SPECIAL REPORT: The Pew Charitable Trusts Advancing Quality Pre-K For All Initiative

Child Care and Aggression
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New Research on Outcomes of State-Funded Pre-K
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The idea of providing high-quality pre-K for more young children continued to take root in 2005. Often as not, it was strong governors sowing the seeds of expansion. Rod Blagojevich in Illinois and Phil Bredesen in Tennessee are two who pushed through substantial increases in access to their states’ programs despite budget woes. Louisiana’s Kathleen Blanco was on a similar path when Hurricane Katrina blew her off course and inundated much of the state’s pre-K system.

The nail-biter in 2005 was Florida where, despite dire forecasts on the meteorological and political fronts, the Jeb Bush administration managed to sprout a pre-K program that attempts to serve all the state’s 4-year-olds. I say “attempts” because Florida has some work to do on funding and quality issues. Get it right, though, and state programs can make a real difference in children’s lives.

Our five-state study replicates the rigorous evaluation approach applied in Tulsa, Oklahoma by Bill Gormley, Deborah Phillips and their colleagues at Georgetown University. Although our study covers a much more diverse set of programs and communities, the results are strikingly similar. As detailed on page 5 in this issue, children had gains in vocabulary scores that were 31 percent greater than children who had not yet had the benefit of the program. This is noteworthy since the test we used is highly predictive of general cognitive abilities. In four of the five study states, we tested math skills and found the children attending the program gained 44 percent over those who did not. In print awareness, program children produced an 85 percent increase compared with what kids would have gained without the programs.

Such studies continue to make valuable contributions. Many policy leaders, advocates, and academics recognize the value of higher-quality public preschool education, but others are still sitting on the fence waiting for more evidence or actively campaigning against such programs.

I still hear voices saying that government-funded programs inevitably fail to make a real difference or that program outcomes aren’t dependent on teacher qualifications, pay, and other program standards.

At the very least, our study adds to the evidence that these claims are untrue (readers who know of research establishing that programs with less qualified teachers have produced the same results are encouraged to send it my way). And, perhaps some of the fence sitters will be persuaded to move ahead.
New Report Refines Views About Child Care’s Long-Term Effects

Day Care Kids Found to be Aggressive in Kindergarten Are Not by Grade 3

When a 2001 report from the nation’s largest long-term study of behavior in young children found more aggression in kindergartners who had attended child care than their home-care peers, working mothers had one more thing to worry about.

Now, the new Early Child Care Report from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) that tracks child care kids as they grow older says the disruptive behavior seen in day care kids during kindergarten appears to have largely dissipated by third grade.

So far, so good, say experts—but there was this worrisome bit of news: The study also found that the day care group had more trouble relating to their peers and exhibited poor work habits—two skills critical to academic success.

Researchers are split on the significance of this difference and whether the effects—both positive and negative—of child care are all that noteworthy since the size of all the effects measured are relatively small. Count University of London psychologist and study researcher Jay Belsky among those who say we should be concerned. His point: With two-thirds of American mothers working and the majority of them putting their youngsters in day care, small effects in areas like work habits and socialization are serious concerns when they are replicated across a huge population of kids.

Others aren’t so sure that small effects should be taken seriously. Sarah Friedman who is the NICHD scientific coordinator of the study believes these small effects support the notion that day care is not as big a problem as many feared when the NICHD study was begun 15 years ago.

Nevertheless, there are consistent effects that deserve attention regardless of their size. Though it was previously thought inevitable that many children in day care would become bullies, the research actually found slightly fewer behavioral problems in these kids than their peers once they reached third grade, no matter how much time was spent in child care.

Those who had been in home-based care had larger gains in social-emotional skills. Kids in higher-quality programs also tested better on the Revised Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery in math, vocabulary and memory skills.

Other studies reinforce these findings. Researchers at the University of California-Berkeley and Stanford University studying 14,000 kindergartners found that children entering preschool at an early age have slower social development but better pre-reading and math skills. They also found that while white, middle-class youngsters benefited modestly in language and mathematics, those from poor families had double the gains.

Researchers say the findings don’t necessarily support the idea that the effects are attributable to a lower standard of care. It is possible that, rather than children from day care becoming less aggressive, their non-day care peers become more aggressive so that by third grade the two groups are more or less on equal footing.

Even so, quality of care is an issue. NIEER Director Steve Barnett says the results reinforce the importance of ensuring that children have access to high-quality early education, whether it’s a day-care center, home-based care or preschool. Programs need to be informed by what we know about how to positively impact social and emotional development.

Deborah Lowe Vandell, a member of the Committee on Family Work Policies of the National Research Council, chair of the NIEER scientific advisory board and a long-term member of the study’s research team, says family issues are the strongest indicator of how children develop. Her research has found that children whose mothers provided more sensitive care showed fewer aggressive behaviors and greater social skills in first grade. They also were more self-reliant and engaged in the classroom. This was true regardless of the amount of time spent in child care.

