

Study shows early investment in families helps children succeed in school

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An innovative program that supports parents and teachers of public school pre-kindergarten students improves early academic achievement, according to a new study published in the April 15 online edition of *Pediatrics*. In a five-year study of 1,050 minority pre-kindergarten students from disadvantaged neighborhoods in New York City, NYU Langone researchers found that ParentCorps, a family-focused, school-based program, led to better achievement test scores and overall school performance.

Children from [low-income families](#) are ten times as likely as children from middle-class families to drop out of high [school](#), and only half of black and [Latino students](#) in U.S. public schools graduate, according to the U.S. Department of Education. The stress and strain of poverty makes the job of parenting even more difficult, and early childhood teachers in [disadvantaged areas](#) face significant challenges in creating classrooms that support early learning for all children. The new study found that engaging and supporting parents and early childhood teachers put children on a pathway to success.

"All parents want their children to succeed. Parents are often hopeful and worried as their children start school, so offering ParentCorps at this key transition gives parents support at a time when they are highly motivated to make positive changes at home," said lead researcher Laurie Miller Brotman, PhD, Prevention Science Professor at the Child Study Center at NYU Langone. "Implementing ParentCorps as part of universal pre-k in public elementary schools means that all parents have

access to the latest evidence on how to promote children's social, emotional and behavioral development – the foundation for success in school and life."

ParentCorps was developed by Dr. Brotman and her colleagues at NYU Langone in 2000 to promote self-regulation and early learning among children in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. The program includes a series of group sessions for parents and children held at the school during early evening hours, and professional development for early childhood educators. ParentCorps helps schools engage families early on in their children's education, and supports parents and educators in using scientifically-proven strategies such as how to establish routines and rules, reinforce positive behavior and provide effective consequences for misbehavior.

The study is the second test of the impact of ParentCorps showing positive results on children's health and development. This study included nearly 90 percent of students enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs over four years in ten public elementary schools in two large New York City school districts with historically low high school graduation rates. Schools were randomized to receive ParentCorps or pre-k and kindergarten education as usual.

Results showed children in schools with ParentCorps had significantly higher kindergarten achievement test scores for reading, writing and math compared to children receiving education as usual, and more positive trajectories of academic performance from pre-kindergarten through kindergarten. In fact, by the fourth year of ParentCorps implementation in schools, the impact on reading achievement was comparable to the size of the achievement gap for poor and minority children, moving the average reader (50th percentile) to above average (69th percentile). Together with previously-reported program effects on obesity and behavior at school, findings indicate that ParentCorps has

the potential to meaningfully improve children's lives.

"ParentCorps is one of a few programs shown to promote positive behavior, learning and health for young children living in underserved communities," said Dr. Brotman. "Public investment in programs that address disparities early in life can prevent costly problems later on and help children lead happier, healthier, more productive lives."

Dr. Brotman and her team are working with local and state leaders to bring ParentCorps to hundreds of elementary schools with pre-kindergarten programs serving low-income [children](#).

Provided by New York University School of Medicine

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