



**March 2012**

### *News*

#### **[How Head Start Can Make a Difference](#)**

*by Motoko Rich in the New York Times Economix Blog*

This article that ran recently in the New York Times examines research described in February's Research Blast about how Head Start increases parental involvement, including among fathers who do not live with their children, and how that increased involvement may contribute to the life-long benefits of Head Start. As a succinct summary of one contribution Head Start makes to families, this article may be useful to share with community members and government representatives who are not familiar with the program.

#### **[The Link Between Obesity and the Early Mother-Child Relationship](#)**

*by Dr. Esther Entin in the Atlantic*

Dr. Entin summarizes research on obesity and mother-child attachment that found children who had the lowest quality relationships with their mothers were nearly two and a half times more likely to be obese as teenagers. This may be due to neurological effects of early stress or the use of eating as a coping mechanism. The research provides support for the need to aid families in building strong relationships and proposes that doing so may even be a strategy for obesity prevention.

### *Resources*

#### **[Raising Attendance at Tulsa's Head Start Program](#)**

*by Lisa Guernsey for Early Ed Watch Blog*

An overview of the importance of preschool attendance, this article touches on how Tulsa CAP Head Start and the programs *On Time*, *On Target With Success* and *Abriendo Puertas* have improved student attendance. The article includes links to video and slides from a recent OHS webinar with those programs.

#### **[Math and Science in Preschool: Policies and Practice](#)**

*by Kimberly Brenneman, Judi Stevenson-Boyd & Ellen Frede of NIEER*

This Preschool Policy Brief from the National Institute for Early Education Research explores

what is known about how young children interact with math and science concepts in their world and makes policy recommendations for how preschool programs can support early learning of STEM concepts and later academic achievement.

### ***Research***

#### **Preschools Reduce Early Academic-Achievement Gaps : A Longitudinal Twin Approach**

*by Elliot Tucker-Drob in Psychological Science*

Tucker-Drob examined 600 sets of twins from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), to find out whether preschool attendance reduced the importance of family factors like socio-economic status, minority group status and lower parental stimulation of cognitive development to children's educational outcomes. The twins were evaluated at two, four and five years old for cognitive measures and the quality of parental interaction with their children. Analysis found that for children with several factors correlated to lower performance (low socio-economic status, minority, poor parental stimulation) there were dramatic benefits for preschool participation. Benefits were not significant for children from high socio-economic, racial majority households with high parental stimulation.

Tucker-Drob comments that not only is preschool more important for high-risk children but those children attend at a lower rate, suggesting that part of the reason for the persistent achievement gap is lack of wide-spread access to preschool for the children who stand to benefit from it most. This research does not specifically address variations in preschool settings, but Tucker-Drob notes that gains in the study may be driven primarily by high-quality programs. For the purposes of Head Start, this research strongly supports the need to ensure that every child exposed to risk factors for low academic achievement has access to high-quality preschool.

*A more detailed summary is available from [Wired](#).*

#### **Fathers' and mothers' cognitive stimulation in early play with toddlers: Predictors of 5th grade reading and math**

*by Gina Cook, Lori Roggman & Lisa Boyce in Family Science*

This unique effort to examine the contributions of both mothers' and fathers' play with their children to children's academic outcomes at the end of elementary school supports much of the work that Early Head Start does with families. The authors worked with 229 children from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project and observed parental interactions when children were 2 and conducted assessments at age 3 and 5th grade. Analysis found that for children who had a biological father living with them, both mother and father made separate contributions to academic outcomes; for children without a biological father in the home, the father's contribution was not significant. For children in the two-parent setting, outcomes were

mediated by early development; for children in other types of families, Early Head Start enrollment was also a significant contributor to outcomes. Of note, fathers living with children did not provide higher stimulation to children but seemed to support greater maternal cognitive stimulation of children.

In terms of applications to Early Head Start, this research offers support for the idea that a single parent can have a significant impact on their child's outcomes through early childhood interactions if they are effective, and Early Head Start can support that effectiveness. This study also provides evidence of the effect fathers can have on development, and a rationale for the fatherhood engagement efforts going on in Early Head Start and Head Start programs across the country.

*The full article is available at the link above for a fee; a longer description is available from [Ed Week](#).*

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Know of other recent research that may be of interest to the Head Start field? Have other questions, comments or concerns? E-mail Emmalie Dropkin ([edropkin@nhsa.org](mailto:edropkin@nhsa.org)) with feedback.