Still other research has shown that high-quality early childhood development programs benefit children into adulthood.

The federally funded NICHD study is being conducted at 10 sites around the country and has tracked more than 1,300 children since it began in 1991. Although the original study was designed to end when the children reached age 15 (in January), researchers hope to follow the children through high school graduation. This, says Vandell, will provide a much more complete picture.
It’s something every veteran preschool teacher knows instinctively—bright, cheerful classrooms that are thoughtfully arranged create more peaceful, engaging environments for their young students.

What they may not realize, though, is how large a role the physical design of a classroom plays in learning. Beyond paint schemes, carpet colors and wall postings are architectural factors like room shapes, locations of bathrooms and play areas, positioning of windows and doors, and acoustics. Many of these elements go beyond those typically considered in the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) assessment, into territory increasingly ripe for investigation.

Attention to classroom design began more than 30 years ago with the introduction of learning centers arranged according to activity. Unfortunately, not all early education decision-makers have the benefit of school design research or experience planning space layout, says Henry Sanoff, professor emeritus at North Carolina State University School of Architecture.

Author of several books on school design, Sanoff says as that knowledge begins to permeate the architectural profession, he expects the practice to change. Decisions about classroom design that are now based on good intentions or school board preferences are more likely to be based on evidence of how and why children are affected by light, acoustics, colors, and other stimuli.

For more information, visit www.anfa.org or www.architecture-mind.com.

Researchers know that classroom design plays a key role in how well kids do in school, but only neuroscience can tell them why.
NIEER Multi-State Study Finds Meaningful Gains from Pre-K

Children from All Backgrounds Show Improvement in Language and Early Math Skills

A new study of five high-quality state-funded pre-kindergarten programs finds children making important gains in nearly all measures of learning studied—gains refuting the notion that preschool success cannot happen on a large scale. Equally important, the study shows all children doing well, regardless of ethnic background or economic circumstances. The results come at what many see as a critical juncture in the debate over preschool’s effectiveness and whether to make it available to all children.

NIEER researcher Cynthia Esposito-Lamy, who directed the five-state study, explains: "With the growth in state-funded preschool and debate over its effectiveness, we thought it important to study a range of programs in states that provide a broad-based sample of children to see how effective these programs really are."

Each program studied (with very minor exceptions) requires teachers with 4-year college degrees and early childhood training and pays teachers comparably to the public schools. Participants included 5,278 children in 1,320 preschool and kindergarten classrooms in Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina and West Virginia. The sample was 47 percent White, 25 percent Black, 21 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Native American and 2 percent Asian. Children were tested in the fall of the 2004-05 school year with tests administered in English or Spanish depending on a child’s primary language.

**Key findings include:**

**Vocabulary:** Children who attended state-funded preschool showed gains in vocabulary scores that were 31 percent greater over one year than children who had not yet had the benefit of the program.

**Early Math Skills:** State-funded programs increased children’s one-year gains over what they would have gained without the programs by 44 percent.

**Print Awareness:** Programs in the study produced an 85 percent increase in growth of print awareness compared with what children would have gained without the programs. They knew more letters, more letter-sound associations and were more familiar with words and book concepts.

The researchers used a regression discontinuity (RD) design, the same approach that Georgetown University’s William Gormley, Deborah Phillips and colleagues employed to conduct the first rigorous evaluations of Oklahoma’s universal preschool program in Tulsa in 2003 and 2004. That study produced results that are quite similar to those from NIEER. The NIEER study not only confirms earlier findings from Oklahoma’s pre-K program, but it expands the basis for generalization considerably. With five states, over 5,000 children and more than 1,300 classrooms, it provides a broader look at some of the better programs.

“We thought Oklahoma would show gains statewide similar to those found by the earlier studies in Tulsa,” says Barnett, “but to find similar gains achieved in several other states is great. It’s also interesting that programs were found to benefit children regardless of ethnic background or economic circumstances.” Two of the programs in the study—Oklahoma and West Virginia—offer services to all children regardless of income. “When we compared results for children who had subsidized lunches with those who didn’t, we found no evidence that only children from low income families benefited,” says Lamy.

NIEER’s multi-state study comes as something of a lift for the early childhood community after this year’s Head Start Impact Study. Barnett puts it this way: “The Head Start Impact Study looked at many measures of children’s progress. Where measures in the two studies are comparable, the multi-state study shows gains 3 or 4 times greater than those shown in the Head Start study. Even allowing for under-estimation of Head Start’s effects in the Impact Study, this suggests Head Start needs to be supported to improve teacher pay and qualifications, which is the most apparent difference favoring the state programs we studied.”

That does not mean gains in the multi-state study are on a par with those seen in model programs like Abecedarian and the Perry Preschool Project. “Those were highly intensive interventions over multiple years that showed greater impact than we are seeing from one year in the multi-state study,” says Barnett. “But for broad-based public programs, the gains we found are very respectable—on par with other successful large-scale education programs.”

