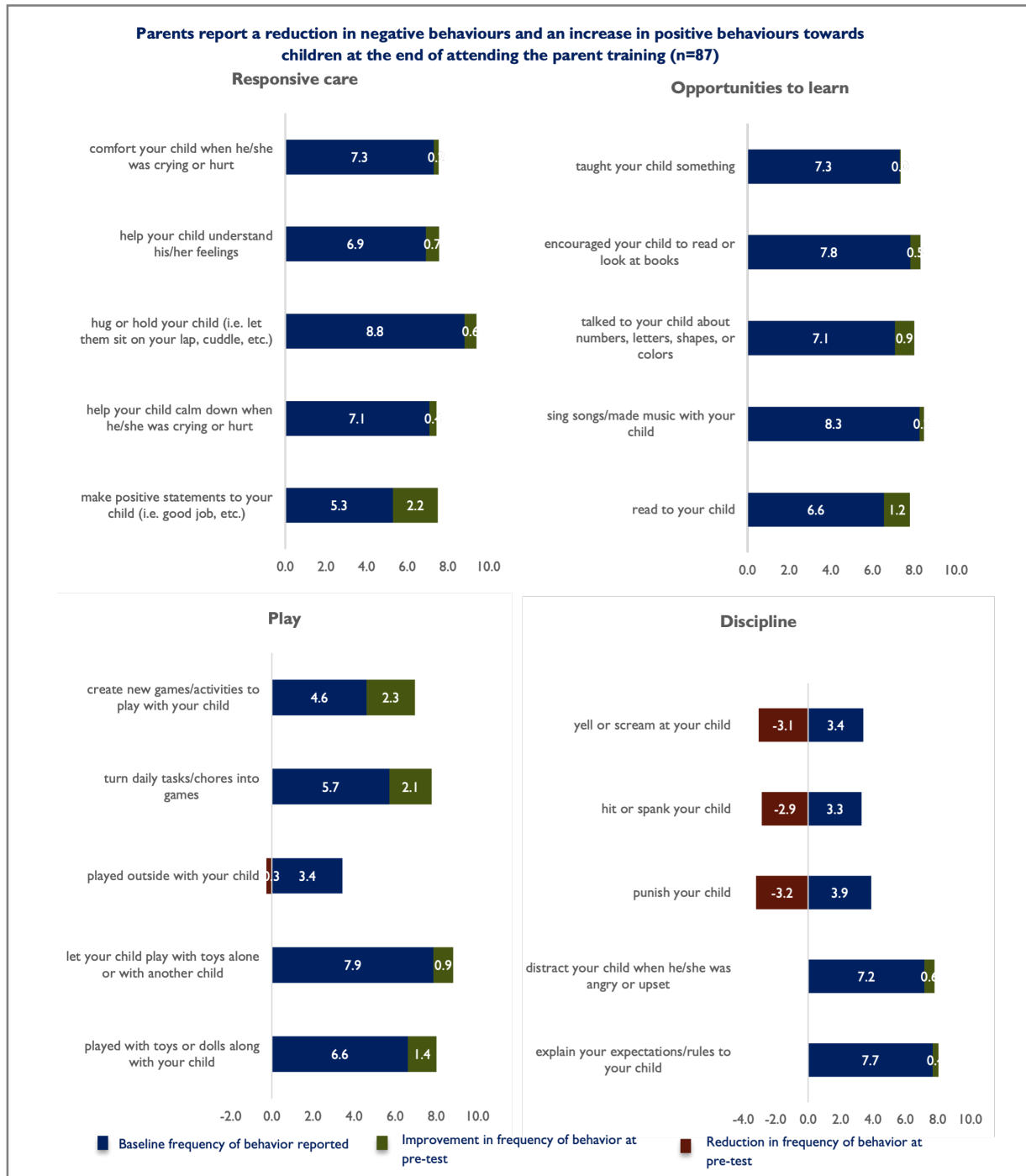
Figure 19b: Mothers empowerment initiative: phase 2 results





The next iteration moved to a completely in-person parent training model that was conducted in three sessions covering parent-child relationships, providing consistent and responsive care, connections between social, emotional, and cognitive development, wellbeing and self-care, and positive discipline. Based on the feedback from this session, nutrition and increased focus on incorporating play into daily practices with children were included in the training. In the subsequent iteration, conversations about cultural identity and gender equality were included in the series of training sessions—which spanned 10 consecutive weekends—and parents were given audio files and handouts of Ti Lekòl Lakay (distance learning audio program developed by Blue Butterfly Collaborative) for continued engagement. During each iteration, a pre- and post-survey was conducted to understand parents’ practices. The data from the last iteration of training is shown below (fig 20):

