

High-quality preschool can support healthy development and learning

Achievement gaps between the poorest and wealthiest Americans are [larger than ever](#), and they often already exist by the time children enter kindergarten. High-quality early childhood education, including pre-K, is one strategy that policymakers and educators can use to address that gap early in a child's life.

Research has shown that preschool can [equip children](#) for kindergarten entry, and also with the social and emotional skills they will need for life. Economically disadvantaged children have shown [especially strong improvements after attending preschool](#).

Preschool can also support families by providing reliable and safe care for children.

Do the benefits of preschool last?

A [strong base of research](#) shows benefits for preschool participants as they transition into kindergarten. High-quality preschool can help children succeed in their first years of school and reduce the early achievement gap.

[A few studies](#) have examined longer-term impacts of preschool, with some evidence of lasting long-term outcomes, including higher earnings, better health, better focus, and less criminal activity. Research shows [mixed evidence](#) for whether academic benefits last over time. Some studies found that students who attended high-quality public preschool had [higher test scores](#) later in elementary school. [Others found](#) that the improved academic skills of [children who attended public preschool](#) eventually converged with those of children who did not attend. Researchers are still working to understand why this shift, known as “fade-out,” happens in some programs.

Benefits of Public Preschool

- Academic benefits in language, reading, and math
- Greater social and emotional development, and enhanced ability to self-regulate
- Reduced likelihood of repeating grades
- Reduced likelihood of placement in special education
- Higher earnings, less criminal activity, and better health

Considerations for policymakers

As the research portfolio on the benefits of public preschool expands, policymakers should keep several things in mind:

- **Better-quality preschool is connected to better outcomes for children.** [Essential elements](#) of high-quality preschool include leaders with a strong vision for delivering quality, and robust early learning policies regarding teachers, curriculum, and supports. Educators should have a sophisticated understanding of child development, along with knowledge of how to promote early academic and soft skills such as communication and self-control. Their level of training, compensation, and support in implementing curricula all matter for quality. Other features of the preschool setting—such as low student-teacher ratios, small classes, rich and varied materials (blocks, books, etc.), and carefully implemented health and safety practices—are also important. Finally, high-quality programs have strong program practices such as data-driven decision-making and ample professional development opportunities.

- **It's important to establish reasonable expectations and goals for public preschool.** Research shows that public preschool does help children prepare for kindergarten, and that it may bestow long-term benefits such as better focus and problem-solving ability, better health, and higher earnings. But attending public preschool is not sufficient for success on every metric throughout life, particularly for our most vulnerable children—those living in poverty or experiencing ongoing trauma.
- **Preschool teachers need excellent training and adequate compensation, and must to be supported as they do their work.** Coaching and mentoring teachers, and providing them fair compensation, all support higher-quality preschool experiences for young children.
- **Kindergarten and early elementary teachers should build on the successes of children who participated in high-quality preschool.** High-quality instruction throughout elementary school will bolster children's skills. Elementary administrators and teachers should understand best practices for early childhood education, and public schools should partner with preschools to support strong early learning from preschool through third grade.

