

# Benefit cost analysis of the Abecedarian early childhood intervention<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Available in print for order (see SOURCE) and online for download.

- Complete study in pdf<sup>[3]</sup>

Excerpts from press release:

The first study to compare the costs and benefits of providing very young children with high quality, full-day, year-round preschool program proves that every dollar paid generates a four dollar return to the children, their families and all taxpayers, according to findings released by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

This major new study included important new findings that high quality preschool programs offered through child care allow mothers to work at better paying jobs, resulting in significantly higher earnings over the course of their lives, in addition to the clear educational benefits and long-term earning potential for the children themselves.

W. Steven Barnett, NIEER director of and report co-author said, "over time, offering high quality early education to all children doesn't cost Americans a penny. Every dollar spent on high quality early education actually yields four dollars in benefits."

He pointed out that the 92nd Street Y Nursery School issue in New York City where a stock broker went to extraordinary lengths to get his twin daughters into a high quality preschool, spotlights the crisis in preschool education our country faces. "If even wealthy people experience this much difficulty finding quality preschool programs, think about how difficult it is for middle- and low-income families."

The benefit-cost analysis by Masse and Barnett looks at the landmark Carolina Abecedarian Project in North Carolina that provided intensive preschool programs to children in low income families in the early 1970s.

"The factors that made for high quality education included small class sizes, well-educated, professional teachers who were compensated accordingly and a strong curriculum," Barnett said.

Follow-up studies of participants, who are now young adults, had previously shown they were more likely to perform well on intelligence tests, pursue higher education and delay parenting than those who did not take part in the program. Even though subsequent studies had focused on the educational benefits to the children, none had determined if the money spent was a good investment for the nation.

"The bottom line, proven by this research, is that high quality education and care for preschool children provides a tremendous return on the investment," said Barnett. "All American children should receive a good education in their first five years as a matter of principle."

He said that children in such programs and their mothers will be more productive, school districts will save money by getting students who are better prepared and there are even surprising health benefits, he said. "America could vastly expand and improve early care and education while saving money in the long run," he said.

Among the study's highlights:

- The Abecedarian Project generated roughly four dollars in benefits for every dollar invested.
- Participants are projected to make about \$143,000 more over their lifetimes than those who didn't take part in the program.
- Mothers of children who were enrolled can also expect greater earnings - about 133,000 more over their lifetimes.
- School districts can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child because participants are less likely to require special education or remedial education.
- Results suggested a possible impact on smoking. Participants were less likely to smoke (39% were smokers vs. 55% in the control group), resulting in health benefits and longer lives, for a total benefit of \$164,000 per person.
- The next generation (children of the children in the Abecedarian project) are projected to earn nearly \$48,000 more throughout their lifetimes.

The research findings reported that the children in the experimental preschool programs reached higher levels of intelligence and

experienced greater educational achievements that resulted in higher earnings as adults. Furthermore, those children were less likely to cause added expenses to the school districts in the form of being held back in classes throughout school or requiring more costly special education classes.

With child care provided, the children's mothers were more likely to reach higher education levels, be self-supporting and earn higher incomes. The analysis found that the children's mothers were less likely to bear more children or to rely on social assistance.

Barnett said the results of the analysis are important for policy makers to consider when making choices about early childhood education issues. "When investing taxpayer dollars, it's important to know what programs pay the greatest dividends," he said.

**Tags:** economics<sup>[4]</sup>

child development<sup>[5]</sup>

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