



**March 2013:
Does Pre-K Work?**

Background

As you have heard over the past months, President Obama has [proposed expansions](#) to pre-K and Early Head Start that could dramatically change the landscape of early learning. Exactly [how these proposals will affect Head Start](#) is still developing - we will learn more when the President releases his proposed budget, or eventually through legislation. But as we start to think about what an ideal system of early childhood care and education would look like, it's important to be familiar with the research that is available.

In this issue, you'll find resources related to existing pre-kindergarten programs and some examples of how they work with Head Start programs. We have also summarized four studies of state pre-K programs that represent different types of efforts to improve options for early learning. It is worth noting, as the Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation pointed out in their [recent report](#), that pre-K programs often have different eligibility requirements than Head Start and offer different arrays of services, so it is not appropriate to directly compare findings from these pre-K studies to Head Start. In the broader conversation, however, it is important to have all the facts and to think about what we can take away from all areas of research in order to continuously improve the services we offer to children and families.

Resources

[The State of Preschool](#)

Each year the National Institute for Early Education Research puts out a yearbook of state-by-state data about preschool access, including information about state pre-K programs, Head Start, and more. If you're unfamiliar with the options in your state or want to learn more about how your state compares to others, this is a great resource!

[Better Outcomes for All: Promoting Partnerships Between Head Start and Pre-K](#)

Head Start and pre-K are not silos; in fact, they are part of the same system and in many communities they're intricately connected. This report from the Pew Pre-K Now campaign

identifies some important components of successful partnerships and offers some examples of success. NHSA is also gathering updated information on this topic - contact Emmalie (edropkin@nhsa.org) if your community has innovative ideas or models of partnering!

Research

Georgia - [Children's Growth and Classroom Experiences in Georgia's Pre-K Program: Findings from the 2011-2012 Evaluation Study](#)

by Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, Jennifer Schaaf & Dore LaForett

Model: Georgia's Pre-K program has existed since 1995 and is open to all 4-year-olds regardless of income. The program provides 160 days of instruction for 6 ½ hours per day. Classrooms must have a lead teacher with a BA degree and adult to child ratios no higher than 1:11. In some cases, Pre-K classrooms are blended with Head Start classrooms.

Findings: This study examined the classroom quality of 100 Georgia Pre-K classrooms and the child outcomes for 509 children in those classrooms and addressed the factors that predict better outcomes for children. Among children, lower English proficiency was associated with greater gains; for some of the outcomes measured, there were stronger gains if children were in school-based classrooms, female, or from lower-income families. In terms of classroom quality, data from the CLASS assessment showed average scores of 5.5 for Emotional Support; 5.2 for Classroom Organization; and 2.8 for Instructional Support. (It is worth noting that these averages are higher than those documented by the 2009 FACES study but are all lower than the averages for the 2012 Head Start monitoring cohort.) Analysis of predictors of quality found that teachers with more experience were more likely to have high quality classrooms based on the ECERS-R tool. Examination of teacher certification, percentage of English language learners, and other factors did not show any consistent predictors of quality. The authors suggest that future research address the differences between school and community-based classrooms and recommend that the Georgia Pre-K Program should reduce class sizes.

Oklahoma - [Do the Short-Term Effects of a Strong Preschool Program Persist?](#)

by Carolyn Hill, William Gormley, Jr., & Shirley Adelstein

Model: Oklahoma's Pre-K program was founded in 1998 and is universal for all children age eligible to enroll. Class sizes are limited to 20 with two adults, and lead teachers must have BA degrees.

Findings: Following initial strong outcomes for children at kindergarten-entry, this study looked at third grade results for children who participated in pre-K in Tulsa in the 2000-2001 and

2005-2006 school years. (Children in the Tulsa Head Start program were part of the kindergarten survey, but were not included in this follow-up.) For the 2000-2001 cohort, there were no lasting gains by the end of third grade when pre-K students were compared to non-pre-K students. For the 2005-2006 cohort, there were no effects for reading, but there were effects for math, particularly for boys and children in poverty. Hill, Gormley and Adelstein theorize that in the later years the pre-K program may have been more fully implemented or that elementary school teachers may have been more prepared for children who were more ready for school.

