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# Early Childhood Education in the US

Based on the work of Nora Gordon and Paul E. Peterson

“What We Know About Our Schools,” an essay by Nora Gordon and Paul E. Peterson, includes an examination of the state of early childhood education in the United States and its effects.

## Key Facts on Early Childhood Education

1. The percentage of children ages 3-5 in either a public or private preschool program climbed from 38 percent in 1970 to a high of 64 percent in 2000, remaining nearly at that level in the decades since.
2. Socioeconomic differences in family background, evident long before a child reaches school, drive large differences in student achievement. To mitigate social disparities, the federally funded program Head Start provides preschool and other social services to low-income households.
3. A federally mandated, experimental, and nationwide study of Head Start found that the program produced short-term gains in school readiness but that benefits “faded out” relatively quickly.
4. Other quasi-experimental studies of Head Start report improvements in high school and college completion and declines in criminal justice system involvement for African Americans.
5. Most US states now provide funding for prekindergarten education, varying between universal and targeted offerings.
6. A quasi-experimental study finds that students from low-income families in states with publicly funded prekindergarten programs show test score gains in the short run, while students from middle-income families do not.
7. An experimental evaluation of a universal preschool program in Tennessee detected immediate social and academic benefits, but these had evaporated by third grade and turned negative by sixth grade.
8. Almost all studies find at least short-term social and academic gains from preschool programs. Large-scale experimental studies show that gains from preschool programs are not sustained through third grade or sixth grade, while small-scale experimental and quasi-experimental studies often find persistent benefits.

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at [www.hoover.org/fact-based-policy-program](http://www.hoover.org/fact-based-policy-program).**



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