Figure 20: Parent training pre-/post- survey results

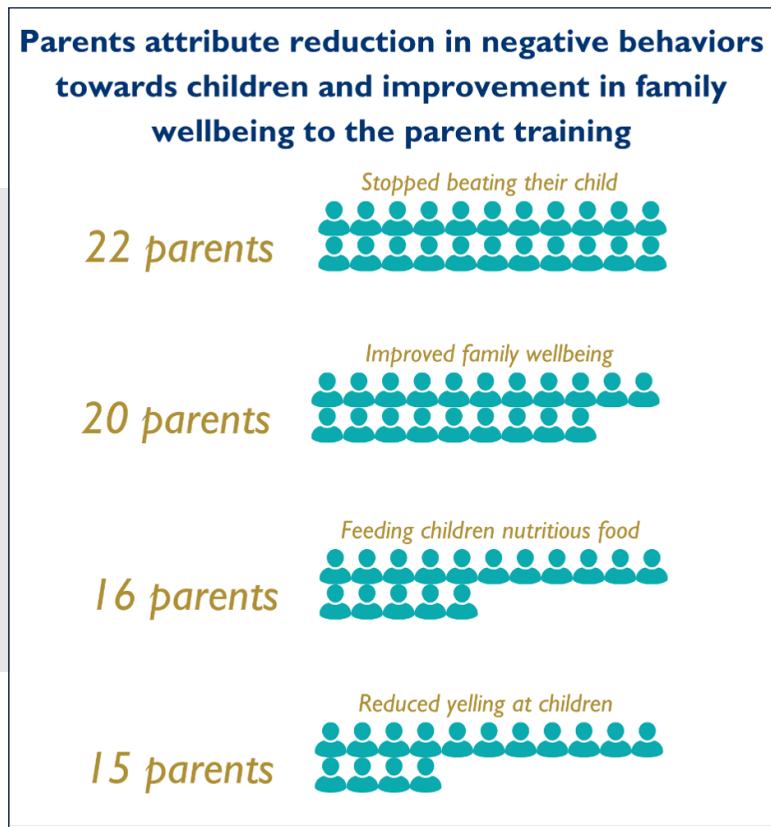


The graph above shows the average number of times participants exhibited a particular behavior with respect to their child at baseline and endline. The week before the survey is administered is considered as the reference period to respond. Across practices, it can be seen that there is a marked reduction in negative behaviors like yelling at the child and spanking the child, and an increase in positive behaviors around play and learning, which were added in response to participant and team feedback. While this data does not indicate a causal connection, the encouraging trends which were seen through these surveys—combined with the participant and team feedback at the end of each training—helped the team iterate the program in an effective and meaningful way.

**PARENT TRAINING PARTICIPANTS REPORT PROMISING SIGNS OF POSITIVE BEHAVIOR CHANGE, BUT ITS EFFICACY AND IMPACT NEED TO BE EVALUATED<sup>1</sup>**

As a part of the QuIP evaluation, 33 parents were interviewed between June and July 2022, where open-ended questions about their caregiving practices, feeding practices, their understanding of the importance of early childhood development, etc. were asked (University of Notre Dame, 2023). Results from analyzing the parent interviews are represented below (fig 21):

Figure 21: Parent training pre-/post- survey results



22 out of the 33 parents said that they stopped beating their child after attending the parent training. Note that the participants were a mix of parents trained at several rounds since the in-person parent training started in 2021. 15 parents said that they yell at their child less after attending the parent training and 20 parents reported an increase in their family well-being post attending the parent training. Interestingly, these findings align with the results from the pre- post survey conducted at the beginning and the end of the trainings (fig 20), which showed reduction in negative behaviors. During the QuIP interviews, 16 parents mentioned that they started feeding their children nutritious food after attending the parent training.

<sup>1</sup> This learning addresses outcome OC3 in table 9

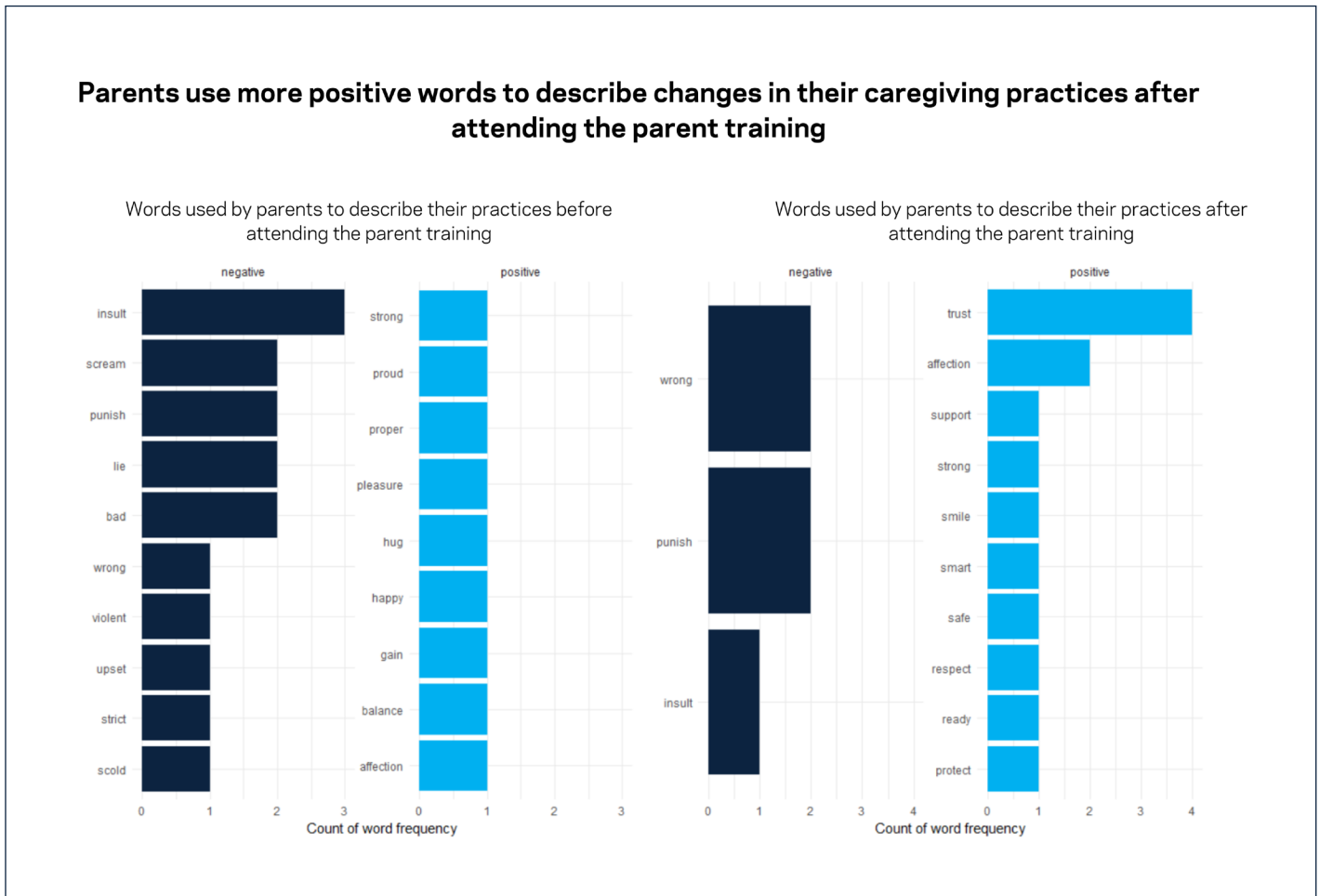
After scaling the parent training program to Nippes, a qualitative study was conducted in August 2023, borrowing from the QulPs methodology. A randomly selected sample of 30 parents who were trained were invited for focus group discussions. While the focus group was not a double-blinded one, the questions asked were open-ended, similar to QulPs. Some of the parents were trained almost a year before the FGDs, and some were trained a few months before the FGDs. Many of the key learnings from the focus groups remained consistent with the QulP findings. Parents spoke about feeding children more nutritious food after the training, being more affectionate with their children and treating them better, and developing a better relationship with their children after attending the parent training. Parents also spoke about using play to help children learn. A sentiment analysis of all the excerpts of parents talking about shifts in behavior shows more negative sentiments in describing behaviors pre-training, and positive sentiments in describing behaviors post-training (Presuma et al., 2023; fig 22).

