

# The effects of universal preschool in Washington, D.C. <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

[Access article online](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

Excerpted from the introduction and summary

Over the past 15 years, the share of 4-year-olds who are U.S. residents attending public preschool has more than doubled to 33 percent. A growing number of cities and states have dedicated resources to establish or expand preschool programs, with policymakers frequently citing the impact that preschool participation has on school readiness. Preschool attendance has been shown to improve children's academic and socio-emotional skills, preparing them for kindergarten and beyond. Research also shows that effective preschool programs benefit children from disadvantaged families the most, providing those children with a nurturing environment for healthy development.

Moreover, along with these important educational benefits, public preschool also allows some parents to re-enter the labor force or increase the number of hours they work, providing a decided boon to families' economic well-being. That has been the experience in Washington, D.C., where parents—specifically mothers—have returned to or entered the workforce in significant numbers since the city expanded to universal preschool.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for millions of parents throughout the United States, who report cutting back on hours or making career sacrifices due to challenges related to child care.<sup>5</sup> Since private tuition for high-quality, full-day preschool can cost many thousands of dollars per year, free public preschool has the potential to significantly increase take-home pay for parents.

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