

High-Quality Early Education: Health Benefits

High-quality early education is an effective strategy for improving school performance and reducing achievement gaps among low-income and minority students. Equally important is that high-quality early education is critical to children's health and social development. Research into three landmark programs¹ – the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC), and the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program – demonstrates that high-quality early education provides both immediate and sustained health benefits to individuals and society.²

Improved health outcomes

High-quality early education programs deliver important on-site services, such as nutritional supports, and proactively engage parents to enhance children's well-being at home. As a result, participants in high-quality early education programs report fewer health problems and stronger family relationships.

- CPC families provided increased support for their child's social and emotional development and only 5% of CPC participants were victims of abuse or neglect, compared to 10.3% of non-participants.
- As adults, Abecedarian participants were 11% less likely to experience depression than non-participants and CPC participants also experienced fewer depressive symptoms.
- Perry Preschool graduates were less likely to miss work for health-related reasons, leading to gains in personal income and improved socio-economic status.

Greater access to health services

High-quality early education programs have the potential to increase children's access to health services through referrals, screenings and preventive services (e.g. immunizations).³ Benefits extend into adulthood where researchers have found a significant relationship between participation in high-quality early education and health insurance coverage, awareness of one's health, and the ability to pay for and seek treatment.

- More CPC participants possessed health insurance as adults than non-participants (70.2% versus 61.5%).
- As adults, Perry Preschool participants were 15% more likely to proactively seek medical treatment.

Reduction in high-risk behaviors

Adolescents and adults who have participated in high-quality early education make more productive choices about their personal health and safety, leading to improved life outcomes.

- Abecedarian Project participants were 16% less likely to smoke than non-participants and Perry Preschool participants were less likely to use drugs (23%) and abuse alcohol (10%).
- Abecedarian Project participants were less likely to become teenage mothers, and teenage mothers with children enrolled in Perry Preschool were 58% more likely to graduate from high school.
- Perry Preschool participants were 23% more likely to report wearing a seatbelt (57% versus 34%).

Universal benefits

High-quality early education benefits children and families, but also provides a significant return to society. For example, researchers estimate that the long-term economic benefits of reduced smoking amount to \$17,800 per person. Overall, high-quality early education improves public health, reduces medical costs and produces healthier citizens who are more employable, less dependent on social services, and capable of generating greater tax revenues.

¹ Evidence on health outcomes resulting from high-quality early education: Barnett, W. S., and Masse, L. N. (2002). *A Benefit Cost Analysis of the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention*. Retrieved December 12, 2007, from the National Institute for Early Education Research: <http://nieer.org/resources/research/AbecedarianStudy.pdf> Campbell, F. A., et al. (2002). Early childhood education: Young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian Project. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6(1): 41-57; Nores, M., et al. (2005). Updating the economic impacts of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 27(3): 245-261; Reynolds, A.J., et al. (2007). Effects of a school-based, early childhood intervention on adult health and well-being: A 19-year follow-up of low-income families. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 161(8):730-739.

² Shulman, K. *Overlooked Benefits of Pre-kindergarten*. Retrieved December 12, 2007, from the National Institute for Early Education Research: <http://nieer.org/resources/policyreports/report6.pdf>.

³ Docs for Tots. (2008). Investing in Early Care and Education is a Powerful Public Health Initiative for New York's Children. Retrieved August 11, 2008 from the Docs for Tots website: <http://65.36.225.239/DFTNY/documents/DFT-brief-PreKNewYorkFINAL.pdf>.

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