“...I myself had my own way of cooking for my children; while I was following the training, there are some things they showed us. They said you can wake up in the morning, if you have a box of beans, you can find a little squash to put in it, a seed of some vegetable, a bit of carrot as if you boil them together, mash it or make a little sauce of beans, and give it to the child to drink.”

“The change is because of the UND parent training program. Because I used to beat them all day, insult them, and their father. Now I don't do that anymore since I learned this from the program. I'm not into insults, I'm not into anything like that anymore.”

- Female Participant, Parent Training

Figure 22: Qualitative FGDs with parents: Sentiment analysis





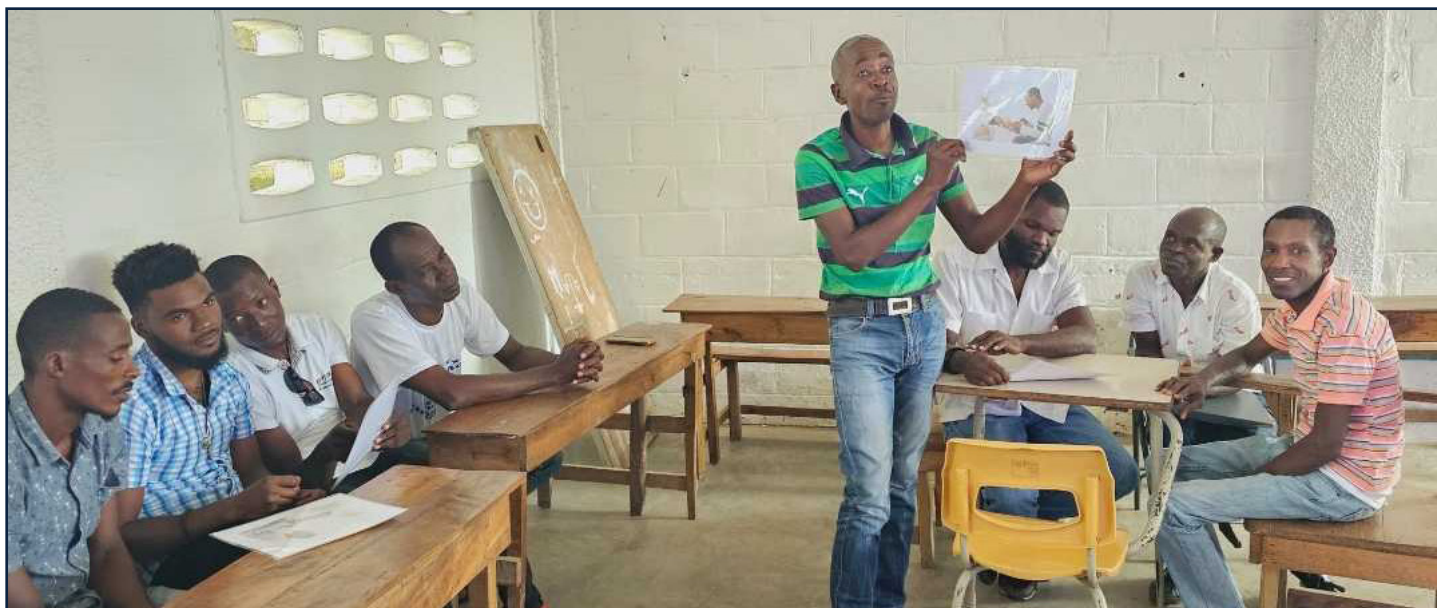
The positive shifts in practices, parents' recollection of the topics covered in the training, and the consistency in results from the qualitative studies and the pre-post surveys are encouraging. However, the intervention itself has not been evaluated to understand its efficacy and the impact on parent training on students' ECD outcomes. Understanding the effectiveness of the parent training component is an important next step in adding to the confidence of the team in scaling this intervention to other communities.