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**Gains Made By Children in State-Funded Programs**

NIEER SPECIAL REPORT

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2006
California Ballot Initiative Gains Support, Some Opposition

A pre-K ballot initiative spearheaded by actor-director-advocate Rob Reiner is gaining support. Earlier in the year, the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce publicly endorsed the Pre-school for All Act, and in late September the nation’s largest Hispanic advocacy group signed on as well. According to that group, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), nearly half of the state’s one million preschool-age children are Hispanic, but only 37 percent of them attend a preschool program. And only 54 percent of all eligible children in California attend preschool.

Citing a report by Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), NCLR President and CEO Janet Murguia said that 80 percent of the achievement gap reported for Hispanics at the fourth-grade level is present prior to kindergarten, making preschool a vital part of a child’s future academic success. “The value of preschool is beyond dispute,” Murguia said. “Anyone interested in the future of this state should support preschool for all.”

Reiner calls La Raza’s support key to guaranteeing the measure’s success, which supporters say is necessary to close the achievement gap and create a diverse workforce.

Joining NCLR were eight California community-based organizations that serve Hispanics: Community Child Care Council of Santa Clara County, California Association for Bilingual Education, Chicano Federation of San Diego County, El Concilio, Para Los Niños, Parent Institute for Quality Education, MAAC Project, and the Unity Council.

Opposing the UPK initiative are California-based libertarian think tank Reason Foundation which is opposed to teacher’s unions in pre-school and an organization calling itself Universal Pre-school that favors home schooling and opposes public preschool-for-all programs.

Massachusetts Update: Boston Joins Ranks of Cities Moving Toward UPK

The head of Boston Public Schools’ new department of early childhood programs says the city’s effort to achieve voluntary universal prekindergarten within five years is on track. Jason Sachs, who came to the school district from the state Department of Education, is shepherding the city’s five-year effort to put in place a high-quality preschool program for all 4-year-olds, a goal Mayor Thomas Menino outlined in his 2005 State of the City address.

This fall, 500 young students joined the ranks of preschoolers attending Boston’s publicly funded pre-K program. By 2010, the Boston program will provide full-day preschool to the city’s 4,000 to 5,000 4-year-olds and will require a yearly $20 million investment, says Sachs, who is charged with rolling out the initiative. In the next year, Sachs and 17 staff members will begin to weave together existing early childhood education programs and services into a combined delivery system that begins at birth and serves children through third grade. Included are the city’s family engagement initiative, infant-toddler care, playgroups, a kindergarten enrollment program, special education services and bilingual education.

Sachs stresses that the program’s focus will be on quality. His department is working toward accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
Five years ago, The Pew Charitable Trusts began a comprehensive review of its past and current grantmaking in the area of improving children’s educational success. At that time, our priorities included a variety of initiatives aimed at K-12 and higher education. After that review, it was evident that there was an urgent need to reach children even earlier than traditional school entry.

Research had demonstrated that there was a school readiness gap for children entering kindergarten, so intervention needed to begin prior to K-12. After examining a variety of approaches to help ensure that children showed up for school fully prepared to succeed, the Trusts decided to focus its attention on a particular strategy that seemed ripe for intervention and had received relatively little attention. So in September 2001, the Trusts launched a national initiative to improve children’s future education and life success by advancing high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds.

Much has happened since then, and it is instructive to step back and look at how the initiative and preschool are faring across the country. We’ll also talk about a possible new direction to build on the success of the work in prekindergarten.

We focused on preschool for several reasons:

• The benefits were well-documented by rigorous research,
• This approach is substantial enough to make a difference in children’s lives, but also well-enough defined so that the public, media and policymakers could readily understand it and follow progress towards the goal,
• Preschool could be framed as an integral support for success in K-12 education, which could generate interest and support from new constituencies, and
• The public and policymakers were beginning to recognize its value for improving children’s lives and showed a readiness to consider major reforms.

The Strategy
Our strategy has been — and continues to be — to develop objective, rigorous information on the cost, benefits, characteristics and impact of high-quality prekindergarten, as well as to establish the infrastructure needed to ensure that unbiased research informs policy debates at the national and state levels. Since September 2001, the Trusts has invested more than $42 million to engage 17 partners who have worked nationally and with local advocates in well over half the states to advance the issue of preschool education.

The Trusts’ initiative emphasizes high-quality preschool that improves child outcomes, can be delivered in a variety of settings that offer parents choices (schools, child care centers, faith-based institutions, etc.) and is available on a voluntary basis to all children whose parents want it for them. Children will also benefit the most if in addition to pre-K there are other services that help parents in their crucial role as their children’s first teachers; offer support to families and children even earlier than...
age three; and address children’s different needs, such as for physical and mental health care. One state that brings together all these strategies is Illinois, which has substantially increased its Early Childhood Block Grant over the past three years. While their message has been about prekindergarten, the block grant includes an 11 percent set-aside to support programs for infants and toddlers, thereby covering the early childhood spectrum.

