

Benefits of preschool vary by family income

November 16 2010

State-funded preschool programs have historically enrolled low-income children, aiming to help them start school on a footing closer to nonpoor youngsters. Today, more and more states are expanding access to preschool programs, and some are making them universally available. How will this affect states' efforts to narrow achievement gaps? A new study concludes that while the benefits of preschool are greatest for children living in poverty, nonpoor children, particularly Black youngsters, also experience positive gains from preschool participation.

The study, conducted at the University of Virginia, appears in the November/December 2010 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

Between 2002 and 2009, the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in state [preschool programs](#) grew from 14 to 25 percent. While most state programs have income-based eligibility guidelines, in the last 10 years, more states have begun offering universal access to [preschool](#), and more states are currently considering doing so.

"Universally available preschool programs are likely to narrow achievement gaps between children who are poor and those who are not poor, and also between racial groups, only if some subgroups—such as low-income or minority populations—experience larger benefits from participation than others," according to Daphna Bassok, assistant professor of education policy at the University of Virginia, who conducted the study.

Bassok's research is based on information on about 7,400 children who

were part of the birth cohort of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, a nationally representative data set that tracks children from birth to kindergarten. She analyzed the link between participation in preschool—described as any classroom-based program targeted to 4-year-olds, including nursery schools, preschool centers, and prekindergarten programs—and how children did on an assessment of literacy when they were 4.

On average, all poor children, regardless of their race, seemed to benefit substantially from taking part in preschool the year before kindergarten. For White children, the benefits of preschool were inversely related to their socioeconomic status, with benefits largely limited to poor children. Among Black youngsters, however, both poor and nonpoor children showed considerable benefits.

The findings suggest that while preschool participation may benefit low-income children across racial and ethnic groups, expanding toward universal access and enrolling [children](#) whose families are above [poverty](#) may still lead to a narrowing of racial achievement gaps.

The study was funded, in part, by the American Education Research Association through funds from the National Science Foundation and the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education.

More information: *Child Development*, Vol. 81, Issue 6

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

Citation: Benefits of preschool vary by family income (2010, November 16) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-benefits-preschool-vary-family-income.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.