### **MALE PARTICIPATION IN PARENT TRAINING WAS LOW, BUT THE ONES WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE TRAINING PROVIDED POSITIVE FEEDBACK ABOUT THEIR LEARNING.**

Even though the in-person parent trainings were designed for both mothers and fathers to participate, 85% of the participants were women. The main reason for this was the availability of fathers, and the difficulty in engaging them during mobilization. The team used the schools as a focal point to mobilize parents, and more often than not, mothers visited the schools for parent-teacher meetings as well as for school pick-ups, which were used as avenues to mobilize participants for the training. Even though both of the parents were invited to participate, the engagement with fathers directly at the mobilization stage was very low. However, fathers who participated in the trainings mentioned many positive learnings. One of the male focus group participants in the Nippes department spoke about positive changes in his approach to fatherhood, and in taking more responsibility in sharing chores and responsibilities at home. To further understand how fathers who attended the training felt, short interviews were conducted with 5 fathers who were randomly selected. All four of them mentioned that they participated in the training because they were willing to learn more about how they could support their children and family better. They also mentioned that the trainings helped them understand the importance of being kind towards children and indicated their willingness to help mobilize more fathers to participate in the training. The majority of the fathers also expressed that a separate training for fathers would be helpful, and will be more effective. In response to the feedback and the learnings, the Strong Beginnings team is working to mobilize fathers and conduct a separate training for fathers, while also working to increase fathers' participation in the broader parent training.

"What changed in my home is the relationship between me and my wife. My child is here, and it is as if my wife is the only one who educates him. I went to work, and I did not have time for the family. Since the program, now my wife and I share the work. I support my wife and my child, and it seems that he's become my good friend now. I created time for us to play together but I didn't know how to do this before. Things have changed."

