

Key takeaways from one of the longest-running studies on the impact of early-childhood education ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Dive Brief:

Low-income black and Hispanic individuals who received four to six years of early intervention services were almost 50% more likely to earn a college degree by age 35 than those who weren't part of the program, according to the latest results of a longitudinal study of the Chicago Parent Centers (CPC).

Published this month in the Journal of the American Medical Association, the study, led by Arthur J. Reynolds of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, identifies some of the reasons why participation in an "established and large-scale" early-childhood program leads to higher educational attainment. CPC promotes "early cognitive scholastic skills," which lead to better academic performance and stronger "school commitment."

The parents' involvement in the program, which includes participating in school activities, support groups and workshops, also contribute to "parenting behaviors" that support children's success, and learning social-emotional skills, such as self-control, can mean young people are less likely to get in trouble and quit school.

Dive Insight:

While Reynolds' most recent analysis focuses on degree completion, he notes that higher educational attainment is also associated with higher earnings, better mental health and less likelihood of criminal activity. "Given that educational attainment is the leading social determinant of health, findings demonstrate that school-based early childhood programs, such as the CPC program, have significant potential to advance life-course health and well-being," he writes.

The fact that children experience continuity in their education from preschool through the early grades is another important factor, notes Anisha Ford, an intern at New America who previously taught in a Chicago early-childhood program.

The results back up the position that beginning preschool at age 3 and continuing to provide wraparound support into the early grades, such as health and nutrition services, can lead to stronger educational outcomes later. In many districts, even if preschool is available for low-income children, those students might still attend kindergarten at a different site, which can make communication between teachers more challenging or even non-existent.

School leaders can improve these transitions, however, by creating transition teams that involve both early-childhood and kindergarten teachers. Principals can also form connections with directors of community-based early-childhood programs and participate in local early learning councils. Positive results have also been shown for summer transition programs targeting children who have not had preschool experience, but these programs have not been studied to the extent of models such as CPC.

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