The ultimate goal is making preschool available for all children because all can benefit. Research clearly shows the substantial effects of preschool for disadvantaged children, but emerging findings illustrate benefits for a larger group of youngsters — as well as the positive impact of economically integrated classrooms. Aiming for all kids will also ensure that services reach the middle class, which, surprisingly, often has the least access to high-quality preschool. And, widespread participation is likely to translate into a broader base of support for the programs. “Universal” does not necessarily mean “uniform,” however; a state’s pre-K program can, and should, vary based on children’s needs. Initial rollout can start with those most at risk. One way to do that is to start with districts that are the most educationally disadvantaged, and offer preschool to all children in those catchment areas (as New Jersey does).

The strategy focuses on advancing prekindergarten state-by-state, with our partners providing a variety of supports to state leaders who have decided this is the time to advance pre-K and need help to advance that goal. However, federal programs provide an essential complement to state services, and grantees have also been active in efforts to demonstrate the benefits of raising the quality of Head Start and including support for preschool teachers in the Higher Education Act.

The Partners
Our lead partners are the National Institute for Early Education Research, which conducts and commissions a wide variety of research; and Pre-K Now, which uses funds from multiple organizations to support a variety of public education campaigns in the states. Last year, Pre-K Now funded public education efforts in 16 states and provided technical assistance to 10 others (see map above).

In addition, the Trusts has brought together a diverse and strong group of
leaders to conduct research and make the case for quality pre-K for all: law enforcement officials (through Fight Crime: Invest in Kids), state and local leaders (with the Council of Chief State School Officers and National League of Cities), business executives (Committee for Economic Development), African-Americans (United Negro College Fund), children’s advocates (Voices for America’s Children), seniors (Generations United), and physicians (Docs for Tots). We continue to welcome new partners and expect to broaden that circle, with outreach to Hispanic leaders and other education officials, such as school principals and state boards of education.

These and other partners educate the public, key decision makers and the media about the benefits of early learning and how to implement a high-quality program. For example, the Trusts co-funded the National Governors Association to host a gubernatorial forum in 2003, and funded the National Conference of State Legislatures to organize a variety of meetings for their members around this important issue.

The Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Columbia University and the Education Writers Association help print and broadcast reporters cover preschool as an educational issue. Finally, the Trusts provides support to the Education Law Center to help plaintiffs in state education lawsuits include preschool as part of a reformed system. (For a complete list of the Trusts’ partners in this endeavor, see www.pewtrusts.org.)

Pre-K’s Growing Acceptance

Is the country making progress? We think that, thanks to decades of work by a wide variety of advocates and funders, including the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Foundation for Child Development and the Joyce Foundation, the answer is “yes.” A few years ago, preschool was hardly a household word, with little focused attention. But now there are significant public education campaigns to advance high-quality prekindergarten in more than a dozen states.

Each year there are more than 3,000 news stories on major preschool policy and practice issues, as tracked by the daily clipping service offered by Pre-K Now. In 2004, 15 states increased funding for preschool, by just over $200 million. In 2005, 26 states did so, raising their early education investments by more than $600 million. This is truly becoming a movement.

There is also increasing acceptance of preschool across a broad cross-section of the public. In many places, the debate has shifted from whether preschool is effective, to how to pay for this widely-desired program; and from whether it should be offered at all, to whether it should be offered to all children or only those most at risk.

Remaining Challenges

Nevertheless, challenges remain. In an era of ever-tightening budgets, it will be harder and harder to find the money for early education, despite the fact that over time, it pays for itself. When the Trusts first launched its initiative, states were facing the tightest budgets since World War II, and the terrorist attacks of September 11 led to enormous shifts in resources to defense and homeland security. But visionary state and national leaders persisted in setting up a foundation of early learning for their children. Now, in the aftermath of catastrophic natural disasters, states will face a continuing challenge to finding the resources needed to stay the course and provide for the future of their children.

Expanding the Strategy

To keep the momentum going, we continue to adjust our strategy. For example, our first years focused on broadening the evidence base for preschool. Now many policymakers accept the research on the benefits of early education, but they sometimes overlook the fact that those results were generated by high-quality programs, including small class sizes and well-paid teachers with college degrees. To save money, they look for a program that touches a large number of children, but with modest services. However, limited or poor quality services may not have the desired impact.

In Florida, for example, the $400 million voted by the legislature to launch their program sounds like a lot of money — and it is — but that only provides for about $2,500 per child, which is less than half of what experts agree a good quality program would cost.

To address this problem, much of the research agenda considered by the Trusts in the coming years will focus on documenting the crucial aspects of high-quality programs, including the evidence base for well-qualified teachers and the benefits of half-day programs for 3- and 4-year-olds compared to a full-school-day programs for 4-year-olds.

On the heels of substantial state investments in preschool will come demands for evidence that state programs are making a difference. To help meet this growing demand for state-level data on the impact of preschool programs, the Trusts, in partnership with the Foundation for Child Development and the Joyce Foundation, launched the National Task Force on Early Childhood Accountability. With leadership from chair Sharon Lynn Kagan of Columbia University and vice-chair Eugene Garcia of Arizona State University the task force will provide guidance to states on how to develop appropriate accountability systems for their pre-K programs. The Task Force is based at the Trusts with staff support from director Thomas Schultz.