- Male Participant, Parent Training

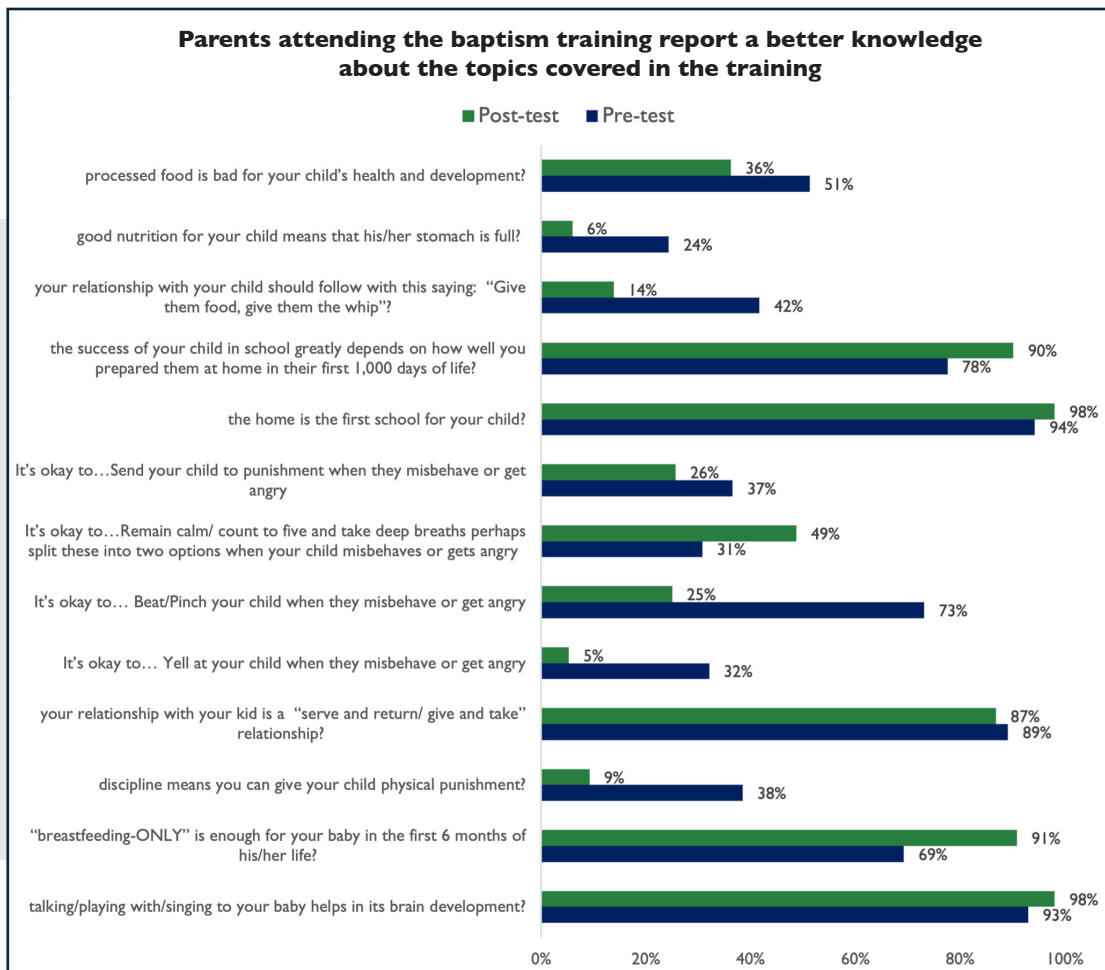


# HOW DID STRONG BEGINNINGS ACTIVATE THE 'PARISH/COMMUNITY' COMPONENT OF L3?

## PARISH LEADERS HAVE A STRONG UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF WCD<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing the unique opportunity that baptism provides for the church to interface with the family as they prepare to care for a child spiritually, the Strong Beginnings team partnered with the five innovation community parishes to integrate WCD messaging into baptism sessions (QuIP brief). This was done by working with the parish leaders (priests) to create a standardized baptism guide that could be shared across dioceses. After understanding how baptism works in each parish and consulting with the priests, modules around nutrition and social care, school readiness, and positive parenting were added to the standard baptism guide. The team then worked with each parish to understand their structure and timeline of baptism training, since each parish was unique in how and when the baptisms were conducted. Trainers who were responsible to deliver the baptism messaging in each parish were then trained and supported through the actual baptism sessions. While the pre- post- survey conducted to understand parents' knowledge at the beginning and end of the training showed an increase in their knowledge (fig 23; note that this was not a powered study and there was no comparison group, this data collection was done more as an assessment to check trends in change in knowledge of the participants), it was logistically difficult to continue this model of integrating WCD messaging and scale it, given the difference in structure and timelines of baptism trainings across parishes.

Figure 23: Baptism training: Results from the knowledge survey of parents showing the percentage of participants agreeing to each statement



1. This learning addresses outcome OC3 in table 9

Further, talking to priests during the QuIP interviews, showed that they understand the importance of WCD and early childhood education. Some of the priests also made direct references to the parent training and baptisms serving as means to help parents understand their roles in their children's lives and improve their practices better. Beyond just understanding the priests' knowledge on WCD, the interviews also shed light on the role of a priest as a parish leader and the several touchpoints they have with the community and school. Priests as parish leaders conduct home visits, are responsible for all administrative decisions in the parish catholic school, and deliver sermons. The priests were also involved in selecting parents for the Strong Beginnings parent training program. This means that in activating the "legliz" system, it is important to look beyond just baptisms, given the numerous touchpoints priests have with the larger community.

### **INVOLVING SEMINARIANS AND BROADENING THE TOUCHPOINT WITH THE COMMUNITY BEYOND BAPTISM SERMONS COULD BE MORE EFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE IN THE LONG TERM**

Findings from the interviews with priests as a part of QuIP laid out how the "legliz" component of L3 can be strengthened by building the priests' capacity in their role as school administrators and by integrating ECD messaging and related activities during home visits and any larger community gatherings. However, it was not realistic to expect a priest serving a large parish to do everything effectively along with their numerous other responsibilities. It was also unrealistic to expect them to attend multiple day-long trainings. In consultation with multiple parish leaders, the Strong Beginnings team decided that working with the seminarians would be a more efficient, scalable, and sustainable model.

Seminarians undergo eight years of rigorous trainings to become priests, with opportunities to work in parishes built into the eight years through internships, notably during their fourth and eighth year. In September 2023, the team trained 40 seminarians in the archdiocese of Cap-Haïtien on integrating WCD messaging and activities in baptisms, sermons, importance of ECD and implementing ECD through pre-primary in schools and school administration principles. Post the training, the seminarians were asked to take the learnings back to the community. The Strong Beginnings team conducted short virtual follow ups with 12 seminarians in their 4th and 8th year, around 3 months post training, to understand whether they have been able to integrate the learnings from the training during their internship in parishes. During the follow up, all seminarians expressed their commitment in supporting Whole Child Development in the communities they serve. They also recognized that it is their responsibility to bring the knowledge they have to the communities. Most seminarians were also able to identify existing avenues where they could integrate the learnings: many seminarians identified homilies (commentary following the reading of a scripture) as a place where the learnings could be integrated. Some seminarians also mentioned working with children in the communities and school directly. Over 50% of the participants mentioned that they were integrating the lessons learned from the trainings. However, the way in which the seminarians integrated the lessons varied widely; some spoke to parents individually, some conducted training sessions, some observed children in classrooms

"I have already started applying the knowledge. I have already discussed the question of punishment with some parents at the parish of Saint Laurent of Limonade. I do training for the parents. The question of the brain architecture and the first 1000 days of the child. That has significance because, from birth, there is an emotional bond between the child and the person caring for him. So, this person should maintain good relationships with his child. Parents must know that children need protection, and since they love their children, they must protect them. Therefore, there is a concern that parents don't accept not beating their children because, according to them, the child must always be controlled and how to control him. It's with a whip. Now, logically, it is quite the opposite in the logic of the training we have received. So we can always accompany the child without whipping him."

- Seminarian, Seminarian Training





and schools etc. While it is encouraging to see seminarians take the initiative, it will be helpful to continue following up to understand if the seminarians are willing to still integrate the learnings in the long term, after they become a priest (especially those currently in their 8th year). To understand this, the Strong Beginnings team plans to do a longitudinal follow up with the 12 selected seminarians over a year, through short virtual follow ups, and maybe a little longer than a year with the current 8th year seminarians. From the first round of follow up interviews, it is clear that the seminarians are definitely able to do more than a single priest with a lot more responsibilities can, and have already broadened their touchpoints in the community through trainings, observations at schools, conversations with families, etc. As a next step, it is important to streamline these touchpoints by providing the seminarians concrete and actionable steps to integrate their learnings from the trainings, and follow up with the community where possible. Exploring how seminarians could act as the crucial link that connects the school and home component of L3—due to their unique position and involvement both in the community and at school—is an important part of strengthening the overall L3 system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Over the four years of implementation of Strong Beginnings, several activities aimed at promoting Whole Child Development were designed, implemented, iterated, and scaled. At the end of the project, in addition to all the key learnings discussed in the previous sections, the project has created invaluable resources that include ECD curricula, literacy and SEL curricula, training modules for teachers and parents, data collection systems, and distance learning modules; these resources can be used by other partners in Haiti and are ready to be tested as scale interventions in future programming. The Strong Beginnings team offers the following recommendations to the sector:

