

**EVALUATING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS:
What Does Research Tell Us About Their Effects on Child Development?
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Overview:

As governments invest more in early care and education, politicians, scholars, parents and others want to know whether these programs are achieving their goals of improving children's readiness for school. This research brief reviews eleven important studies that examine the relationship between early childhood education (ECE) programs and child development in real world settings. Each of these studies found that ECE program participation is associated with improvements in children's cognitive skills. However, the size of the effects found varied significantly. The findings suggest the value of providing preschool for all and the need for additional research in this burgeoning area.

Main Points

I. Studies discussed include:

1. Head Start Impact Study: Six-year impact evaluation designed to determine the effect of program participation on children's school. See www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact_study/
2. Chicago Child-Parent Centers: Longitudinal evaluation that compares children who participated in Child-Parent Centers in the mid 1980's with a similar group that graduated from CPS kindergartens in 1986, but were not involved in CPC. See www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/PUBLICATION.HTM
3. Oklahoma Universal Pre-K Program: Two studies that examined the effects of participation in Tulsa's state Pre-K program. See www.crocus.georgetown.edu/papers.html
4. National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) Five-State Pre-Kindergarten Study: Study estimates the effects of state-funded prekindergarten programs on the academic skills of students entering kindergarten in MI, NJ, OK, SC and WV. See www.nieer.org/resources/research/multi-state/fullreport.pdf
5. Family and Child Experiences Survey: A large-scale study of Head Start designed to provide information on program quality, child outcomes, and school readiness that can be used for national decision-making and program quality improvement. See www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/faces/index.html
6. Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study: A five-year project that examined the relationship between cost and quality in full-time, center-based ECE programs and the impact of these factors on children's development from preschool through second grade. See www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/pages/cq.cfm
7. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care: Longitudinal study whose primary purpose is to examine how variations in non-maternal care are related to children's socio-emotional adjustment, cognitive and linguistic development, school achievement, physical growth and health. See <http://secc.rti.org/home.cfm>
8. Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort: Long-term, national study of 14,000 children born in 2001 who are being tracked through first grade. Data are being collected on children's homes, communities, health care, and non-parental

- care, including ECE participation. See <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/getpubcats.asp?sid=024>
9. Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort: Long-term, national study of 22,000 children who attended kindergarten in 1998-99. Data on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development were collected from participants, their families, teachers and schools. See <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/getpubcats.asp?sid=024>
 10. Georgia Early Childhood Study: Study whose primary purpose was to compare child outcomes from the beginning of the preschool year to the end of first grade among children who had attended state Pre-K, Head Start, private preschool or no preschool as four year olds. See <http://aysps.gsu.edu/epg/index.htm>
 11. National Center for Early Development and Learning Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten and Study of State-Wide Early Education Programs: Comprehensive study of state-funded pre-k programs in 11 states looking at how important variations in Pre-K programs relate to child outcomes at the end of Pre-K and kindergarten. See www.fpg.unc.edu/~nced/pages/products.cfm#sweep_ms

Conclusion

These eleven studies illustrate the complexities involved in assessing the relationship between ECE program participation and children's development. As the number of children enrolled in ECE programs continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, it is critical to keep processes of program assessment grounded in the complex realities of young children's lives.

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