

Outcomes for children in 'preschool for all' differ by class

September 20 2013, by Wendy Leopold

A paper released today by the Brookings Institution finds that the outcomes for children participating in "preschool for all" programs are starkly different for children from poor- versus middle- and upper-income families. In his \$75-billion "Preschool for All" initiative, President Barack Obama has called for dramatic increases in the number of 4-year-olds enrolled in quality programs nationwide.

"Our study underscores the importance of [early childhood education](#) and benefits of providing access to [preschool](#)," says Northwestern University researcher Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach. "However, because access to free, high-quality preschool will result in many more-advantaged children switching from private to public preschool, states should carefully consider what tuition levels they set for higher-income families."

In "[The Impacts of Expanding Access to High-Quality Preschool Education](#)," co-authors Schanzenbach and Dartmouth College economist Elizabeth U. Cascio suggest it may be more cost-effective to design [preschool programs](#) that target those most in need while acknowledging that exposure to higher-income peers also plays an important role.

The co-authors examined the effects of children and families in universal preschool programs that were put in place in Georgia and Oklahoma in the 1990s and compared children and families in those states with others elsewhere in the country.

They found that children from disadvantaged families gained more from preschool participation than higher-income children, including gains in overall maternal quality time spent with children and modest, sustained increases in eighth grade math test scores. Conversely, the researchers found no positive impacts on student achievement among higher-income [children](#).

Schanzenbach is associate professor in Northwestern's School of Education and Social Policy, a faculty fellow of Northwestern's Institute for Policy Research and a faculty research fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

She has done research on the impact of class size on student outcomes, food stamp benefits, school reform policy and school accountability policies including the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. She is studying the impact of school policies such as school lunch and availability to recess and gym class on child obesity.

Provided by Northwestern University

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