

Teacher influence persists in early grades

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Having consistently good teachers in elementary school appears to be as important for student achievement as small class sizes, according to new research by a Michigan State University education scholar.

The study by Spyros Konstantopoulos found that, starting in kindergarten, [teachers](#) can significantly affect students' reading and [math scores](#) in later [grades](#). The study, which appears in the research journal *Teachers College Record*, is one of the first scientific experiments to find that teachers can affect student achievement over time in the crucial early grades.

"The findings suggest teacher effects do not fade, but remain strong predictors of student achievement," said Konstantopoulos, associate professor of education.

The study highlights the importance of identifying and hiring effective teachers in the early grades and implementing interventions such as professional development to improve [teacher effectiveness](#), Konstantopoulos said.

"Of course we should have the best teachers we can in all grades," he said. "But if you have to prioritize resources, perhaps the earlier school years make the most sense because this is where students receive most of the basic skills for reading and math."

Konstantopoulos analyzed reading and math scores on [standardized tests](#) for several thousand students in kindergarten through third grade

involved in the landmark Student Teacher Achievement Ratio study (known as Project STAR), in Tennessee. He found that teachers in all four grades can have a significant effect on student achievement, independent of the other teachers.

That means, for example, that a kindergarten teacher can have significant, measurable effect on a third-grader's math and reading scores. Previously it wasn't clear what effect teachers in previous grades might have on that third-grader's achievement, Konstantopoulos said.

Project STAR was the first major study of the effects of class size on student learning. In his study, Konstantopoulos said he was surprised to discover that teacher effects over time appear to be as important for [student achievement](#) as the cumulative effects of small class sizes.

The teacher effects were more pronounced in reading than in math. This makes sense, Konstantopoulos said, because "teachers in kindergarten and even first grade typically see their role as that of a reading teacher, not necessarily a mathematics teacher."

Provided by Michigan State University

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