### **IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH ALLOWS FOR ITERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF INTERVENTIONS, AND IT SHOULD BE EMBEDDED ACROSS PROGRAMMING IN HAITI**

The implementation research approach embedded within Strong Beginnings—REALM—enabled data-driven, timely decisions. It served as a built-in “pause-and-reflect” moment to look beyond daily implementation and understand deeper learnings from observation of activities, participant feedback, and experiences of practitioners. The parent training program is an example of how the REALM approach was embedded within programming, and how it helped track short-term positive changes in parental practices (self-reported) and informed subsequent program models. The ECD program, which was scaled across 6 departments over 2 years, also was iteratively developed using the REALM approach. It started as a training for the teachers on SEL activities, and was iteratively adapted based on teacher feedback and evaluation findings into a comprehensive ECD curriculum along with a focus on classroom management and lesson planning. The shift from baptism training to seminarian training was also largely informed by rapid assessments and quick feedback loops. A notable characteristic of REALM is that it prioritizes participant and practitioner feedback in making changes, as in the case of moving from a mother’s empowerment initiative to a parent training model. In doing so, the focus is more on co-creating contextual solutions rather than going in with a presumed solution to a problem. Continuing to integrate and deepen this implementation research approach into future programming will help in creating and scaling robust, evidence-based, community-informed interventions to promote Whole Child Development.

## **THE PRE-PRIMARY SEL PROGRAM HAS PROMISE AND SHOULD BE SCALED AS A PART OF FUTURE PROGRAMMING**

As elaborated in the “school-based interventions” section, the pre-primary SEL program shows a statistically significant impact on children’s SEL skills. Looking beyond the developmental outcomes, during the teacher interviews conducted as a part of QulPs, 11 out of the 13 teachers mentioned that they have an increased knowledge of child development after attending the training, and 8 teachers mentioned that they engaged in play-based learning with children after attending the training. During focus groups conducted with pre-primary teachers in the Nippes department, many teachers mentioned that the training helped them improve classroom management practices and their relationship with students. Along with the empirical evidence that the program works, the learnings from the qualitative studies conducted with teachers who were trained almost a year before the studies were done makes a strong case about the effectiveness of the ECD program, and its potential to be scaled further as a part of future programming.

## **THE PRIMARY SCHOOL SEL PROGRAM HAS PROMISE BUT NEEDS A DEEPER APPROACH FOCUSING ON IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE AND SAFETY**

Even though the SEL program for Grades 1 & 2 did not have a significant impact on children’s SEL skills, the similar program for pre-primary was effective. This could be an effect of the overall school environment and the recurring socio-political tensions the children are exposed to. In response to study findings, the Strong Beginnings team fine-tuned several intervention components, including building coaches’ capacity to support SEL activities better and streamlining the instructions to implement morning meetings. To ensure subsequent programming goes beyond just a light touch SEL intervention, the team conducted focus group discussions with teachers, parents, and students to understand peer relationships, and teacher-student relationships at school. These focus groups brought up the need to address lack of sharing and respect among students, corporal punishments used by teachers to correct students, teachers not feeling respected by students, parents expressing the need for children to handle their emotions (especially sadness) better, and for teachers to be more affectionate towards children. Participants also spoke about the socio-political tension in Haiti reflecting in children’s behavior in the form of increased aggression. All of this point towards the need for a school culture improvement approach with focus on SEL, rather than an intervention for children alone, since all of the other factors at school also influence their social and emotional learning. The team is currently in the process of designing a whole school approach model to improve school culture and SEL for future interventions. As the process moves to the implementation stage, it will be important to embed REALM strategies in the program so that any changes required can be made to the content or model of implementation in a timely manner, and it can be iteratively tested to ensure a robust intervention.

## **DISTANCE LEARNING APPROACHES SPECIFIC TO LOCAL CONTEXTS WITHIN HAITI NEED TO BE TESTED, AND INTEGRATED INTO THE L3 SYSTEM WHERE FEASIBLE**

Distance learning mechanisms are essential in a context like Haiti where recurring, prolonged school closures, acute resource shortage, and escalating socio-political tensions are frequent. However, modalities like radio programming—which was once probably the best way to reach most children—are no longer an equitable, or a standardized solution given the limited access to electricity, fuel shortage affecting the radio stations, and lack of radio signal in many places. The current landscape of distance learning in Haiti is filled with technology-based distance learning solutions which are also not equitable or accessible. Strong Beginnings operationalized resource centers as a response to ensure all children have access to learning resources, leveraging both technology-based and analog options under one roof. This programming needs to be further streamlined and linked to parent training, so that parents are also aware of the resource centers, and know how to help their children at the resource centers. Considering that operationalizing these centers are time and resource-intensive, and it may not be feasible at scale, especially in places like Port-au-Prince where gang violence and protests hinder mobility. There is an urgent need to move away from a one size fits all solution for distance learning in Haiti. Future programming should focus on piloting and testing modalities suitable for the varying micro-contexts within Haiti. In contexts where resource centers work as a good distance learning modality, its efficacy should be tested, and REALM should be embedded as with any other intervention.



