

Why pre-K is critical to closing the achievement gap ^[1]

Principal, May/June 2011 (The Magazine of the National Association of Elementary School Principals)

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Source: National Association of Elementary School Principals

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Jun 2011

AVAILABILITY

Article in pdf ^[2]

More from the May/June special issue on early childhood ^[3]

Excerpts from the article:

The recently released results of the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) comparison of educational achievement across 65 countries has brought renewed attention to the achievement gap and recommended changes to improve U.S. performance. The U.S. was well down in the middle of the pack for reading, math, and science while Shanghai, a Chinese city with a population equal to that of New York, was at the top of the leader board. One might think recommendations on how the U.S. could gain ground might start with an analysis of education policy in Shanghai or the European nation with top scores: Finland. For example, we might consider emulating Finland's universal access to high-quality early care, education starting in infancy, and requirement that every public school teacher earn a master's degree. Or, we might replicate Shanghai's universal pre-kindergarten, in which all teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree, or China's 251-day school year.

Of course, not every policy followed by high-achieving countries is an effective strategy for the U.S. To identify those that are effective, we can look systematically at policies associated with higher scores internationally, and then look at the full body of education research to identify what works in the U.S. as well as abroad. Most of the recommendations for raising U.S. PISA scores we have seen so far ignore both international and U.S. research on the effects of policies.

They often recommend policy changes that will do little to raise scores here, have not led to success elsewhere, and neglect pre-K and its clear salience in the most successful countries.

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Region: United States ^[4]

Tags: outcomes ^[5]

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