

New Report: Evidence for Pre-K is Sketchy at Best

A couple months ago, the Brookings Institution came out with a paper questioning the evidence on pre-K's effectiveness. As author Dale Farran [noted](#):

"The proposition that expanding pre-K will improve later achievement for children from low-income families is premature. Premature as well is the presumption that solid research exists to guide the content and structure of pre-K programs."

Farran's observations were recently underscored by another [report](#) from the American Enterprise Institute. In the report, authors Katharine Stevens and Elizabeth English take a look at the ten most commonly cited studies in the world of early childhood research. The authors discover that while some early childhood programs *do* show positive results, those results are often for programs far different from the universal pre-K programs policy-makers are touting as a silver bullet.



Stevens and English also note that there is little evidence that short-term gains exhibited by some pre-K students – such as kindergarten success – translate into long-term gains.

But while there's much to be desired in the area of preschool research, the authors note that there is one element which research consistently shows makes a difference in the lives of young children. That element is a novel thing known as... parents:

"The leading science and strongest research to date indicate that the clearest avenue to help disadvantaged children is

not to send them to school a year earlier but to improve child care and support parents in better fulfilling their role as their children's first teachers. Our current knowledge is insufficient to justify a large expansion of pre-K as the best path forward. And the growing pre-K push may well do more harm than good by diverting attention and scarce resources from other more effective approaches."

Until we have more reliable evidence on the benefits of pre-K education, do we need to reconsider the rush to pull children out of their homes, away from their parents, and into the institutional environment of the education system?

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