Paying Tribute To A Preschool Pioneer

This time of year, nearly everyone takes a moment to take stock—looking back at the past year and ahead to the new year, full of anticipation. So it is here at NIEER, and this year we take heart and hope for our cause, at the same time as we pay tribute to Dr. David Weikart who passed on in December at the relatively young age of 72. Dave was one of the foremost preschool pioneers, laying the foundations for much of the policy research and analysis that underlies the preschool education movement today.

My own work in the economics of early education began at the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan working on the Perry Preschool study, which Dave began in 1962. Dave Weikart’s insight into the implications of his work went well beyond the understanding that the early years are crucial for human development, with lifelong consequences.

He was convinced that hard science could be used to demonstrate the benefits of preschool education and that these benefits could be measured in dollars as children grew. Dave was among the first to look for economic returns from a broad range of impacts across the lifespan including school cost savings, reductions in crime and delinquency, and increased earnings. Dave Weikart’s work was remarkable for its vision and its impact on public policy. His vision of following the children throughout their lives to chart the economic benefits created a dynamic force that helped shape early education policies in this country.

As James Heckman, an economist from the University of Chicago and a Nobel laureate said in the New York Times, “Dr. Weikart’s work was unprecedented in the duration and intensity of its observation. In particular, it proved the importance of teaching character traits like responsible decision-making at a very early age.”

Paying tribute to the significant contributions made by Dave Weikart also keeps us focused on the work ahead. Nearly everyone these days, from the average mom and dad to business leaders to sophisticated policy wonks, now seem to “get” the importance of investing in early childhood development.

As a nation our public investments in young children remain trivial compared to our spending power and the environments in which many children spend their days are an embarrassment in the world’s richest country. Our greatest challenge today may be moving past lip service to the vision of quality education developed by Dave and others.

In this issue, you will read about efforts to improve preschool in Los Angeles county, Florida, and Oklahoma. In LA and Florida there is a tremendous challenge to ensure that children are actually provided with a quality education. From Oklahoma and Mauritius, a tiny island nation in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Africa, we get evidence of the pay-off when at least some crucial aspects of quality are in place.

Actor/director/producer Rob Reiner says solid scientific evidence turned him into an enthusiastic activist for universal preschool—as described in his Newsweek interview with us. It was the science, he says, which convinced him and so many others in California to fight hard for the very best early learning experiences for all children in that state.

Dave Weikart not only produced good science, he inspired and informed the work of many of today’s researchers who continue to create the science of which Reiner speaks.

As we look ahead to the new year, we must continue to strive for sound science to help guide the policy debates on preschool programs. That’s one of the best ways we can honor the scientific contributions made by Dr. Weikart.

W. Steven Barnett
Director, NIEER
Federal Reserve Economist Urges Much Wider Public Investment In Preschool

Expert Says Preschool Pays Public Up To 16 Percent On Every Dollar Spent

Art Rolnick, head of research for the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, has a simple answer when people ask him the value of investing in early education. “Up to a 16 percent return, adjusted for inflation,” he answers, without hesitation. “At the minimum, 12 percent.” Rolnick never takes long to add, “Hard to beat, isn’t it? What other investment pays that kind of return these days?”

Certainly not the stock market. Nor do bonds, with interest rates at their lowest level in half a century. “That’s what I mean,” he says. “There’s just nothing better than this investment.”

“Not only that,” he goes on. “But you’re creating a public good, something of value to the entire public.”

In other words, he agrees with the researchers who say the social return on an investment in pre-K—at least $7 for every $1 spent—is accurate. “That’s a valid analysis. But I like to figure the value of early education in a way that allows ready comparison to other investments, to calculate its internal rate of return over time,” he says. “Much as you can calculate the value of a college education.”

The beauty of such analysis, he argues, is that policymakers can then compare the cost of an investment in pre-K to any other investment, such as a new sports stadium or even one in stocks and bonds. “A rate of return is something everyone understands, and once you do that, you see that an investment in early education nets a very, very high return,” he says.

And that is why he thinks it will be so easy to create a new trust fund, an endowment, to pay for prekindergarten for all of Minnesota’s low-income three- and four-year-olds. “It would only cost one and a quarter billion dollars to fund these programs into perpetuity,” he says.

Only one and a quarter billion? “Yes, I say ‘only’ because it’s clearly such a good investment. And because it’s a bargain when you compare it to other investments local governments might make,” he says.

