

Talking Points for the California Head Start Child Outcomes Bulletin 2010

Results of the Analysis

- The California Head Start Outcomes Bulletin 2010 shows that children with prior year enrollment in a center based Head Start experience 7 to 19 percentage point increases in the likelihood of being in the top developmental levels across all developmental domains compared to newly enrolled Head Start children. These domains include Language and Literacy, Self-Concept and Social Interpersonal Skills, Self Regulation and Safety and Health, Learning and Cognitive Competence, Math, and Motor Skills.
- Regardless of language or ethnicity all children with prior year Head Start participation showed significantly higher development across all the developmental domains as compared to newly enrolled Head Start children.
- The results cannot be extended to the Head Start population as a whole because the agencies chose participate in the study and children were not selected at random. All Head Start however, programs follow the same federal requirements for operation.
- The intent is to repeat the same process again next year to determine if there is a consistent program impact.

Sample and Design

- The bulletin included fall 2008 child assessment data from over 6,600 children from 15 agencies in California.
- The sample was divided into two populations. One group had at least 6 months experience in Head Start during the prior year, the other group was new to Head Start that fall.
- The fall 2008 ratings from the children in each group were compared. A logit regression controlled for age, gender, language-ethnicity, and agency to determine the increased probability that a child would rate in the top developmental levels.
- The two groups were demographically very similar. A limitation of the analysis is that children who enroll earlier in Head Start may have more involved parents or more enriched home environments, which could lead to higher development. We test for this effect by following both groups of children from the fall of 2008 to the spring of 2009 and find that both have the same rate of growth during the year. While this would lead us to believe that the difference we see in the groups is the result of the Head Start program, a limitation of the analysis is that we cannot be sure.
- A second issue is that some of the children new to Head Start may have been enrolled in another child development program in the prior year. To the extent that this is the case, then the analysis underestimates the impact of Head Start.

Implications for Policy

- The findings of the California Child Outcomes bulletin provide evidence that the California Head Start programs included in this child outcomes bulletin produce positive impacts similar to other quality programs. The effect sizes for this bulletin ranged by domain from 0.323 to 0.406; other studies of quality preschools have shown similar effect sizes.

Head Start National Study 2010	0.147 to 0.319
Tulsa Head Start Program	0.334 to 0.514
Tulsa Public School Pre-K Program	0.355 to 0.985
Abecedarian Project	1.08 average
Perry Preschool Study	0.77 to 1.16

- Quality preschool programs have been demonstrated to have significant impacts on school readiness and long-term child outcomes including improve measures of school readiness; raised performance on academic achievement tests in the early elementary grades; sustained effects on academic achievement into the middle-school years; ... [reduced] special-education use and grade repetition and [increased] rates of high-school graduation. Karoly, Lynn A., Preschool Adequacy and Efficiency in California: Issues, Policy Options, and Recommendations, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2009.