

Early Education Commission

A community leadership collaborative supporting the United Way's goal of ensuring children are ready for school



Research Abstract

Title: “Preschool Education and its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications,”
Education and the Public Research Center, University of Colorado/Education
Policy Research Unit, Arizona State University

Author(s): Barnett, W. Steven, National Institute for Early Education Research

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This policy brief summarizes a variety of research on the short- and long-term effects of early childhood education. It pays particular attention to those characteristics that affect program effectiveness. A useful guide for policy decision makers, it is also a helpful resource for those seeking to familiarize themselves with the issues relevant to program quality.

After an overview of the current state of preschool programming across the nation, the main portion of the policy brief discusses research on all types of preschool programs, local, national and international. This section is followed by implications and recommendations for the future. A generous reference list is also included. Overall, the 35-page brief is rich with information on a number of significant studies and findings about quality preschool programming.

Barnett summarizes the conundrum facing groups like the Early Education Commission in his Executive Summary, “Over the last several decades, participation in center-based preschool programs has become much more common, and public support for these programs has grown dramatically. Nevertheless, participation remains far from universal, and policies vary across states, as well as across options such as private child care, preschools, Head Start and state pre-K. Since policy makers typically have more alternatives than money, they face key questions about the value of preschool education, whom it should serve or subsidize, and which program designs are best.”

In its conclusions, the brief states that:

- While many different preschool programs have positive effects, the effects vary widely.
- Some well-designed programs produce long-term improvements in school success, as well as reduced delinquency and crime in childhood and adulthood.

- Economically disadvantaged children reap long-term benefits from preschool, but children from other socioeconomic backgrounds benefit as well.
- Current public policies for child care, Head Start and state pre-K do not ensure that most American children attend highly effective programs.
- Increasing federal and state child care subsidies will be unlikely to produce any meaningful improvements.
- Increasing public investment in preschool programs for all children can produce substantial benefits; these programs need not be provided exclusively by public schools.

The brief's recommendations include:

- Policy makers should support highly effective models (small class sizes, well educated teachers, adequate pay).
- Preschool program teachers should receive intensive supervision and coaching.
- Preschool programs should regularly assess children's learning and development.
- Preschool programs should be designed to develop the whole child, including social and emotional development and self-regulation.
- Policies expanding access to children under age 4 should prioritize disadvantaged children who are likely to benefit most.

Link to the full article:

http://epicpolicy.org/files/PB-Barnett-EARLY-ED_FINAL.pdf