

_EDUCATION

The Effects of Pre-K May Last Longer Than You Think

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Is pre-K worth it? This is a hot button question that has been debated for many years since states began funding pre-K programs. According to the [National Institute for Early Education Research](#), nationwide state-funded preschool program enrollment reached an all-time high in 2016, with nearly 1.5 million children, or 32 percent of four-year-olds enrolled. Policymakers, educators, and parents want to know if pre-K provides an academic advantage to children. Now a [new study](#) out of Georgetown University published in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* indicates that there are several measurable benefits of pre-K once the students reach middle school.

The Georgetown research team began tracking about 4,000 children in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2006 when they started pre-K through the time they were in eighth grade. The pre-K program in Tulsa was of special interest because it has been around for quite a few years, reaches a relatively large portion of four-year-olds, and is considered high quality. It has also been featured in the national debate about the merits of universal pre-K because the program has been studied in depth over more than a decade, Oklahoma was the second state in the nation to adopt a universal pre-K program, and President Obama highlighted it in his 2013 State of the Union as he endorsed universal pre-K as a national policy.

In order to evaluate the program, researchers reviewed performance measures throughout middle school in areas including standardized tests, GPAs, enrollment in either a gifted program or honors courses, grade retention, special education placement, absenteeism, and suspensions.

They discovered the [following facts](#) about eighth graders who attended pre-K:

- They were less likely to be held back than their classmates who did not attend preschool.

- Their scores on the state's math achievement test were higher.
- They were more likely to take algebra in eighth grade, which is a consistent predictor of college readiness.
- They were more likely to be enrolled in honors courses.
- They were more likely to be engaged in class, less timid, and more confident overall.

Then the researchers extrapolated the Tulsa data to project the impact of the program into adulthood. They predict that those students who attended pre-K will have a higher income and less of a chance for incarceration. This is a big deal for parents evaluating whether to send their children to preschool or not. It's clear from this study that pre-K can help lead to success later in life.

The study also looked at the quality of the education provided. Tulsa preschool teachers devoted more time to academics and were more apt to talk with, not talk at, their students, than teachers in 11 other states who they were compared to. Additionally, the student-teacher ratios in the classroom were impressive, and every teacher has at least a bachelor's degree and is certified in early childhood education.

William Gormley, a professor of public policy at Georgetown and one of the lead researchers for this study, thinks that a main reason for the success of the children in Tulsa who attended pre-K is that the elementary and middle school teachers have made the curriculum more challenging because the students are much better prepared than those who did not attend pre-K. In a nut shell, pre-K gives kids a jumpstart in their education and the positive social, emotional, and academic benefits surface later in their educational journey and after graduation.



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