Like sports stadiums. “When people tell me that one and a quarter of a billion sounds like a lot of money in a time of tight budgets, I just remind them that it’s the price of two sports stadiums,” he says. “Most cities have been willing to invest in stadiums, which don’t create nearly the same value as early education does.”

Not to mention all the other large investments cities and states make in tax breaks and spending for other corporate projects. “A new Target store or even a new factory just doesn’t have the same value as preschool,” he says. “Many cities argue that companies will bring new jobs, but they also bring other costs, such as pollution or parking problems. Even worse, cities and states get in bidding wars for the projects, driving up the costs to taxpayers without producing a public good.”

Preschool, on the other hand, is a public good. “It’s education, something that people have understood as a CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 >>

Children and the public-at-large reap lifelong benefits from high-quality preschool education.
The Committee for Economic Development continues to make exciting progress in its innovative early education initiative, Preschool for All: Investing in a Productive and Just Society. These days, we are particularly excited about our partnerships with local community organizations, education activists and state education leaders, which help us better communicate our message to the nation’s decision makers.

Our Preschool for All report urges Americans to make preschool available to all children ages three and up. We realize that change will not come overnight. But we know that by engaging the broadest possible spectrum of community activists and local policy-makers, we can make it happen sooner than later.

That’s why we’ve been on the road so much, in communities such as New York City, Rochester, Buffalo, Chicago, Hartford, Phoenix, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Orlando. CED’s mission in this project is to create a cohesive movement to support investment in early education. CED representatives have now built diverse partnerships to reach a broad audience. In each of these cities, we are co-hosting events, involving the media, and meeting with elected officials. Again and again, CED and its partners work to inform decision makers about the need to see high-quality early education as a critical issue in economic development.

By joining together, our efforts are more representative and have a stronger chance of creating real change. We’ve already seen this happen in New York State, when broad-based coalitions worked together to support public investment in early childhood education. That coalition rescued the state’s innovative universal prekindergarten initiative from the budget ax in one of the worst fiscal crises since the Great Depression. That’s just one sign of the power behind partnerships. But it is our hope to do more than save existing programs. Our real agenda is to encourage ever-more investment in prekindergarten. And to that end, CED will continue to work with partners across the country. Already, we have a solid coalition in Syracuse, NY, one that represents a broad base of support for early education. Specifically, we’re working with Syracuse Success by 6, Winning Beginning NY, and Syracuse 2020, on a series of meetings that will draw local business, education and policy leaders together to discuss how to make public investment in preschool a top priority.

We are also looking forward to expanding our efforts in Florida. The Children’s Campaign and Florida’s Success by 6 are now working with us to educate the state’s business leaders on Florida’s astonishing new constitutional amendment which mandates preschool for every four-year-old who wants to attend. With our partners, we hope to inform these leaders just how valuable corporate involvement can be in moving the state toward providing quality early learning opportunities for all children.

CED will continue to encourage community partnerships, as well as growing activism among national business leaders. For the sake of our children, it is time to make good on the commitment to provide early learning opportunities for all. The time for making an investment in early education a national priority is long overdue.

Charles E. M. Kolb
President, Committee for Economic Development

Engaging the broadest possible spectrum of activists will win more and better public preschool programs.
Yet another new study shows that a high-quality preschool experience can stem lifelong aggressive and antisocial tendencies—this time, among children in Mauritius, a volcanic and mountainous island in the Indian Ocean. Mauritius is a middle-income multi-ethnic democracy with free public education.

In this carefully-constructed look at the impact of both educational and nutritional intervention, the scientists found the effects of preschool to be significant, robust and long-lasting in preventing anti-social behavior as the children grew up. At the ages of 17, and even at 23, the researchers found a drop of up to 50 percent in criminal activities and a similar decline in other anti-social behavior. “It’s remarkable that the findings from Mauritius demonstrate some of the same kinds of benefits for human development that we find for high-quality preschool programs in the United States. Its a large study by researchers from outside education conducted half-way across the globe.

Yet, they find that just as in the United States, it pays-off to invest in the development of young children,” says Steve Barnett, NIEER’s director. “The study takes place in a social and economic context that differs greatly from ours in the United States. Even so, a high-quality preschool program addressing the needs of the whole child is found to improve social and emotional development, resulting in less conduct disorder and crime in adolescents and young adults.”

The study, conducted by psychiatric and medical researchers at the University of California, explored whether a program that offered both educational enrichment and proper nutrition might play a role in reducing violence and crime. In particular, the scientists wanted to see whether an intervention between the ages of three and five could prevent or lessen the symptoms that lead to “conduct disorders” and other mental disorders that lead to violent and aggressive behavior.

