



Media Release

Contact:
Kate Luck, Communications Specialist
(501) 320-6323

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Studies: State-funded Preschool Program Narrows Education Gap, Has Lasting Effects

Little Rock, Ark -- Studies show the state-funded pre-K program in Arkansas shrunk the education gap between economically-disadvantaged and affluent children and has had significant positive and longer-term effects on a child's academic skills.

"It's clear that early, quality education is a powerful tool for addressing the education gap, and reducing the chance that a child may be less prepared for school just because of his parents' income or the neighborhood in which he lives," said Tonya Russell, director of the Department of Human Services Division of Childcare and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE).

The first study, Longitudinal Effects of the Arkansas Better Chance Program: Findings from First Grade through Fourth Grade, found that the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Pre-K Program had modest but meaningful long-term effects for children who participated. This is the final release of the longitudinal study began in the 2005-2006 school year conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University. Researchers continue to analyze ABC participant data. The study showed positive effects on children's receptive vocabulary and math skills through grade 2 and on literacy through grade 3.

In addition, children who attended ABC pre-K were less likely to have been held back by the end of third grade than those who did not attend any pre-K, which can be seen as an early indicator of the program's effect on school success, according to lead author Kwanghee Jung.

A second study, Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Shrinks gap in Kindergarten Readiness for Economically Disadvantaged Students, assessed results from a learning evaluation given to every kindergartener entering a public school in Arkansas. The evaluation classifies children as either "not developing," "developing," or "developed" in six categories. The study, conducted by the Arkansas Research Center, showed that a larger percentage of disadvantaged children who had been enrolled in pre-K were considered "developed" than disadvantaged children with no pre-K in all six categories.

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“Educating children is one of the most critical roles adults have,” said Education Commissioner Dr. Tom Kimbrell. “It’s building our future leaders and, as with any building program, you need the strongest foundation possible. The prime objective of Arkansas pre-K is to improve the readiness of economically disadvantaged children to enter kindergarten with better emergent literacy and math skills than they would have otherwise.”

But Russell and others acknowledge that the studies also show that more needs to be done, and that the state should find ways to address the skills level of low-income children and those children who don’t attend a high-quality pre-K.

That’s why DCCECE, in partnership with the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission, launched the Better Beginnings/Quality Rating Improvement System for Arkansas in July 2010. The system is designed to improve the quality of early education and child care for all children in Arkansas. In addition, DCCECE is analyzing data on current funding utilization and focusing more of the funding on quality early care and education programming. Arkansas is submitting a Race to the Top/Early Learning Challenge proposal to the U.S. Department of Education and watching the President’s proposed budget regarding federal dollars aimed at expanding high quality early care and education programs in partnership with states.