Finally, we are exploring opportunities to present the value of preschool in
new ways. One very successful part of the early education message that resonates with a variety of important audiences has been the macroeconomic benefits of preschool. A study by the RAND Corporation found a positive benefit/cost ratio of 2.62:1 if the state provided preschool to 70% of its 4-year-olds: for every dollar invested in making state-funded pre-K available to these families, $2.62 is returned to society.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation funded RAND Corporation to conduct a similar analysis for California. In that study, economist Lynn Karoly found a positive benefit/cost ratio of 2.62:1 if the state provided preschool to 70% of its 4-year-olds: for every dollar invested in making state-funded pre-K available to these families, $2.62 is returned to society.

We’re working with partners in the business community, including the Committee for Economic Development (CED), PNC Financial Group and the Invest in Kids Working Group (chaired by investment fund manager Robert Dugger) to disseminate this information. On January 10th in New York City, these partners will join the Trusts in convening the second national conference on the economic benefits of investments in young children. And next spring, CED plans to release a major new policy statement by business leaders that presents early education as an economic benefit to the country.

A Potential New Initiative
The research into economic returns on pre-K has had such a remarkable impact on the preschool policy debate that we have begun to explore whether the approach could be applied more broadly. In addition to preschool, children need many different kinds of supports to thrive, and they need them even earlier than age three.

Parents, especially those at risk, need help in fulfilling their responsibility to their young children. Good health care is critical. After-school and mentoring programs can add great value. When children and families receive these kinds of supports, they have the best opportunity to succeed. Yet little research exists that ties these other programs to broader economic benefits.

If a case is to be made for public investment in a range of programs for children, we need to identify which interventions are grounded in rigorous evidence of positive impacts. Once identified, that evidence must be translated into large-scale economic impacts such as workforce productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth.

That kind of definitive evidence could provide a solid foundation for a public education campaign to make smart investments in children one of the nation’s top economic priorities. With support from contributors such as Robert Dugger and others we are forming the Invest in Kids Partnership, a multi-donor fund based at the Trusts to build the evidence base needed to make investments in children the top economic priority in the United States.

The Trusts’ initiative builds on decades of hard work by national, state, and local leaders, advocates and funders to call attention to the need to help our youngest citizens get off to the right start. By linking arms with them to advance preschool, we are working toward the day when all children will be able fulfill their potential and become the successful, productive adults that we all want and need them to be.

Web-Based Resources
The Pew Charitable Trusts
http://www.pewtrusts.org/
National Institute for Early Education Research
http://nieer.org/
Pre-K Now
http://www.prekknow.org/
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
http://www.fightcrime.org/
Council of Chief State School Officers
http://www.ccsso.org/
Committee for Economic Development
http://www.ced.org/
United Negro College Fund
http://www.patterson-uncf.org/
Voices for America’s Children
http://www.voicesforamericaschildren.org/
Docs for Tots
http://www.docsfortots.org/
National Conference of State Legislatures
http://www.ncsl.org/
The Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media
http://www.nancycolumbia.edu/hechinger/
Start Smart America
http://www.startsmartamerica.org/
Education Writers Association
http://www.ewa.org/
Education Law Center
http://www.edlawcenter.org/
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
http://www.packard.org/
Foundation for Child Development
http://www.startingat3.org/
Education Law Center
http://www.ccsso.org/
Council of Chief State School Officers
http://www.ccsso.org/
Committee for Economic Development
http://www.ced.org/
United Negro College Fund
http://www.patterson-uncf.org/
Voices for America’s Children
http://www.voicesforamericaschildren.org/
Docs for Tots
http://www.docsfortots.org/
National Conference of State Legislatures
http://www.ncsl.org/
The Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media
http://www.nancycolumbia.edu/hechinger/
Start Smart America
http://www.startsmartamerica.org/
Education Writers Association
http://www.ewa.org/
Education Law Center
http://www.edlawcenter.org/
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
http://www.packard.org/
Foundation for Child Development
http://www.startingat3.org/
Education Law Center
http://www.ccsso.org/
Council of Chief State School Officers
http://www.ccsso.org/
Committee for Economic Development
http://www.ced.org/
United Negro College Fund
http://www.patterson-uncf.org/
Voices for America’s Children
http://www.voicesforamericaschildren.org/
Docs for Tots
http://www.docsfortots.org/
Georgia’s universal preschool program received welcome news when a Georgia State University study found the program, which critics had said yielded insufficient gains, showed the program does, indeed, produce meaningful gains in children. Conducted by the Andrew Young School for Policy Studies, the study said children made significant gains from the beginning of preschool to the end of 1st grade compared to national samples of children their age.