In Mauritius, they worked with children from two separate villages, choosing 100 out of about 1800 for the enrichment program. Those 100 were then matched with close to 400 peers from the community who ranked similarly on temperament, family situation, parental employment and education, and the age of mom at birth. At the age of 23, the scientists were still following 83 of the original preschool children and about 355 from the community.

The preschool program was of exceptional quality, with teachers trained in early literacy and child development, nurses who made home visits to ensure proper nutrition and a very low staff-to-child ratio. The program also included at least two hours of exercise every day, some of it in structured play and some free play. By the age of 10, the children who attended the preschool showed better social skills, more organized thinking and had more friends than the children who received no such enrichment. By the age of 17 and 23, the scientists found the positive
Trade In Senior Year Of High School For Preschool Programs?
Colorado Looks Into New Proposal

The evidence is there. A few educators have openly discussed it. But no one was bold enough to put it on the public policy agenda.

Until now, that is.

Colorado state Senators Ron Teck and Dave Owen, both Republicans, proposed eliminating the senior year of high school and replacing it with a public preschool program for four-year-olds. “We’ve been operating under the same education model for the last 100 years,” Teck says. “I’d like to see if we might change the model.”

The motivation? Both Teck and Owen say such a revamping of the state’s educational system could both boost student achievement and save the state money.

Citing the research showing that children learn the most in the earliest years—as well as studies that show a big pay-off from high-quality pre-K—Owen urged the state Board of Education to study the idea. “I do think we need to look at early education,” he told education officials. Offering preschool, he argued, might help Colorado’s youngest citizens better achieve their potential. “Maybe we need to see how we can help form their lives a little better than we seem to be doing today.”

The proposal got a chilly reception from many Colorado officials, including those at the state Board of Education. Board member, Evie Hudak, noted the state has yet to require a full-day kindergarten program. “Why would we want mandatory funded preschool when we’re not even having full-day kindergarten?” she asked.

But the idea was not dismissed out of hand, only tabled for further study, as part of an ongoing examination of the ways that high school might be restructured. And at least one Democratic member of the state’s Joint Budget Committee sounded intrigued by the idea and requested more information on how many high school seniors actually take a full academic load.

And many observers—including some outside the state of Colorado—sat up and took notice, including the Education Commission of the States, which represents state education officials across the nation. The idea that states might get a bigger bang for the buck by funding preschool instead of the senior year is one articulated by several prominent educators and elected officials, including Maryland’s state education commissioner Nancy Grasmick and Georgia’s former governor Zell Miller, who oversaw the launch of Georgia’s universal prekindergarten program.

Jennifer Dounay, a policy analyst for ECS, noted Colorado was the first state to launch a formal policy debate over the idea, but noted others have floated the idea. Indeed, many are proposing a restructuring of high school which includes at least an abbreviated senior year. Florida, for example, adopted a plan to let seniors skip a year by graduating with 18 credits instead of 24. Many high schools already offer classes off-campus or apply vocational education toward their diploma.

Florida Struggles To Meet New Mandate

The voters spoke, and policy-makers were put on notice. They passed an amendment to their state constitution which requires Florida to create access to pre-K for every four-year-old in the state.

But state officials are still struggling to figure out how to fulfill the promise. For starters, there’s not enough space for the 91,000 new students who will be eligible by the deadline, fall of 2005. The state currently serves about 60,000 kids.

Nor is there enough money yet in the state budget. “The capacity just doesn’t exist in our public schools,” says Jim Warford, chancellor of the state’s schools.

Nonetheless, the state Board of Education has come up with some recommendations for moving forward:

• A four-hour day offered 180 days a year
• Teachers with a CDA degree
• A $2880 state subsidy per pupil
• Regular assessment of the programs and children’s progress

The state legislature will take up the issues in its 2004 session, and many expect some heavy debate.

For the complete report on Florida’s progress, visit www.upkcouncil.org.
Universal prekindergarten is near the top of the wish-list of a new coalition of minority legislators from across the U.S., and for one reason: These lawmakers are sold on the research that shows pre-K can help close the achievement gap for minority youngsters.

The new group, a coalition which brings together both the National Black Caucus and National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators, declared quality education a “civil right not yet realized” by many African-American and Latino children. Ohio’s startlingly low high school graduation rate among black students, for example, amounts to nothing short of an “academic emergency,” argues Ohio State Senator C.J. Prentiss.

