

Preschool better than home for children, study finds: Gives youngsters step up in math, reading [CA]^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Preschool is better preparation for kindergarten than the attention of a stay-at-home-mom, new research shows.

The national study in the United States found children who attend preschool enter public schools with higher levels of academic skills than their peers who experienced other types of child care, including from stay-at-home parents, relatives and babysitters. And the advantage in reading and math persists through Grade 3 unless children are placed in small classes with high levels of reading instruction.

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The study, to be published in the forthcoming edition of *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, assessed the skills of a national sample of 7,748 children who entered school in 1998. The researchers then tested their academic progress in math and reading in the spring of Grades 1 and 3.

After controlling for home and family resources, the team found that by the spring of Grade 1, the advantages in kindergarten associated with preschool attendance had largely dissipated for children experiencing class sizes of 20 youngsters or less and enjoying levels of reading instruction in excess of the average of 61 to 90 minutes a day.

"Whether their peers overcome their early deficits, or whether preschool attendees maintain their advantage, is in part a function of the subsequent classroom environment," concludes the study.

By the spring of Grade 3, the differences associated with preschool attendance had disappeared for those in the more enriched classrooms.

"By contrast, a marked advantage persists among their counterparts in low instruction or large classes," the study found.

In fact, for children who weren't enrolled in preschool before entering kindergarten and who subsequently attended large classes and received low reading instruction, the skills gap appears to grow, the study found.

"What is particularly interesting, however, is that estimated benefits of preschool appear to increase between spring of the first and third grades, suggesting that the benefits measured in the third grade may persist into subsequent school years and even raising the possibility of 'sleeping effects' that increase in size in later grades."

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- reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

Tags: child development^[2]

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