Not All Preschools Are Created Equal: What Matters Most and How Best to Measure Quality

Terri J. Sabol
Northwestern University

Ready for School, Ready for Life
Institute for Policy Research Policy Briefing with
The Honorable Bob Dold (R-10th) and
The Honorable Dan Lipinski (D-3rd) of Illinois

Preschool Quality… the new buzzword in policy and research

“We must expand access to high-quality early learning to ensure that all children graduate high school prepared to succeed…”

U.S. Department of Education

“The evidence based on preschool… Quality preschool education is a profitable investment.”

Society for Research in Child Development

FOUNDATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

“What Exactly Is `High Quality’ Preschool?”

npr
Defining Quality Based on Preschool Program Impact

Effect of Preschool Program on Pre-Reading Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perry Preschool</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abecedarian</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK Pre-k</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Pre-k</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee Pre-k</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start Impact Study</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model Programs from 1960s and 1970s

Prekindergarten programs

Head Start
Large Range of Impact Within Head Start

Effect of Individual Head Start Program on Pre-Reading Skills

- Negative effect
- Small, positive effect (Gain of 2-3 months)
- Large effect (Gain of 8-10 months)
A Model of Preschool Quality

**Structural Features**
- Health and safety
- Class size and child-adult ratio
- Staff qualifications
  - Curriculum

**Process quality**
- Classroom environment
- Teacher-child interactions
State and Federal Systems to Monitor and Rate Preschool Quality

Head Start

The State of Preschool

NIEER

Race to the Top
Early Learning Challenge
Preschool Quality Rating Systems: Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

- **State QRIS**
- **Piloting QRIS**
- **Local QRIS**
- **Planning QRIS**
- **No QRIS**

The map shows the status of Preschool Quality Rating Systems across the United States, with different colors representing the various stages of system development.
Do Pre-k Quality Ratings Relate to Child Outcomes?

• Conducted a “simulation study”
  – Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Measure</th>
<th>% of states use for rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Qualifications</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio and Group Size</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher child interactions</td>
<td>&lt;50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QRIS Compendium 2010

• Regulated state-funded pre-k programs
Pre-k Quality Ratings and Child Outcomes

Relation between Quality Measure Rating and Pre-Reading and Math Skills

- **Teacher ed**
- **Ratio**
- **Class Environment**
- **Teacher-child interactions**

* $P < .05$
Implications for Measuring Preschool Quality
Policy Implications

- Invest in quality preschool to ensure that children are prepared to succeed in K-12 and beyond

- Move beyond “checking a box” to measure quality

- Focus on where learning occurs: teachers and children

- Opportunities to improve quality to maximize preschool investment