By the end of 1st grade, children who attended Georgia’s Prekindergarten Program exceeded national norms on overall math skills, phonemic awareness, expressive language and letter and word recognition. Receptive language skills improved through kindergarten but declined somewhat by the end of first grade—a finding that may indicate the need to more closely align pre-K programs with kindergarten and 1st grade.

Family characteristics played a role in children’s progress. Nearly one-third of children whose mothers did not finish high school repeated either kindergarten or first grade. Age made a difference as well with children starting closer to age 4 making larger gains.

Children from families that received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) were able to identify more letters and words at the end of 1st grade if they had attended the Georgia Preschool Program than if they hadn’t. Overall, the program helped children from lower income families close the gap between themselves and their more advantaged peers.

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The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) has had its ups and downs since its inception in 1988. Developed to address early childhood education needs of at-risk children and the rising school drop-out rate, CPP no sooner got up and running than the state passed the nation’s first Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) which limits state spending increases to a formula based on population growth and inflation. That has made it hard for the state to expand new programs. Some years there were cuts, such as 2003 when the legislature dropped 2,000 slots from the program despite a growing desire on the part of school districts to participate.

Recently, however, Coloradans voted to suspend TABOR because it severely limited state spending on services and infrastructure that most residents view as investments. “Our challenge hasn’t been one of selling the advisability of expanding CPP,” says Lori Bowers, consultant for the program, “we already have 91 percent of the school districts wanting to participate. We just haven’t had the money to serve all the children for which CPP was developed.”

Now that TABOR is suspended, Bowers is hopeful funds will be forthcoming to enable the program to serve all Colorado’s at-risk 4-year-olds. She and her staff recently finished their count of additional children who qualify for the program. “It looks like an additional 4,500 to 5,500 children qualify,” she says.
Are Today’s Preschoolers the Cure for What Ails Social Security?

Investing in Early Education Could Fund Baby Boomer Retirement Checks

Political leaders have a habit of postponing the kind of serious reform of Social Security economists say needs to occur if the system is to avoid bankruptcy in coming decades. One reason for the delay is the unpopular choices, such as trimming benefits many know may be required in any serious reform effort. Meanwhile, researchers and business interests are stepping up to offer a solution that is both popular with voters and effective: invest in early childhood development programs.

A report from Washington College economist Robert G. Lynch says that, without a public investment in high-quality early education, today’s disadvantaged children will be “less skilled, less productive, and earning less…less able to help sustain our public retirement benefits systems such as Social Security.”

In “Early Childhood Investment Yields Big Payoff,” Lynch calculates the costs and benefits of implementing a high-quality, publicly funded early childhood development program for all poor 3- and 4-year-olds nationwide. Drawing on earlier research that tracked the outcomes from the Perry Preschool Project, Lynch found that a national system of publicly funded early childhood education programs would produce benefits that begin to outpace costs in year 17. By 2050, the last year considered in the study, total budget savings would be $167 billion.

Lynch’s estimates factor in both the expense of the early education program itself as well as the higher cost of educating more college students. It does not, however, take into consideration the likely added effect of investing in future parents who would be able to provide more education to their own children, something that could lower early education spending in the future.

With the current level of preschool funding, the researchers predict we can look forward to a stagnant economy, higher crime, lower tax revenues, migration of jobs overseas and staggering investments in social programs for aging baby boomers and the poor. It’s a choice between paying some now or paying much more later. After all, today’s 4-year-olds will become employed, tax-paying citizens not long after the Social Security trust fund begins to run deficits, by some estimates in 2018.

That drain, and the one created by higher Medicare and Medicaid costs, could ultimately break the federal budget. The Committee for Economic Development’s Invest in Kids Working Group projects that total federal spending will surpass revenues by about $44 trillion in today’s dollars. In practical terms, this spending gap will double the tax burden placed on the average 3-year-old throughout his lifetime.

Says Robert Bixby, executive director of the Concord Coalition, “There’s a real fiscal witches’ brew out there waiting to confront these kids. We need to be good generational stewards to make sure this doesn’t happen.”

CED also estimates that the $20-$25 million funding currently going for early care and education programs would need to more than double to provide access to free, part-day, part-year preschool programs to all children age 3 and up, including nearly 3.5 million kids who are not in center-based care. What’s more, they argue that the overly complicated process of serving young children through separate federal programs makes it harder for states trying to build comprehensive, coordinated early care and education systems. They favor an integrated system with shared resources, missions and goals.

If business people and

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Robert Dugger: At the Intersection of Economics and Morality

Research continues to emerge on the value of investments in early education. At the forefront of efforts to communicate the results of these studies is Robert Dugger, head of the Committee for Economic Development’s Invest in Kids Working Group and managing director of Tudor Investment Corporation. He spoke to Preschool Matters about the economics of early education and the role of the business community in creating universal pre-K.

Q. How did you become interested in the issue of preschool?
A. Two ways—I am a new grandparent, and I’m told that when people become grandparents, they become much more interested in kids than before. So I guess I’m responding to a biological imperative that’s millennia old. But I also saw in the federal government’s—and to a degree state governments’—budget and spending decisions a steady diminishment of resources for kids relative to everybody else. Corporations, seniors, everyone.

