

Study: It's Not Your Imagination, Modern Kindergarten is More Demanding

It's a question that's been raised a number of times in recent months: are schools demanding more of young children these days?

According to news out this morning, we no longer have to rack our brains to recall our own kindergarten experience for comparison's sake. Research shows that today's 5 year-olds are required to perform far more academic exercises than children a generation ago.

As [NPR reports](#), researchers from the University of Virginia surveyed teacher responses to the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and discovered the following:

- *In 2010, prekindergarten prep was expected. One-third more teachers believed that students should know the alphabet and how to hold a pencil before beginning kindergarten.*
- *Everyone should read. In 1998, 31 percent of teachers believed their students should learn to read during the kindergarten year. That figure jumped to 80 percent by 2010.*
- *More testing. In 2010, 73 percent of kindergartners took some kind of standardized test. One-third took tests at least once a month. In 1998, they didn't even ask kindergarten teachers that question. But the first-grade teachers in 1998 reported giving far fewer tests than the kindergarten teachers did in 2010.*

- **Less music and art.** The percentage of teachers who reported offering music every day in kindergarten dropped by half, from 34 percent to 16 percent. Daily art dropped from 27 to 11 percent.
- **Bye, bye brontosaurus.** “We saw notable drops in teachers saying they covered science topics like dinosaurs and outer space, which kids this age find really engaging,” says Bassok, the study’s lead author.
- **Less “center time.”** There were large, double-digit decreases in the percentage of teachers who said their classrooms had areas for dress-up, a water or sand table, an art area or a science/nature area.
- **Less choice.** And teachers who offered at least an hour a day of student-driven activities dropped from 54 to 40 percent. At the same time, whole-class, teacher-led instruction rose along with the use of textbooks and worksheets.
- Not all playtime is trending down, though. Perhaps because of national anti-obesity campaigns, daily **recess is actually up by 9 points**, and PE has held steady.

[Recent studies](#) have demonstrated that a heavier emphasis on academics in preschool years – instead of play – has a negative effect on children as they advance through their school career. Given that information and the above revelations, one has to wonder: by trying to give our kids a head start, are we actually setting them up for academic burnout and failure?