The Intergenerational Benefits of Pre-K in 200 Words

Family & Community Health

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Pre-school is more than a place to color, take naps and learn the ABCs. It also prepares children for a lifetime of success that can even be passed on to one's children, suggests one of the largest longitudinal studies of the effects of pre-school.

Researchers at the University of Chicago have been following a group of students who attended the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan from 1967-1972. Today's data show that the children of Perry Preschool participants were much more likely to complete high school without suspension (67% vs 40%), never have been suspended, addicted or arrested (60% vs 40%), and be employed full-time or self-employed (59% vs 42%) compared to children whose parents did not participate in the program. While the researchers did not track specific health measures, we know that factors like a caregiver's educational attainment, involvement in the criminal justice system and employment are often linked to their children's health.

So, what could contribute to this success? For one thing, the Perry Preschool Program didn't solely focus on academics, but rather emphasized improving social-emotional development and executive functioning. It even included home visits from the teachers. Young children's ability to have strong emotional regulation and positive social skills is an important prerequisite for school readiness and academic success.

Finally, this study demonstrates the importance of long-term research. While it may seem daunting to wait decades to fully understand the impact of an intervention, this research builds the case that preschool is a vital investment for children today, tomorrow and for decades to come.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategy & Communications

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