Q. What message did you take from that observation?
A. It showed me clearly that society was distinctly allocating resources to the possible disadvantage of kids. We spend so much money on the health care of people in the final years of their lives at the expense of health care, mental health, parenting assistance and education for families with young children. When I looked at those allocations of resources, it became clear that the economic costs are quite high. But it’s not just economics.

Q. What do you mean?
A. There are moral and possibly civil rights aspects too. Every child is sacred. What parents and family members do to raise a child well is a sacred trust. What teachers, neighbors, and all of us do to make sure children grow into successful adulthood is part of this trust. If we deny an economically disadvantaged child a good quality pre-K education and thereby decrease the chance that he will graduate from high school, we limit his opportunity to succeed. President Lincoln explained that the Declaration of Independence, and indeed America, is all about the opportunity of every American to succeed. When we under-educate a child, we prevent that child from being able to participate fully in society and succeed in the economy. For me, under-education, in an important sense, denies a child’s civil rights.

Q. Does a high-quality early education for all kids become a reality only with the support of the business community?
A. It’s extremely important to have support from the business community. They are direct beneficiaries of more young adults who are better educated, more team-oriented, change accepting, and productive. They are the solid center of society. When that solid center says something is essential but not as available as it should be, they’re likely to be successful in getting more of it. It won’t happen without a struggle, but the harsh reality is that an important aspect of the preschool-for-all discussion is a calculation of the economic benefits for the whole economy. Business leaders understand this.

Q. What advice would you give those working toward ensuring every child gets a high-quality early education?
A. I would say to them that as they make this case, they will speak to people coming at the issue from vastly different perspectives. For some, the issue is workforce competitiveness and economic growth, for others an out-of-control fiscal policy or return on investment. And for still others it will be a moral or civil rights question. Advocates need to find a vocabulary to express themselves in ways that the other person understands. If they can do this, they can harness the energy and commitment behind each of those perspectives—and I think they’ll be more successful.
Urie Bronfenbrenner: The Man Who Changed How We See Human Development

The sciences have produced pioneers whose life works have answered questions from the development of the molecule to the development of the universe. Somewhere between lies the development of the human—the field where the late Urie Bronfenbrenner not only proposed new answers to age-old questions but also framed important new questions. Along the way, he developed a model that is as relevant today as the day he proposed it.

It was in 1979, a decade after Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, that Bronfenbrenner, the longtime Cornell professor and a co-founder of Head Start, published his groundbreaking book The Ecology of Human Development. In it, he set forth his ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner viewed a child’s development in the context of the system of relationships forming his or her environment. He defined the complex layers comprising the child’s environment, comparing them to sets of Russian dolls that nest inside one another.

At the innermost level is the immediate setting surrounding the developing person, such as a classroom or home. The next level is not so much a setting as the relationships between settings. Bronfenbrenner believed the interconnections could be as decisive in the way humans develop as events taking place in the immediate environment (first level). “A child’s ability to read may,” he explained, “depend no less on how he is taught than on the existence and nature of ties between the school and the home.” That point is not lost on today’s pre-K teachers working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Bronfenbrenner’s third layer involves events in settings where the developing person is not even present, such as parental employment. Though beyond the child’s control, the third layer could have profound effects on how he or she develops. Finally, an outermost fourth layer involves aspects of the environment that may connect many members of a culture or subculture. An example is childrearing beliefs in the United States. This conception of the developing person’s environment extending beyond the behavior of individuals to encompass systems

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Related Reading:
Basics of Assessment: A Primer for Early Childhood Educators

By Oralie McAfee, Deborah J. Leong, & Elena Bodrova

This straightforward 110-page volume makes assessment highly accessible to early childhood educators (defined as teachers working with children from age 3 to age 8). The authors provide definitions that are strategically placed throughout, beginning with the definition of assessment as “the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information.” Other reader-friendly features include illustrations, photos of work and assessment examples, and resource and reference lists. Reliability, validity and bias in testing—all essential concepts for educators—are described in clear and relevant terms. A brief discussion of reasons for assessing children follows, along with detailed descriptions of various kinds of developmentally appropriate assessments for young children. Basic examples of each are provided with some explanation of how to use them, how to share information with families, and how to use what is learned to improve instruction. The authors recommend other references to take practitioners beyond these basics—this is meant only as an introduction to meaningful assessment.
Kids’ Attitudes on Alcohol, Tobacco Form Earlier Than Believed

Teachers Can Shape Preschoolers’ Views

Children’s play activities are greatly influenced by their parents’ attitudes and behaviors. In fact, according to a study funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and published in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, children as young as two will pretend to smoke or use alcohol when they play, especially if their parents engage in these activities.

Though the study is not nationally representative, it adds to growing evidence that substance abuse prevention could begin much earlier, even in the toddler years. Dartmouth Medical School investigators used role-playing to examine attitudes toward tobacco and alcohol products among 120 children age 2 to 6. It also looked at how their parents think about and use those same products. The findings suggest that children are already forming attitudes about smoking and drinking during their preschool years.