The groups say that two-thirds of minority students attend schools that receive less state and federal money for early education programs. In addition to more public preschool programs, the groups are calling for smaller class sizes, enriched curriculum with special attention to the development of literacy skills and stronger bilingual education.

For the officials at PNC Financial Services, there’s no doubt about the value of early education. That’s why they’ve decided to pump $100 million into school readiness efforts—from Head Start partnerships to preschool and literacy programs—over the next decade. “Our goal is to reach 2.8 million children and ensure that boys and girls not only grow up, but they grow up great,” says James E. Rohr, PNC’s chairman and chief executive officer.

The ten-year program will support programs in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Ohio and Kentucky, a region served by PNC. The company had already established a presence in these early education programs, through grants and support for employees who volunteered time or contributed money to such efforts. But the size of the new plan represents a much larger and more vigorous corporate effort. The new program aims to galvanize PNC’s 23,500 workers as volunteers who will promote literacy and other school readiness skills. The initiative will also provide resources to the targeted community.

In addition, PNC will support projects to raise the visibility of the power of early education, in hopes of fostering more action and public policy to support preschool and other programs for young children. “This kind of private investment will mean long-term pay-offs for all of us,” says Steve Barnett, NIEER’s executive director. “PNC represents a model for corporate America.”

To learn more about PNC’s new initiative, contact Brian Goerke at PNC, 412-762-4304, corporatecommunications@pnc.com.

PNC Financial Services Pledge $100 Million For School Readiness

New Coalition Of Minority Lawmakers Calls For Better Schools And More Pre-K Classes
Federal Reserve Economist Urges Much Wider Public Investment In Pre-K

Expert Says Preschool Pays Public Up To 16 Percent On Every Dollar Spent

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public good for a long time. An education prepares people to be productive and to be good citizens. It is essential to not only the economy, but also to democracy," he argues.

So why create a big trust fund to pay for public preschool?

Because Rolnick believes that an endowment is one way to protect early education funding from politics when budgets get tight, in particular, he argues an endowment would keep the money free of tax-cutting politics that tend to consume lawmakers in bad budget years. "Once money is in an endowment, it can never be cut. It’s not like taxes that are subject to political whim and debate. What I am proposing is an endowment, like Harvard or Yale has, that will represent a permanent commitment by the people of Minnesota to its children," he says.

Rolnick is quite serious, and creating both a model and a constituency to make this policy happen. This fall, his branch of the Federal Reserve held a summit on early education, giving shape and weight to the idea.

The meeting was hosted by none other than Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman, a University of Chicago economist who also champions the value of early education. "Early learning begets later learning and later success," Heckman has concluded, which boosts life-long earning power and productivity, just as a college diploma does.

Rolnick and his staff are currently in conversation with early education advocates and policy-makers across Minnesota, hoping to come up with a pilot program and concrete proposal in the near future.

His idea is also gaining attention from policy-makers in other states. Michigan’s governor has expressed interest, as have activists in California who are researching long-term financing options for expansion of that state’s preschool programs.

For more information on Rolnick’s research and proposals, visit www.minneapolisfed.org and click on “early education.”

Governor’s Forum On Quality Preschool Hosted By Florida Governor Jeb Bush

Led by governors, first ladies and senior state policy-makers, teams from 25 states convened in Florida in December to share ideas and strategies for advancing the cause of public prekindergarten programs. Florida Governor Jeb Bush hosted the meeting, while his own state officials continued to map out a plan to provide pre-K to all four-year-olds in his state, under a new constitutional amendment (see “Florida Struggles To Meet New Mandate,” page 6).

Finance, accountability and governance topped the list of concerns for nearly everyone at the meeting, as experts, including NIEER director, Steve Barnett, detailed the evidence emerging in study after study that shows programs must be of the highest quality if they are to boost children’s achievement. Governors Judy Martz of Montana, Jennifer Granholm of Michigan, Jeb Bush of Florida and Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho (left to right) led a session on how to create maximum access to the high-quality programs during the two-day meeting.
A powerful new study of Oklahoma’s universal preschool program finds the pre-K program has positive effects for all children—not just poor or minority students. The study findings showed that language, cognitive and motor skills all got a boost from the state’s high-quality preschool program.

Specifically, the children were more likely to be able to name colors, identify shapes, correctly name everyday objects, tell the meanings of words, count objects, repeat an eight-word sentence and sort pictures by category—all critical cognitive skills for children entering kindergarten.

