Fewer parents than expected are sending their children to before and after-school sessions that are part of the state's new program to educate 4-year-olds.

The main part of the program is the six-hour daily classes. Turnout for those is high, and backers say there already is evidence that those youngsters are enjoying major learning gains.

Schools that participate also are required to offer before and after-school sessions that last two hours each.

Those sessions are designed to make it easier for parents to take advantage of the classes. But participation is well below what state officials predicted.

The state expected 4,296 children would be enrolled in the before and after-school sessions for 4-year-olds. The current count is actually 2,490.

East Baton Rouge Parish, one of 19 districts in the state taking part in the program, expected 567 students. Only 320 are enrolled.

The less-than-expected turnout trimmed the district's program by about $290,000, to $3.8 million.

The state's calculation that parents needed the before and after-school sessions may have been flawed, said Glenny Lee Buquet, a board member from Houma.

"I don't know if this is an assumption we have to re-examine," Buquet said.

Keith Johnson, a board member from New Orleans, said before and after-school attendance is less than expected because many mothers of poor children do not work outside the home.