High-Quality Early Education: Student Achievement

The human brain develops most rapidly from birth through age five. This is a time of enormous social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development when children can build either a strong or fragile foundation for future growth and learning. High-quality early education provides essential supports for future success in school and life.

Improved school readiness and early learning
- Children who participate in high-quality early education develop better language skills, score higher in school-readiness tests and have fewer behavioral problems in school.
- In Georgia, kindergarten teachers report that children enrolled in pre-k were better prepared for kindergarten, especially in the areas of pre-reading, pre-math and social skills.
- The Oklahoma universal pre-k program significantly improves pre-reading and reading skills, pre-writing and spelling skills, and math reasoning and problem-solving abilities.

Higher academic achievement
- Longitudinal studies of early childhood interventions during infancy as well as the pre-kindergarten years have shown that high-quality programs have academic benefits for children of various socio-economic backgrounds.
- Low-income children who attended high-quality early education programs scored higher on average on school achievement tests between ages 9 and 14 than children who did not.
- Low-income children with high-quality early learning experiences are 40% less likely to need special education or be held back a grade, helping to reduce educational costs.

Greater educational attainment
- Low-income children who attended high-quality early education programs on average outperformed those who did not on literacy tests at ages 19 and 27.
- Low-income children with high-quality early learning experiences are 30% more likely to graduate from high school, and more than twice as likely to attend college.
- At age 40, adults who participated in high-quality early childhood education programs during their preschool years were more likely to be employed, and had 36% higher median annual earnings than the control group.

Quality Makes All the Difference

The quality of the early childhood education a child receives has a direct impact on positive child development. Ensuring that early education programs are high-quality is key to producing benefits throughout a lifetime. While this quality can be delivered in a variety of settings – from family child care homes to center-based programs to public preschools – there are certain characteristics that distinguish high-quality early learning settings:
- Well-educated and caring teachers
- Program quality standards
- Developmentally-appropriate curriculum and learning activities.


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2 ibid.
6 William T. Gormley, Jr. and Ted Cayer, Public Policy Institute, Georgetown University; Deborah Phillips, Department of Psychology, Georgetown University; Brittany Dawson, Center for Research on Children in the U.S., Georgetown University.
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