



Information Briefing

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The Influence of Preschool Attendance on Student Achievement

In Iowa, the demand for high-quality early care and education is growing. A vast majority of parents with young children work outside the home and depend on other adults to provide child care for their children prior to school entry (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). In addition, many parents without the need for child care services seek quality preschool education to nurture growth and learning prior to kindergarten. As a result, the majority of Iowa children are provided care and educational experiences from adults other than parents during the years critical to brain development and learning.

As the demand for child care and early childhood education continue to grow, so does the need for a comprehensive, well-coordinated system of quality early care and early education for families with young children. Unfortunately, the current fragmented system serving children under the age of 5 tends to prohibit children with the most need from participating in high-quality preschool education. Preschools that are part-time, part-year programs are often not accessible to limited income families needing full-time child care. Instead, children most at-risk for school failure typically end up in low-quality programs. Experts now recommend that all early childhood settings provide children with the kinds of experiences that prepare them for success in school. The Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy in their commissioned report titled *Eager to Learn, Educating Our Preschoolers* (2000) says, "...promoting young children's growth calls for early childhood settings (half day or full day, public or private, child care or preschool) that support the development of the full range of capacities that will serve as a foundation for school learning."

All young children deserve access to high-quality early care and high-quality early education. Therefore, policies and supports must exist to ensure programs provide excellent preschool experiences along with high-quality care. The summarized findings on the research of quality preschool experience on later student achievement can inform policy makers and other key stakeholders of the significant role preschool can make on later student success in school.

Research on Quality Preschool

Over the last 40 years, researchers have studied the impact of quality early childhood education on student achievement. Rigorous, well-designed early education studies conducted in various settings outside the home examined the influence of quality preschool on children prior to kindergarten entry. The findings from the early education studies not only provide evidence of the positive influence of preschool attendance, but also provide a description of the quality preschool components associated with improved student achievement. For more detailed information about the research findings and studies included in this review, see the Iowa School Boards Foundation (ISBF) research synthesis titled *A Literature Review: The Influence of Preschool Attendance* (2007). More information on the preschool program components associated with student achievement can be found in the full synthesis report or in the short ISBF information brief, *High-quality Preschool* (2007). Both documents can be found at www.ia-sb.org.

Benefits of High-Quality Preschool: Summary of Findings

Findings related to success in school:

Preschool attendance is associated with short- and long-term, positive effects on academic performance.

Children who attended preschool tended to:

- ❖ enter kindergarten with increased:
 - ♦ cognitive abilities,
 - ♦ higher literacy abilities, and
 - ♦ higher mathematics abilities.
- ❖ maintain the academic performance advantage over children who did not attend preschool as children progressed through the grades.
- ❖ have higher literacy and mathematics achievement scores in the middle and high school grades than children who do not attend preschool.

Preschool attendance is positively related to children's social and emotional outcomes, successful progression through the grades and attitudes toward learning.

Children who attended preschool tended to:

- ❖ adjust more easily to school and were more likely to get along better with other children than those without preschool.
- ❖ advance through the grades more successfully without repeating a grade or receiving special education services than children without preschool.
- ❖ have better attitudes toward learning and school than peers who did not receive early childhood education prior to school entry.

Other findings:

Preschool attendance is positively associated with economic and social benefits into adulthood.

In longitudinal studies, children who attended preschool tended to:

- ❖ have higher education levels, earn higher wages, and attain higher skilled jobs than peers who did not participate in the early education intervention.
- ❖ have more stable marriages, were more involved in raising their own children, and used fewer social service programs than adults who had not experienced preschool education.

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Reference

Bowman, B. T., Donovan, S. M., & Burns, S. M. (Eds.). (2000). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

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