Psychologist Judith Tellerman, a National Advisory Council member of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, says how young children perceive alcohol can be a predictor of their later behavior. She says preschool teachers can potentially alter those perceptions. That in turn could translate into lower rates of alcohol and tobacco use as adults.

Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) showed that people who drank before age 15 were more than five times as likely to be alcohol dependent than those who began drinking at age 21 or older (16 percent vs. 3 percent). And boys were more likely than girls to begin drinking before age 15.

Tellerman says, “The new study opens up the door for preschool educators to get really involved and design good [substance abuse prevention] programs, and know how valuable their impact is.”

To read the full report, visit www.rwjf.org/research and select Tobacco Use & Exposure from the left menu bar. For the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), visit http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nhsda.htm.

Today’s Preschoolers: The Social Security Cure?

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politicians generally agree on the need to fix Social Security and invest in preschool, why hasn’t prekindergarten become a national priority? Robert Dugger, managing director of Tudor Investments and head of the Invest in Kids Working Group, says that everyone—individuals, corporations, elderly, young, rich, poor—will have to share in the pain, and that’s not typically a popular idea. But suffer we must because within four years, Congress will face an authentic spending crisis.

“This crisis cannot be fixed like it was in 1995-96. It’s going to be pervasive and unfixable without making some very hard choices,” Dugger says. “We need to make adjustments that maximize the future growth of this country and doing that means massively increasing investments in [the years encompassing] prenatal to five.”

While Dugger isn’t against funding Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid, he does believe we should stop doing so at the expense of early education. CED is among many business interests throwing their weight behind investment in early education. Others include the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), The Business Roundtable and the Concord Coalition, a nonpartisan group that supports responsible fiscal policy.

At the state level, business groups in California, New York, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Iowa, and Connecticut among others are also marshaling support. The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce recently took the unusual step of publicly endorsing a proposed tax increase to fund universal preschool in California.

Bixby likens the situation to the disaster-in-waiting that was New Orleans. “It’s an object lesson in preparing for the future,” he says. “Any number of fiscal experts on the left and the right will tell you we have this huge demographic problem and the economy will be hugely challenged, and yet we don’t do anything about it because it’s inconvenient to make short term sacrifice for long-term gain.”

In January, CED, The Pew Charitable Trusts and PNC Financial Services will bring together economists, business leaders, policymakers, and funders to share new research on the benefits of early education investment and to get business leaders behind the push for universal preschool at the state and national levels. For more information, visit http://www.ced.org/projects/kids.shtml.
Urie Bronfenbrenner: The Man Who Changed How We See Human Development

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and interconnections contrasted with research models that prevailed at the time. Bronfenbrenner was not shy about saying the scientific lens applied through prevailing research models could, in his words, “blind researchers’ vision of environmental obstacles and opportunities.”

Over the years he made a number of refinements to his theory, including an increased emphasis on how processes in the environment can help us realize our genetic potential. This aspect grows in relevance as new brain research begins to identify opportunities to influence brain development in young children.

When Urie Bronfenbrenner died this September at age 88, the consensus on his contributions to the field of human development had long been in. He is credited with creating the discipline of human ecology. His ecological systems theory is taught alongside theories of human development from Freud, Piaget and others.

Along with noted Yale psychology professor (and NIEER scientific advisory board member) Edward Zigler, Bronfenbrenner was instrumental in creating the federal Head Start program. Zigler acknowledges his colleague’s contribution this way, “Urie’s work went well beyond increasing our knowledge of human development. Beginning with our joint work in creating Head Start, for 40 years, Urie and I stood shoulder to shoulder in arguing that our entire knowledge base be used in improving the lives of children and their families.”

Zigler and others continue to advocate for a system of early care and education that takes into account the multiple settings and interconnections that shape children. Fellow Cornell professor and long-time friend, Dr. Henry Ricciuti, sees Bronfenbrenner’s beliefs as central to today’s challenges: “Urie’s ecological approach to human development and his longtime promotion of the linkages between research on children and families and the practical needs of practitioners and policymakers will be especially remembered and appreciated by early childhood educators.”

That message resonates with the current generation of researchers whose work is helping guide the growth in pre-K programs now sweeping the country. Jason Hustedt, NIEER’s lead researcher on the State of Preschool Yearbook and a Cornellian who studied in Bronfenbrenner’s department, sees the applicability of the ecological approach when evaluating state-funded preschool programs. “We see some programs that do a good job of providing services sensitive to children’s environmental context. Unfortunately, there are others where the policymakers could have used some time listening to Dr. Bronfenbrenner,” he says.

Listening to Bronfenbrenner was popular at Cornell where, over his 50-year tenure on faculty, he regularly packed a large auditorium with his introductory lecture on human development. In recent years, he grew concerned about a decline in values taught to young children. That challenge will best be met if we continue his work.