

Research shows a good kindergarten education makes dollars and sense (w/ Video)

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There isn't a lot of research that links early childhood test scores to earnings as an adult. But new research reveals a surprising finding: Students who learn more in kindergarten earn more as adults. They are also more successful overall.

Harvard University economist John Friedman says he and a group of colleagues found that [students](#) who progress during their kindergarten year from attaining an average score on the Stanford Achievement Test to attaining a score in the 60th percentile can expect to make about \$1,000 more a year at age 27 than students whose scores remain average.

Taking into account all variation across kindergarten classes, including class size, individuals who learn more--as measured by an above-average score on the Stanford Achievement Test--and are in smaller classes earn about \$2,000 more per year at age 27.

Moreover, students who learn more in kindergarten are more likely to go to college than students with similar backgrounds. Those who learn more in kindergarten are also less likely to become single parents, more likely to own a home by age 28 and more likely to save for retirement earlier in their work lives.

"Kindergarten interventions matter a great deal for long-term outcomes," said Friedman. "For instance, being in a smaller class for two years increases the probability of attending college by 2 percent.

"We find that both smaller class sizes and teachers with more experience improve long-term outcomes," he said. "We believe that other teacher characteristics, as well as various characteristics of a student's peers, also have significant impacts on later life outcomes, but the data did not allow us to measure those effects well."

Friedman and colleagues from Harvard, Northwestern University and University of California, Berkeley, used a well-known education experiment conducted in Tennessee as a starting point to measure adult outcomes of early childhood learning. In the mid-1980s, the Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project placed students in classes of different size to determine how class size affects student learning. Results showed that students in small classes learn more and have greater academic success.

This new study, funded by the National Science Foundation's Division of Social and Economic Sciences, examined adult outcomes of nearly 12,000 students who took part in the original study and who are now 30 years old. It allowed the research team to go beyond what children learned during their year in the STAR project to see how their [kindergarten](#) learning experiences affected their lives. Researchers recently presented results of the new study, which has yet to be peer-reviewed, at an academic conference in Cambridge, Mass.

To learn more about what the researchers found, see John Friedman discuss the recent study in the accompanying video.

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