In addition, the children in the state’s pre-K program showed superior small motor skills, when compared to those who had not attended the program. Those who’d completed pre-K, for example, could color a circle with control, print their first names and cut along a straight line with scissors with more ease than other children.

The study’s design was unusually rigorous, making the researchers confident of the findings. “These are robust findings,” says William Gormley, Professor of Public Policy at Georgetown University. “The effects are most striking for disadvantaged children, and really phenomenal for Hispanic children. But overall, this study shows that all children benefit from a high-quality, universal preschool experience.”

Gormley, noting that a large body of evidence now shows that teacher credentials and pay are key to keeping quality high in preschool classrooms, “Teacher turnover is low in these programs, which is an important factor in assuring quality,” he says. “And turnover is probably low because the compensation is better than in other early education programs.”

Oklahoma is one of just a handful of states currently committed to universal preschool for all four-year-olds, and stands out from nearly all states in its commitment to having highly-qualified teachers in its pre-K classrooms. To be hired in the state-sponsored program, teachers must have a four-year college degree in early childhood education.

Oklahoma also rewards those who choose early education by paying them the same as other public school teachers. Class size and adult supervision are also tightly regulated, with the staff-to-child ratio allowed to go no higher than 1 to 10. Class size is also limited, kept to a maximum of 20 students.

The new study, conducted by William T. Gormley, Jr., Ted Gayer, and Deborah Phillips, was supported by NIEER and can be downloaded at www.nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=85.
Families across Los Angeles will start the new year with a new vision of early education, as Los Angeles officials unveil a $600 million plan to create preschool programs for all four-year-olds in the county—all 153,000 of them.

“It’s the most exciting thing I’ve ever been involved in,” says Beth Lowe, vice chair of the local First Five Commission, which is rolling out the new program. “To have this much money, this much expertise, this much enthusiasm, all focused on doing something meaningful for children, it’s a dream come true.”

Officials of the First Five Commission plan to reveal their road map to a new system—one that will include school-based and community programs, serving subsidized and unsubsidized children, one that will strive for quality through a five-star rating scale, and push to have all teachers both well-credentialed and well-compensated. “We know it’s ambitious, and we don’t have all the details of it ironed out yet,” says Karen Hill-Scott, a highly regarded educator and architect of the plan. “But I’ve had a crackerjack staff of 10-15 core people working around the clock and another hundred people working diligently on committees to pull together this vision.”

Some children will be enrolled in new programs right away, but the big rollout won’t happen until next September and even then, brain research, I couldn’t sit on the sidelines,” says Reiner. “The case was just too compelling and the need too great. We need to get these early childhood programs up and running.” (For more, see “Newsmaker” interview, page 10).

It was Reiner’s appearance and lobbying before the Los Angeles First Five Commission that moved the agenda forward last summer, with an initial commitment of $100 million to expand preschool in Los Angeles County. In October, the local commission earmarked another $600 million to the effort, as Hill-Scott and other committee members scoured the country for models, ideas and the technical expertise to design the “road map” she is now about to release.

“Some of it is still hazy, but a lot of the vision is there now and we think people around the country will be extremely interested in what we are pulling together,” she says, “based on research, experience in other states and our own vision.”

No one doubts that challenges lie ahead. But no one doubts the effort is worth it, either. “Trying to do it on such a large scale is obviously a challenge, but we think the time is right. People are ready for this. That’s why they voted for the new tax. The hope now is that we can recreate society in a way that makes us all better, by giving young children the services they really need,” says Ben Austin, spokesman for First Five. “And we believe that if we can do it in a place like Los Angeles, that is so diverse and so large, then we can do it across the nation.”

Reiner Campaigns For New Education Tax

Can he do it again? That’s the question posed by the California Teachers Association, as the giant union joins forces with Rob Reiner to win approval for a new commercial real estate tax to support education across the state.

The proposed “Improving Classroom Education Act” would raise business property taxes by $4.5 billion, with $3 billion earmarked for kindergarten through high school improvements and the rest used to pay for preschool for the state’s four-year-olds, higher salaries and benefits for the state’s teachers, classroom supplies and smaller class sizes.