## **CRUCIAL NEXT STEPS FOR L3 WOULD BE STREAMLINING PROGRAMMING, DEEPENING PARTNERSHIPS, AND CONDUCTING STUDIES TO UNDERSTAND IF THE L3 APPROACH AS A WHOLE WORKS**

The findings from the QulP interviews, the focus groups in the Nippes department, and data from the rapid assessments all indicate that the individual L3 interventions have significant merit. In order to strengthen the L3 approach, it will be important to deepen partnerships with other actors in Haiti to incorporate and embed other important elements of WCD, like nutrition, into the L3 approach so that the systems strengthening truly is multi-faceted and considers everything a child needs to thrive and grow. Strategically linking social enterprise initiatives to the L3 communities could go a long way in achieving sustainability and promoting all aspects of WCD. For example, once fully operational, MBE can work to drive local economic growth, employing and training local Haitians. Simultaneously, MBE can feed profits back into the community through partnering with local schools to cover shortfalls in teacher salary, tuition, and infrastructure needs. However, the efficacy of this model has not been tested, and this needs to be further studied. In addition to deepening partnerships, it is also important to strengthen the existing interventions by linking interventions and stakeholders where relevant to bolster the L3 approach. For example, seminarians who are trained could conduct home visits to households that have participated in the parent training program to reinforce topics covered during the training and conduct follow-up activities. Trained parents could also be given the opportunity to share their learnings and reflections with other parents in the community, encouraging them to participate in future trainings. Linkages like these can not only strengthen interventions, but also leverage existing social networks in the community in promoting Whole Child Development. As these next steps around deepening partnerships and strengthening existing interventions are implemented, it is important to simultaneously scale-up the program to new communities where the new strategies can be further tested and refined.

The four years of Strong Beginnings has helped the GC-DWC and the partners build great momentum in creating and testing interventions to strengthen each component of the L3 system. Through impact evaluations, qualitative studies, and rigorous implementation research that have informed many of the learnings in this report, the project has not only succeeded in laying a strong foundation for systems strengthening in Haiti, but also a clear roadmap in terms of next steps and further learning.





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# ANNEX

**TABLE 1: RESULTS FROM PRE-PRIMARY SEL IMPACT EVALUATION**

Model results for the impact of SEL Pre-primary intervention on SEL, emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, and motor development at post-test

VARIABLE	SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING	EMERGENT LITERACY	EMERGENT NUMERACY	MOTOR DEVELOPMENT
Group	0.04** (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.001 (0.02)
Child age	0.01 (0.01)	-0.003 (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Child gender (female)	0.02 (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)
Pretest outcome score	0.25*** (0.04)	0.40*** (0.04)	0.25*** (0.05)	0.32*** (0.04)
Department	0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Constant	0.22*** (0.05)	0.35*** (0.05)	0.02*** (0.05)	0.47*** (0.05)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.09	0.18	0.11	0.16
p	0.03	0.11	0	0.08

Clustered standard errors in parentheses; \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001



**TABLE 2: RESULTS FROM GRADES 1 & 2 IMPACT EVALUATION**

Model results for the impact of SEL intervention on children’s SEL and literacy at post-test

VARIABLE	SELF-CONCEPT	EMPATHY	STRESS MANAGEMENT	CONFLICT RESOLUTION	LETTER KNOWLEDGE	FLUENCY	LISTENING COMPREHENSION	READING COMPREHENSION
Intervention	-0.07 (0.04)	0.04 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.91 (1.32)	-0.92 (1.38)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.003 (0.03)
Grade	0.22*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.01)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.05*** (0.01)	5.27*** (0.98)	6.82*** (0.69)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.02)
Child gender (female)	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	2.67*** (0.69)	2.93*** (0.57)	0.03 (0.02)	0.11*** (0.03)
Pretest outcome score	0.30*** (0.05)	0.33*** (0.02)	0.31*** (0.03)	0.21*** (0.03)	0.65*** (0.06)	1.05*** (0.05)	0.72*** (0.04)	1.41*** (0.05)
SES	0.07 (0.05)	0.06* (0.04)	0.08* (0.03)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.43 (1.43)	1.26 (1.02)	0.15*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.04)
Disability Status	-0.09* (0.05)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)	0.26 (1.22)	-0.32 (1.06)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.07 (0.04)
Department1	-0.19** (0.06)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.54 (1.47)	-1.77 (1.63)	0.10*** (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)
Department2	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.19*** (0.03)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	7.34*** (1.86)	0.69 (1.63)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Constant	-0.34*** (0.07)	0.15*** (0.03)	-0.01*** (0.03)	0.04** (0.02)	7.71*** (1.59)	0.25 (1.79)	-0.25*** (0.03)	-0.50*** (0.04)
ICC ( )	0.09	0.07	0.05	0.05	0.11	0.14	0.19	0.30

Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses; \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

**TABLE 3: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN NUMBER OF COACHING VISITS AND FIDELITY METRICS**

VARIABLES	diff_fid_inst	diff_cls_mgmt	diff_lesn_mgmt	diff_class_env
num_visits	0.0370*** (0.0106)	0.0771*** (0.0118)	0.0733*** (0.00878)	0.170*** (0.0250)
2.dept	-0.187 (0.169)	-0.519*** (0.187)	-0.708*** (0.140)	0.0424 (0.253)
3.dept	-0.0266 (0.180)	-0.183 (0.200)	-0.192 (0.149)	-0.290 (0.250)
4.dept	-0.325* (0.180)	-0.437** (0.200)	-0.435*** (0.149)	-0.431 (0.276)
5.dept	0.0980 (0.153)	0.211 (0.170)	-0.253** (0.127)	-0.563*** (0.210)
Constant	0.688*** (0.168)	1.395*** (0.186)	1.269*** (0.139)	0.765*** (0.223)
Observations	614	614	614	357
R-squared	0.046	0.132	0.182	0.196