New Jersey - [Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study: Fifth Grade Follow-Up](#)

by W. Steve Barnett, Kwanghee Jung, Min-Jong Youn & Ellen Frede

Model: Since 1999, the Abbott Preschool Program in New Jersey has been open to all age-eligible 3 and 4-year-olds in 31 high poverty districts. Children are served 10 hours per day, 245 days per year, with services delivered in both school-based pre-K, Head Start, and other community settings. Classrooms have a maximum class size of 15, with a certified teacher and an assistant teacher. Services include developmentally appropriate education and support services for children and families. (In the case of Head Start classrooms, Abbott provides additional investment beyond Head Start per-child funding.)

Findings: This study examined the effects at fourth and fifth grade of one or two years of Abbott Preschool compared to other early learning experiences. Children in the study enrolled in 2004-2005. While the follow-up results were not as strong as second grade findings, students who attended the Abbott Preschool Program did significantly better than controls on state language arts and math tests in fourth and fifth grade and on science in fourth (it was not assessed in fifth). Effect sizes for the Preschool group as a whole were generally in the range of .2 to .25 standard deviation; when analyzed separately, children with two years of Abbott outperformed children who attended for only one year. The authors emphasize that positive long-term findings support pre-K's role as an important component of education reform.

Michigan - [Michigan Great Start Readiness Program Evaluation 2012: High School Graduation and Grade Retention Findings](#)

by Lawrence J. Schweinhart, Zongping Xiang, Marijata Daniel-Echols, Kimberly Browning, & Tomoko Wakabayashi

Model: The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) began in 1985 and enrolls four-year-olds with at least two of a list of risk factors, including poverty, disability, and trauma. The program requires an adult to child ratio of 1:8 with up to 18 children in a class and is delivered through a variety of settings and models.

Findings: This evaluation compares high school graduation and retention rates for a cohort of GSRP children who enrolled in 1995-1996 to children whose families were below 200% of poverty but did not attend the program. Earlier evaluations had found benefits for students who attended GSRP through fourth grade, but those outcomes were not sustained through middle school. Some subsets of GSRP participants were less likely to repeat grades. Yet years later, significant benefits were demonstrated: GSRP students were 14% more likely to graduate on time than the control group of low-income students, and GSRP students who were non-white were 22% more likely to graduate on time than their control group peers. This effect was partly due to reduced grade repetition: 36.8% of GSRP students ever repeated a grade, compared to 49.2% of control students. The state rate of grade repetition was 35%, indicating that the preschool program had nearly closed the gap for vulnerable children. In grades 11 and 12, GSRP students also showed benefits in test scores for math and math/language arts combined. The authors note that reductions in retentions alone repaid 43.5% of the investment in the preschool program.

Discussion Questions

1. How do these models compare to the pre-K options available in your area or your state?
2. Which of these programs seemed most similar to Head Start, and how do you think that relates to their findings?
3. How do Head Start and pre-K collaborate in your community? What opportunities are there to improve collaboration?

Enjoy hearing about the latest research? Join NHSA for our [Head Start Research Symposium](#) on Thursday, March 2nd during our 40th Annual Conference! The day-long event is included in conference registration and will feature four sessions with a ticketed [Research Luncheon](#) mid-day. Come learn about:

- **Sustaining the Results: How the Quality of the Elementary School Environment Can Influence the Initial Gains from Head Start**
- **Connecting Teachers' Effective Emotional Classroom Practices to their Beliefs about Emotions**
- **Language and Early Math Skill Gains in 3- and 4-year-old Head Start Children**
- **Scaling up through Professional Development in Head Start: Lessons Learned from**

a National Demonstration

Do you know of other recent research that may be of interest to the Head Start field? Do you have other questions, comments or concerns? E-mail Emmalie Dropkin (edropkin@nhsa.org).