

Universal preschool works best for poor kids, study finds ^[1]

Author: Mongeau, Lilian

Source: Forbes

Format: Article

Publication Date: 4 Apr 2019

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Preschool is most likely to help low-income children if their classmates come from a range of family incomes, according to a new study.

The new research contradicts the current strategy in most states of targeting public preschool only to low-income kids. That approach is based on the results of many earlier studies that have found attending preschool helps kids from disadvantaged backgrounds start kindergarten on a stronger academic footing. The benefits for higher income children are less pronounced. That is why most states and the federal government choose to spend taxpayer dollars on “targeted” preschool programs open only to low-income families.

But the new study, just updated in December by Dartmouth College economist Elizabeth Cascio, finds that universal programs have a significant positive effect on the reading scores of poor kids, while targeted programs do not. The effect on math scores is also positive but not statistically significant, Cascio said.

Even though universal preschool programs are more expensive because they serve more children, Cascio found that these programs were also more cost-effective because low-income students did so much better.

“I was sort of skeptical that this would be the result,” Cascio said. She said she expected it would be “much more efficient to just spend the money on disadvantaged kids.”

But when she compared the end-of-year test scores of low-income children who had attended preschool to those who hadn’t, she found that low-income preschoolers who had attended preschool classes with peers from other economic strata performed the best. To complete her analysis, Cascio compared the academic outcomes of preschoolers who qualified for federal free- or reduced-price lunch programs, a standard measure of poverty, in states that offered universal preschool to similar preschoolers in states that offered only targeted preschool.

Related link:

Region: United States ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/08/universal-preschool-works-best-poor-kids-study-finds>

Links
^[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/08/universal-preschool-works-best-poor-kids-study-finds> ^[2]

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/thehechingerreport/2018/04/05/universal-preschool-works-best-for-poor-kids-study-finds/#69e4633465b6> ^[3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865>