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**TABLE 4: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN TEACHERS' FIDELITY OF INSTRUCTION SCORE AND STUDENTS' LITERACY SCORES**

VARIABLES	phon_aware	ltrspm	wrdspm	rdcmp_scr	liscmp_scr
fid_inst	0.0406*** (0.0151)	1.541** (0.756)	1.754*** (0.618)	0.0365*** (0.0136)	0.0228** (0.0109)
a2a	0.127*** (0.0340)	6.711*** (1.699)	7.663*** (1.387)	0.125*** (0.0305)	0.0913*** (0.0244)
sex	0.0713** (0.0331)	5.282*** (1.652)	4.656*** (1.349)	0.102*** (0.0297)	0.0651*** (0.0238)
Constant	0.368*** (0.0735)	15.07*** (3.674)	4.516 (3.000)	0.0705 (0.0660)	0.0922* (0.0529)
Observations	575	575	575	575	575
R-squared	0.037	0.045	0.072	0.052	0.038

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**TABLE 5: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN TEACHERS' CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SCORE AND STUDENTS' LITERACY SCORES**

VARIABLES	phon_aware	ltrspm	wrdspm	rdcmp_scr	liscmp_scr
cls_mgmt	0.0781*** (0.0195)	3.625*** (0.971)	3.909*** (0.789)	0.0613*** (0.0175)	0.0347** (0.0141)
a2a	0.146*** (0.0343)	7.740*** (1.711)	8.725*** (1.389)	0.137*** (0.0309)	0.0970*** (0.0248)
sex	0.0719** (0.0328)	5.314*** (1.639)	4.688*** (1.330)	0.103*** (0.0296)	0.0653*** (0.0237)
Constant	0.249*** (0.0801)	8.013** (4.001)	-2.682 (3.249)	-0.00218 (0.0722)	0.0604 (0.0580)
Observations	575	575	575	575	575
R-squared	0.051	0.061	0.098	0.060	0.041

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**TABLE 6: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN TEACHERS' LESSON MANAGEMENT SCORE AND STUDENTS' LITERACY SCORES**

VARIABLES	phon_aware	ltrspm	wrdspm	rdcmp_scr	liscmp_scr
lesn_mgmt	0.0939*** (0.0275)	4.994*** (1.370)	6.087*** (1.107)	0.113*** (0.0245)	0.0970*** (0.0195)
a2a	0.142*** (0.0346)	7.829*** (1.722)	9.090*** (1.391)	0.149*** (0.0308)	0.117*** (0.0245)
sex	0.0696** (0.0329)	5.201*** (1.639)	4.558*** (1.324)	0.100*** (0.0293)	0.0635*** (0.0234)
Constant	0.166 (0.116)	1.568 (5.774)	-12.49*** (4.663)	-0.227** (0.103)	-0.202** (0.0823)
Observations	575	575	575	575	575
R-squared	0.044	0.060	0.106	0.074	0.071

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**TABLE 8: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN POSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT SCORE AND STUDENTS' LITERACY SCORES**

VARIABLES	phon_aware	ltrspm	wrdspm	rdcmp_scr	liscmp_scr
sel_env_scr	0.0520*** (0.0102)	2.062*** (0.538)	1.812*** (0.436)	0.0264*** (0.00991)	0.0186** (0.00793)
2.a2a	-0.161*** (0.0437)	-5.108** (2.314)	-6.237*** (1.871)	-0.133*** (0.0426)	-0.0565* (0.0341)
sex	0.0216 (0.0422)	4.348* (2.234)	2.608 (1.807)	0.0635 (0.0411)	0.0510 (0.0329)
Constant	0.468*** (0.0576)	18.38*** (3.050)	10.50*** (2.467)	0.232*** (0.0561)	0.183*** (0.0449)
Observations	306	306	306	306	306
R-squared	0.104	0.065	0.081	0.053	0.030

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1



**TABLE 9: LOGIC MODEL**

OUTCOME NUMBER	OUTCOMES DEFINED FOR PORTICUS (STRONG BEGINNINGS)	OUTCOMES DEFINED FOR CO-FUNDER (STRONG BEGINNINGS)
OC1	<p>OC 1: CEEC embeds WCD approaches within their policies and supports teacher and school capacity to foster mature readers and lifelong learners with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Improved reading skills (phonemic awareness, fluency and comprehension) in Haitian Creole.</li> <li>b) Increased socioemotional skills and holistic development.</li> </ul>	<p>Outcome 1A.1: Students demonstrate improved Haitian Creole phonemic awareness                      Outcome 1A.2: Students demonstrate ability to read fluently in Haitian Creole                      Outcome 1B: Students demonstrate stronger SEL skills</p>
OC2	<p>OC 2: Incorporation of whole-child policies and approaches conducive to early learning within CEEC preschools so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) preschool children demonstrate improved whole-child developmental indicators</li> </ul>	<p>Outcome 2: Children in preschool demonstrate improved pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, motor functioning, and SEL skills</p>
OC3	<p>OC 3: A strengthened family-school-parish network that allows for heightened community involvement in the identification and problem-solving of local issues that impede children from developing and leaning to their full potential, with sustainable and scalable solutions.</p>	
OC4	<p>OC 4: More robust and accessible SEL and literacy distance-learning programming for Haitian students and caregivers, to ensure continuity of educational access and support during school closures.</p>	



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