The initiative has already met some resistance, most notably, from a strongly-worded editorial in the powerful L.A. Times. But Reiner, the teachers’ union and education advocates across the state intend to fight vigorously for the proposal. For more information, visit www.cta.org.
Actor/director/producer Rob Reiner played a leading role in winning support for early education in California, as chief advocate and activist for the state’s First Five program, which is funded by a new tobacco tax. More than $600 million has been released to L.A. County alone, to ramp up a universal pre-kindergarten program serving all four-year-olds in the sprawling county which covers 70 school districts. Most recently, Reiner joined forces with the California Teachers Association to seek a new commercial property tax that would create permanent funding for preschool, among other things.

Q. What made you such an ardent activist for pre-K?
A. It actually started years ago for me, after I came across the Carnegie Corporation’s report on brain development. That report showed the connection between early experiences and functioning later in life. I was riveted. I was always politically active, and always tried to think of what I could do to make a difference, how we could solve some of our social problems. That report showed how the earliest experiences have a direct effect on how people function later in life. It was amazing to me.

I gathered a group of people at my house in 1994. I had a scientist, political people, show business people, and I just said, ‘How many people know about this research?’ From the gut response in that room, I knew this research could move people. So I said, it’s amazing, but it’s only distributed in the scientific community. We need to get it out into the world. We need to make people aware of this, of just how important the early years are and how good programs can make a difference.

Q. Sounds good, but how did you think you could accomplish that?
A. Well, I saw a vacuum of leadership. I could see that so many people had been working on these issues for 30, 40, 50 years, but there was no cohesive effort to create a national campaign and put it on the map to win a significant investment. So I decided to take it on myself. I launched the “I Am Your Child Campaign” to inform the public and policy-makers about the importance of early education. I wanted to start a dialogue that would foster a serious public investment.

Q. You make it sound simple. Was it really that simple?
A. Of course not! We hit a lot of roadblocks. At the start, there was good support. John McCain and John Kerry supported an investment in early childhood development, to the tune of $26 billion. We proposed using tobacco money coming out of the Federal settlement. But the tobacco industry came out strong against it, and after two years, we ended up with nothing. That’s when we decided to focus on California and take it straight to the voters.

Q. What, exactly, did you take straight to the voters?
A. We proposed a new tax on cigarettes. But we took it to the voters as the idea of children as our future, and how a concrete investment in children’s early years could make a difference. We used the brain research to show just how the earliest years are the most significant. We turned that into Proposition 10, a ballot initiative that would create the new state tax on tobacco to fund early childhood programs, including preschool.

You know, you hear politicians—just about every single politician—say that children are our future. We wanted to make that real. We said that if we are going to have less crime and a better economy, we have to pay attention to this research that shows we have to start early on. The most important period is from prenatal to five years, yet we have no real system for dealing with these years.

We tried to put it all in perspective, to put out the idea that we just started the education system a little over 100 years ago, in an agrarian society. Now we have mostly technical, industrial jobs. We are at another crossroads in our economy. If we want people to be able to perform in the new economy, we must start young.

Q. So it sounds as if the research was central to winning support. Is that true?
A. Absolutely. That’s what policy-makers listen to, and it’s what the public listens to as well. All we did was say, hey, based on what we know now, based on this research, it’s important to start our educational system earlier, even in the prenatal years. You can’t wait for kindergarten. That’s too late.
effects still pronounced with the young adults more socially-adjusted, calmer and better able to get along with peers than the children who received no enrichment. As young adults, both self-reports and objective records revealed an even more profound difference—the children who’d attended preschool were far less likely—up to 52 percent less likely—to commit a crime. Results tended to be stronger for children who were malnourished at age three.

The “robustness of the effects” could not, the scientists declared, be attributed to any “pre-enrichment group differences in temperament, cognitive ability, nutritional status, autonomic reactivity or demographic variables.”

In other words, the high-quality preschool program produced the reduction in crime and aggression. “The fact that this is a real randomized trial makes it especially more exciting,” says Barnett. “These findings just add to the growing body of evidence that interventions in the early years of life can be effective in preventing later behavior problems and crime.”

Certainly, that is one of the findings the scientists who authored the study hope to convey. “Violence and crime are being increasingly recognized as major public health problems with origins in the early years of life. Prevention of these behaviors is one of the most important and pressing issues in society today,” they said. And yet “the large majority of prevention programs do not start early in life, when the pathway to antisocial behavior is believed to begin.”

To download the study, visit www.aip.psychiatryonline.org, see “Effects of Environmental Enrichment at Ages 3-5 Years on Schizotypal Personality and Anti-Social Behavior at Ages 17 and 23 Years,” 160-9, September, 2003.